



2026

# The State of Neurodiversity in the Workplace

*Supporting Performance,  
Leadership Effectiveness, and  
Retention in Today's Workforce*



# Table of Contents

Executive Summary ..... 4

Introduction: Neurodiversity and Workforce Reliability ..... 8

**Key Finding 01:** Workplace support for cognitive differences improves consistency, performance, and cost outcomes..... 10

**Key Finding 02:** Managers play a pivotal role in how neurodiverse teams perform.....12

**Key Finding 03:** Supporting working caregivers, including parents of neurodivergent children, improves employee reliability and retention.....16

Actionable Strategies: What High-Performing Organizations Do Differently.....18

Conclusion: What’s Next for Employers..... 20

Spotlight: RethinkCare’s Commitment to Supporting Neurodiverse Workplaces..... 22



An estimated 15–20% of the global population is neurodivergent.<sup>1</sup> In the U.S. about 1 in 5 children has a learning or thinking difference,<sup>2</sup> and more than half of Gen Z – over a quarter of the workforce – reports identifying as neurodiverse.<sup>3</sup> **Neurodiversity isn't an abstract concept. It's an everyday part of today's workforces**, present across roles and teams, with tangible implications for performance, leadership, and workforce retention.

This reality is shaping workforce capacity, manager effectiveness, and the ability to sustain performance. For a growing share of employees, caregiving responsibilities – especially for neurodivergent children – introduce variability that directly affects attendance, focus, and retention.

The findings that follow highlight three areas of opportunity for forward-thinking global organizations, illustrating how targeted neurodiversity support can strengthen performance, reduce pressure on managers, and create meaningful operational advantages.

# Executive Summary

**The State of Neurodiversity in the Workplace Report 2026** examines how neurodiversity support connects to performance, leadership, and workforce reliability.

The findings show that when employees receive support around focus, communication, planning, and emotional regulation, work becomes more predictable and execution more reliable. Without this support, everyday work becomes harder to manage, often showing up as missed deadlines, strained conversations, and difficult trade-offs between work and home.

Managers play a central role in translating support into daily impact, yet gaps in capability and execution remain common. Clear guidance and practical, role-specific resources are needed to help managers support their teams effectively.

The report also looks at working caregivers, including parents of neurodivergent children. The findings show that personalized support helps reduce daily caregiving pressures, lower stress, and limit missed workdays related to caregiving demands.

**Together, these insights show that neurodiversity support functions as a business differentiator, strengthening execution, reducing managerial strain, and supporting greater workforce reliability.**

## WHO THIS REPORT IS FOR:

This report is designed for organizational leaders assessing workforce reliability risks and the support strategies that mitigate them. The findings reflect measurable patterns observed across real-world employer environments, with a focus on execution, manager capacity, and retention stability.

# Key Findings at a Glance

The State of Neurodiversity in the Workplace Report 2026 shows how neurodiversity support influences performance, leadership effectiveness, and reliability. The findings point to three key areas of opportunity for global organizations:

## KEY FINDING

# 01

### **Workplace support for cognitive differences improves consistency, performance, and cost outcomes.**

As neurodiversity initiatives expand, organizations that pair those efforts with targeted support for planning, time management, and emotional regulation see stronger performance and cost outcomes. Employees with access to this support report a 68% improvement in executive functioning skills (planning, prioritization, time management, task initiation, follow-through), with **79%** avoiding costs related to absenteeism, disability claims, and urgent care use.<sup>4,5</sup>

## KEY FINDING

# 02

### **Managers play a pivotal role in how neurodiverse teams perform.**

Manager capability is a measurable driver of employee performance and engagement. Research from Gallup shows that managers account for up to **70%** of the variance in employee engagement, which is closely linked to productivity, retention, and performance outcomes.<sup>6</sup> Among managers with access to neurodiversity resources, **64%** report confidence in their ability to support cognitive differences, while demand for manager-focused neurodiversity training increased **4x** over the prior year.<sup>5,7</sup> This increase reflects both a sharp rise in expressed demand and the growing pressure on managers to translate organizational intent into consistent day-to-day execution.

