

Neurodivergent Team Mental Model

1. Purpose of the project and reasons for undertaking the research

Neurodiversity includes individuals whose neurological predispositions are not typical, spanning a range of psychiatric and neurological classifications, and refers to diversity in human cognition, which is a natural phenomenon. It is any kind of cognitive processing or way of making sense of the world that deviates from 'typical' ways of thinking and being. The neurodivergent community includes individuals with autism, ADHD, dyslexia, dyspraxia, or Tourette's syndrome. Some estimates suggest that up to 20% of the population may have neurodivergent conditions. The professional situation of representatives of the neurodiverse community is varied. Some of them can work successfully, while others face problems with finding and keeping employment, as a result of, i.a. challenges in the area of interpersonal communication and social interactions, coping with stress, and sensory hypersensitivity that influence working within a team. According to some estimates, in the United States, the unemployment/underemployment rate for individuals on the autism spectrum is greater than 90% and similar in Europe. Representatives of this group also face discrimination, negative attitudes, and stereotypes from supervisors and co-workers, which also affects their professional situation. Due to the distinctive characteristics of neurodivergent individuals, effective cooperation within a team can sometimes pose more challenges compared to neurotypical employees. It is necessary to understand how we can make neurodivergent people integrate and cooperate within a team to allow their unique capabilities to thrive for the benefit of the entire organization and themselves. The key to this may be to understand the Neurodivergent Team Mental Model (NTMM).

Taking into consideration all the above, the project objectives are the following: 1) Identification of the specificity of working within neurodivergent teams; 2) Identification of the components of the Neurodivergent Team Mental Model (NTMM), along with their determinants; 3) Development of the Neurodivergent Team Mental Model (NTMM).

2. Research description

Research activities are divided into several stages. In the first stage, we will conduct 20 semi-structured interviews with business professionals (including no less than 10 self-identified or diagnosed as neurodivergent), such as job trainers, HR officers, D&I officers, neurodivergent team leaders or managers, and neurodivergent team members. The interviews aim to identify the specificity of working within neurodivergent teams, as well as to identify and explore the components of the Neurodivergent Team Mental Model (NTMM), along with their determinants. Based on this, the study will be carried out in the next stage, using an open-ended Computer-Assisted Web Interview (CAWI). This study will aim to explore the congruence of the team mental model, namely, to what extent individual members of 20 neurodivergent teams (that is, at least one person among them self-identifies as neurodivergent or holds a diagnosis) perceive similar components and determinants of the Neurodivergent Team Mental Model (NTMM). A qualitative 'neurodivergent team mental model congruence scale' that allows one to determine the level of congruence of NTMM within the team will be developed. As a result, 3 neurodivergent teams characterized by a high level of congruence in perceiving the components and determinants of the neurodivergent team mental model will be selected for the next stage of the research. The research will include an in-depth study that involves group interviews with neurodivergent team members, diary research and repeated open-ended CAWI research. To facilitate the data collection process and make the interviews interesting for the participants, we will use suitable projection techniques. During this stage, we will capture real-time reflections on team processes. In the final phase of the project, the final Neurodivergent Team Mental Model (NTMM) will be developed.

3. The most important expected effects of the project

Based on the research material collected at all stages of the research:

- 1) We will identify advantages and challenges that constitute the specificity of working within neurodivergent teams.
- 2) We will identify components and determinants of the Neurodivergent Team Mental Model (NTMM).
- 3) We will develop a Neurodivergent Team Mental Model (NTMM).