## KEY FINDING

# 03

### **Supporting working caregivers, including parents of neurodivergent children, improves employee reliability and retention.**

Caregiving demands introduce variability into employees' capacity to sustain consistent performance and attendance. When organizations provide targeted caregiver support, that variability decreases. **Sixty-seven percent** of parents report reduced day-to-day parenting strain, and **56%** report improvements in parenting stress or confidence,<sup>5</sup> indicating greater stability outside of work. These pressures are not isolated. National CDC data show that caregiving-related stress affects a substantial share of working parents and caregivers.<sup>2</sup> Addressing caregiving needs helps organizations reduce disruption, improve reliability, and retain experienced employees.

# Methodology

## About the report

**The State of Neurodiversity in the Workplace Report 2026** brings together real-world data to examine how organizations are supporting neurodiversity – and what that support means for employee performance, manager effectiveness, and workforce reliability.

Insights are drawn from **anonymized, aggregated engagement and outcomes data** from participating organizations using RethinkCare to support employees, managers, and caregivers.

## Organizations represented

This report reflects participation from **mid-size to enterprise organizations**, with a strong concentration of **multinational employers operating at the Fortune 1000 level**. These organizations operate in complex environments with distributed workforces, layered management structures, and formal people operations – contexts where neurodiversity support, manager enablement, and caregiver resources are closely linked to workforce performance, reliability, and retention.

Participating organizations span multiple industries, with the highest levels of engagement observed across:



RethinkCare platform data also reflects **global participation**, with organizations operating across North America, Europe, Asia, Central America, and South America.

## Data sources and measurement

Findings are informed by self-reported outcomes collected through structured surveys and **validated clinical and behavioral assessment instruments** embedded within the RethinkCare experience. These measures track change across domains including stress, confidence, executive functioning, time management, emotional and behavioral regulation, and neurodiversity knowledge.

Percentages reflect the share of respondents reporting improvement, confidence, or impact in the specified category. Reported “cost avoidance” reflects respondent-reported avoidance of outcomes such as absenteeism, disability claims, or urgent and emergency care utilization.

## Analytical context and limitations

This report reflects aggregated, real-world patterns observed across the RethinkCare platform. Findings indicate association between access to neurodiversity-informed resources and reported outcomes; they do not establish causality.

All data is **anonymized and reported in aggregate** to protect privacy and confidentiality. Results are not attributable to any individual participant or employer. All measures are based on voluntary, self-reported data and are intended to illustrate directional trends rather than clinical or diagnostic conclusions.

# Neurodiversity and Workforce Reliability

Neurodiversity is an integral part of today's workforce. But when workplaces lack shared frameworks or practical support for navigating cognitive differences, reliability becomes uneven and continuity risks increase across teams and roles.

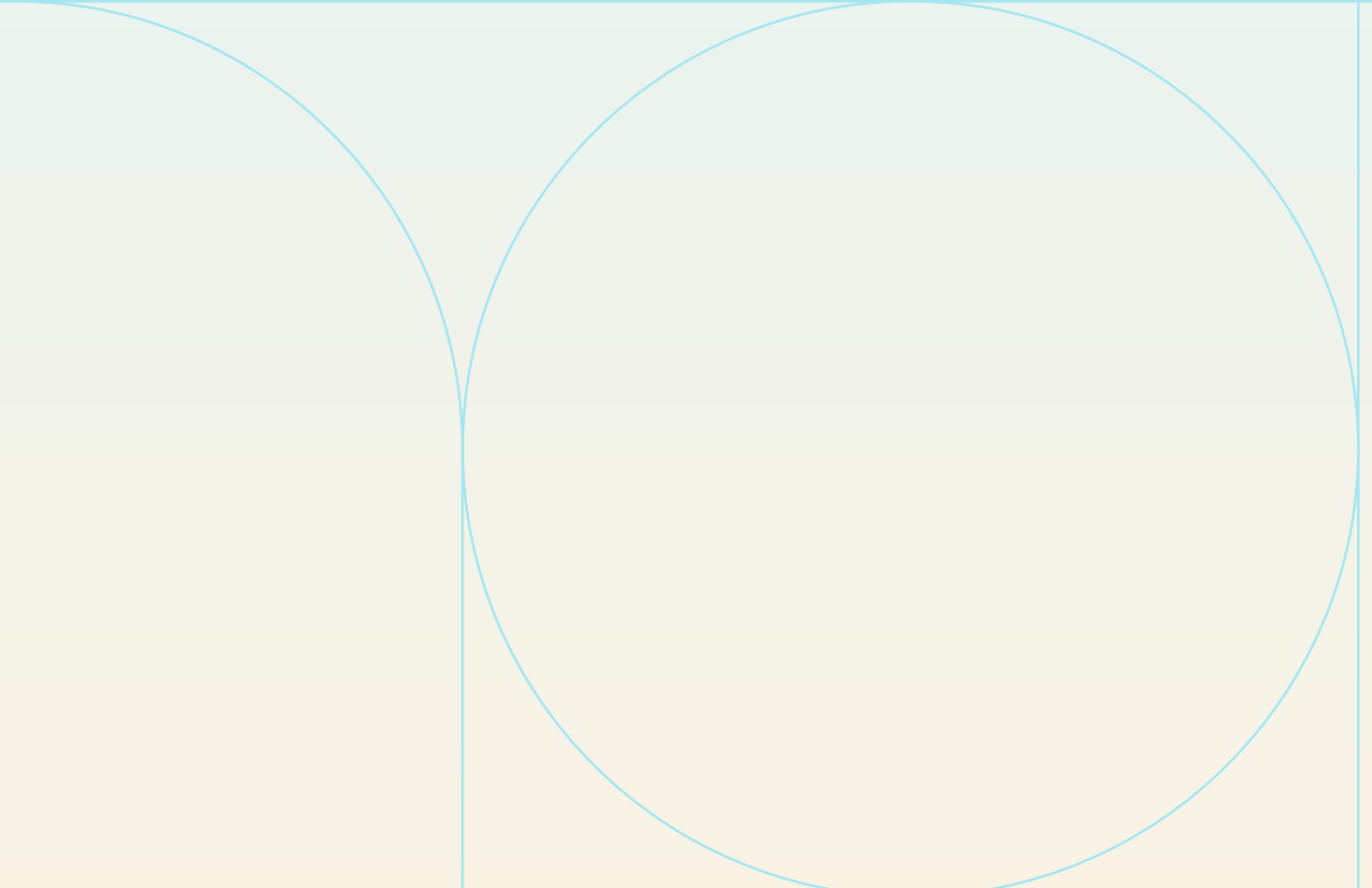
Organizations that invest in neurodiversity training and personalized support experience a more stable operating reality: **expectations are clearer, managers are more effective, and employees are better equipped to sustain performance.**

The sections that follow illustrate how these dynamics play out across three critical areas – day-to-day functioning, manager effectiveness, and caregiver support – and why they demand near-term business attention.



KEY FINDING 01

Workplace support  
for cognitive differences  
improves consistency,  
performance, and  
cost outcomes.

A decorative graphic at the bottom of the page consists of two overlapping circles. The left circle is partially cut off by the left edge of the page. The right circle is fully visible and overlaps with the left one. The circles are drawn with a thin, light blue line.

## KEY FINDING 01

Top global organizations recognize the benefit of attracting neurodivergent talent and building neurodiverse teams. In our 2025 report, we highlighted a 32% increase compared to the prior year in the adoption of neurodiversity initiatives across industries, indicating a growing recognition that cognitively diverse teams lead to high-performing workplaces.<sup>7</sup>

# 3X

A recent labor market study underscores this trend, revealing that U.S. job postings mentioning neurodiversity-related keywords have nearly tripled over approximately six years, rising from roughly 0.5% of all postings as of January 2018 to 1.3% by December 2024.<sup>8</sup>

### Hiring alone does not build the everyday workplace and executive functioning skills required for consistent performance.

Planning, time management, and emotional regulation play a crucial role in whether people can participate consistently and reliably at work – for both neurotypical and neurodivergent employees. When these areas are insufficiently supported, it can directly impact employee performance, leading to delays and difficulty keeping work on track.

When workplaces proactively support cognitive differences through access to neurodiversity training, skill-building, and targeted support, employees are better able to stay engaged and focused, improving reliability while reducing some avoidable operational costs.

Workforce reliability emerges when clear expectations and execution support diverse working styles.

### 2025 RethinkCare data among professionals with access to neurodiversity resources

79% reported avoiding costs tied to absenteeism, disability claims, or urgent care<sup>5</sup>

68% reported improved executive functioning<sup>4</sup>

70% reported stronger emotional and behavioral regulation<sup>4</sup>



### Executive Takeaway

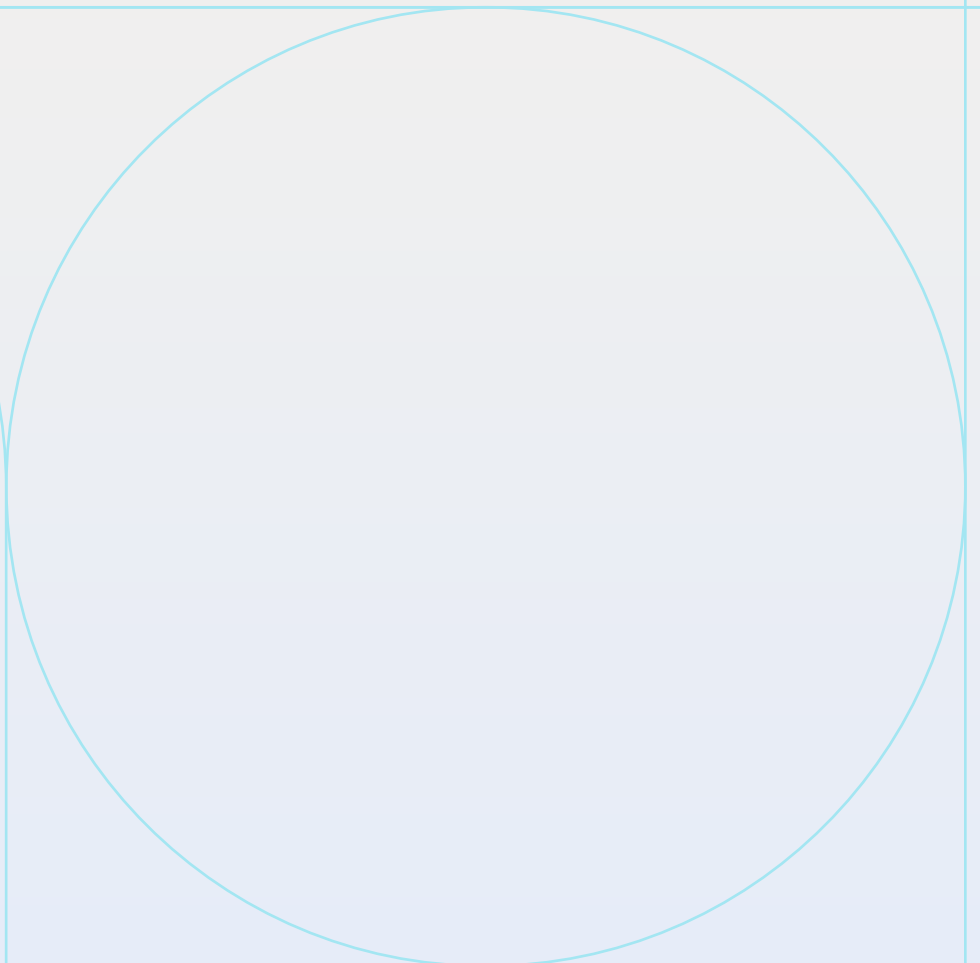
When cognitive differences are accounted for, work becomes more predictable and less reactive for both employees and managers.

- More consistent follow-through
- Fewer delays and less rework
- Clearer priorities across teams
- Reduced disruption to day-to-day execution

*Neurodiversity hiring is essential, but only the first step. Ongoing cognitive support helps stabilize performance and reduce avoidable costs.*

KEY FINDING 02

Managers play a pivotal role in how neurodiverse teams perform.



## KEY FINDING 02

As teams reflect a wider range of cognitive differences, expectations of managers have expanded. Gallup research highlights that frequent, expectation-setting conversations are a defining habit of effective managers and a key driver of consistent performance.<sup>9</sup>

### Beyond translating organizational goals into daily work, managers are expected to:

- set clearer priorities
- adapt communication and workflows
- and maintain consistency across diverse cognitive needs without lowering expectations

Research from the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development suggests that many organizations have not yet fully integrated neurodiversity into work design and management practices, which can leave managers without consistent training or guidance to support neurodiverse teams effectively.<sup>10</sup>



### According to Deloitte's 2025 Gen Z and Millennial Survey:



Roughly **half of Gen Z and millennials** want more from their managers on key areas of development



yet only a third report receiving it.<sup>11</sup>

Without neurodiversity-informed resources and practical guidance, many managers struggle to sustain team performance.



Recent research shows that only 35% of senior managers have received training on neurodiversity (up from 28% year over year)

Most leaders are being asked to manage complexity they were never trained for.<sup>12</sup>

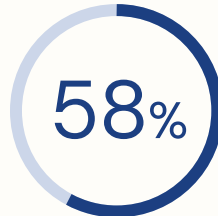
Qualitative clinical research reinforces this gap. A clinical-led study examining organizational support for autistic employees found consistent deficits in manager knowledge, confidence, and practical skill, with many managers relying on HR due to limited training and unclear guidance. Even when attitudes toward neurodiversity were positive, the absence of structured education and role-specific tools led to inconsistent expectations and increased managerial burden.<sup>17</sup>



Within RethinkCare's own book of business:

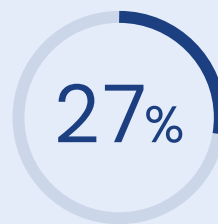


64% of managers reported increased confidence in their ability to support neurodivergent employees



58% reduction in HR-related incidents (performance escalations, interpersonal conflict, formal HR involvement), easing day-to-day burden on managers<sup>5</sup>

At the same time, momentum is building, signaling growing commitment to management enablement.<sup>14</sup>



Those engaging with RethinkCare's neurodiversity resources identify as leaders or allies (up from 15.9% the prior year).

When managers receive dedicated upskilling:

10–22% higher engagement

8–18% stronger team engagement

21–28% lower turnover



## Executive Takeaway

When managers are equipped to lead neurodiverse teams, they enable clearer priorities, communication, and performance management.


- Greater confidence setting expectations
- More consistent communication & tracking
- Earlier recognition of support needs
- Less pressure from daily performance issues

*In cognitively diverse workplaces, consistent execution – not intent – drives team performance.*



KEY FINDING 03

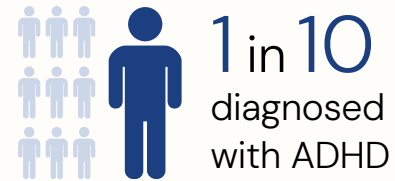
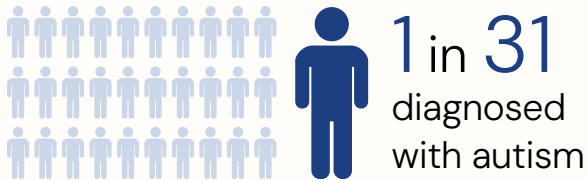
Supporting working caregivers, including parents of neurodivergent children, improves employee reliability and retention.



### KEY FINDING 03

Caregiving responsibilities are a defining reality for a meaningful and growing portion of working parents, shaping employee availability, focus, and ability to perform consistently at work.

As the prevalence of cognitive differences in children continues to rise – with 1 in 31 children diagnosed with autism and roughly 1 in 10 diagnosed with ADHD<sup>15,16</sup> – more working parents are managing the complexities of caregiving demands associated with neurodevelopmental differences. Many working caregivers report concerns about neurodevelopmental differences in their children, even in the absence of a formal diagnosis.



Parents of neurodivergent children often navigate additional and compounded stressors, increasing the likelihood of work disruptions and recurring tradeoffs between work and family. When these caregiving demands are not supported in the workplace, the effects surface quickly in day-to-day ways. Employees experience more missed workdays, reduced focus, and elevated stress, patterns that can disrupt reliability and increase the risk of attrition.

By contrast, when organizations provide personalized caregiver support, including neurodiversity-informed resources, work becomes more manageable and sustainable. These shifts make it easier for employees to remain present, focused, and engaged at work, and have more confidence in managing parenting responsibilities.

#### Among caregivers who accessed targeted support:

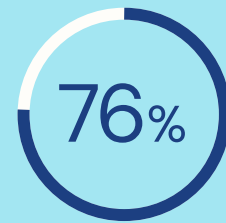


felt less stressed



2.24

fewer missed workdays<sup>5</sup>



increased confidence<sup>4</sup>



### Executive Takeaway

From a business perspective, supporting caregivers – especially parents of neurodivergent children – improves workforce stability.

- More consistent availability
- Fewer caregiving-related disruptions
- Stronger follow-through
- Improved retention

*In workplaces with a growing share of caregivers, employee reliability depends less on effort alone and more on access to targeted, personalized support.*

# Actionable Strategies: What High-Performing Organizations Do Differently

High-performing organizations do not rely on effort, awareness, or good intentions alone to sustain performance. As cognitive differences and caregiving demands become an everyday reality, how work is designed and supported determines consistency, reliability, and performance.

Across industries, five patterns consistently emerge in organizations that sustain performance under pressure.



### **Clarify Expectations and Planning**

Clear priorities, roles, and timelines give teams a shared understanding of what matters most and how work should move forward. This clarity reduces ambiguity, limits rework, and supports consistent execution across cognitively diverse teams.

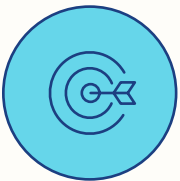
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### **Equip Managers to Support Neurodiverse Teams**

Managers need practical tools – not just awareness – to support neurodiverse employees and real-world work demands. Training that focuses on communication, structure, and follow-through helps managers maintain consistency while reducing strain on both leaders and teams.

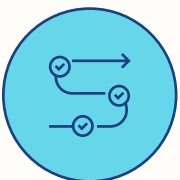
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### **Provide Targeted Support for Employees and Caregivers**

Targeted, skills-based behavioral support helps employees and caregivers manage competing demands that interfere with focus, follow-through, and daily execution. By addressing these pressures directly, organizations strengthen reliability and performance.

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### **Design Work Expectations That Support Reliable Execution**

Work expectations that clarify priorities, timelines, and measures of success make day-to-day execution more manageable without lowering standards. This approach reduces disruption and supports consistent performance across different working styles.

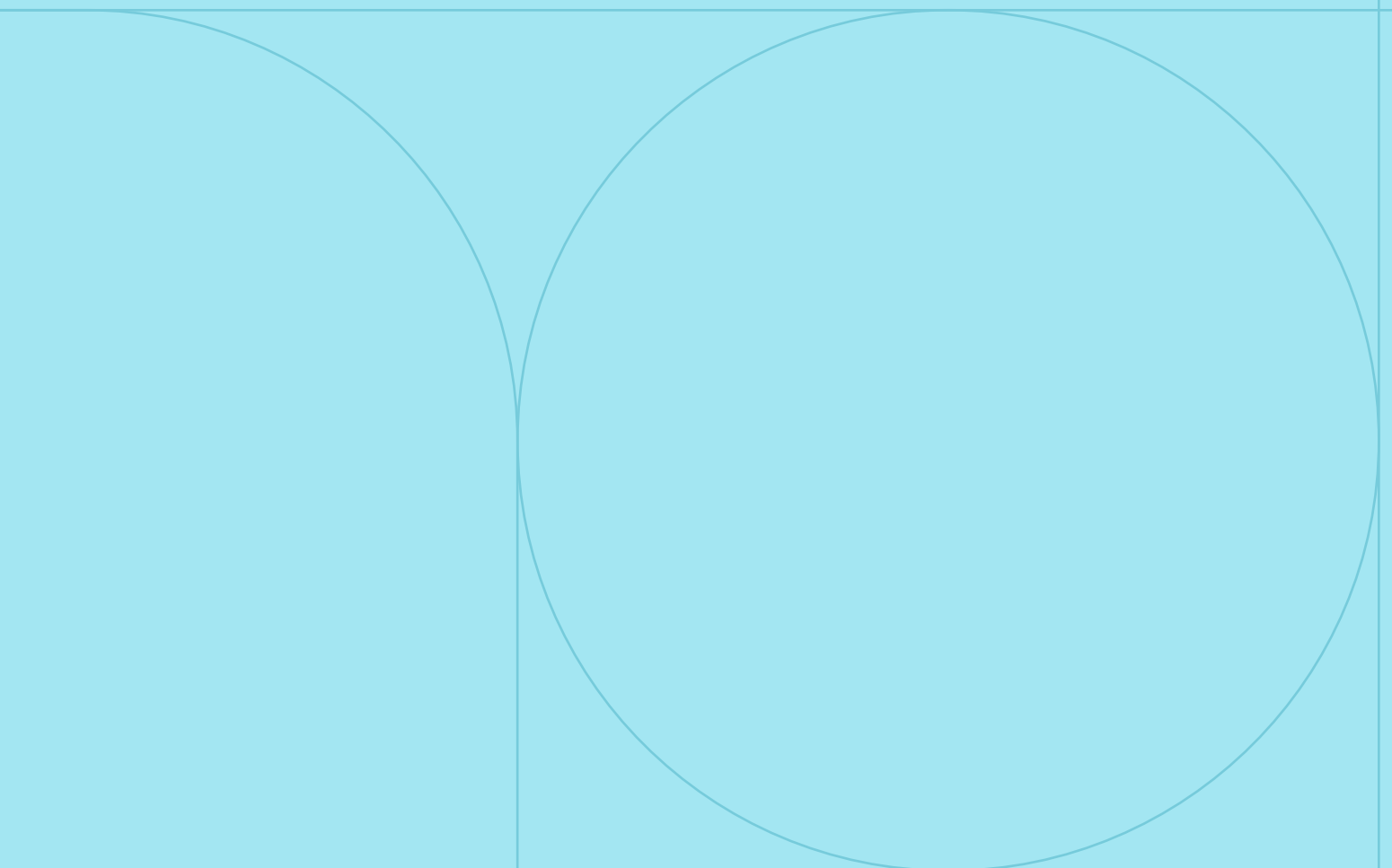
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### **Reinforce Skills Beyond One-Time Training**

Skills develop through use over time, not one-time instruction. Continued reinforcement helps new behaviors carry into daily work, ensuring training investments translate into sustained performance.

# Conclusion



## What's Next for Employers

In 2026, conversations about neurodiversity in the workplace have evolved beyond awareness to direct alignment with day-to-day operations. Organizations are seeing how cognitive variation and caregiving responsibilities shape the daily realities of work, influencing focus and follow-through.

Performance challenges are rarely about motivation or ability. More often, they reflect unclear expectations, unsupported cognitive demands, and caregiving pressures that compound over time.

Organizations with more stable outcomes invest in personalized behavioral support that equips managers, clarifies expectations, and strengthens execution before issues escalate.

When organizations address these pressures directly, the effects are measurable and sustained.

- More predictable, reliable execution
- Greater consistency across teams
- Lower retention risk through steadier performance

These insights reinforce a broader shift. Neurodiversity support is no longer an emerging concept, but a core operational workforce asset, and manager enablement functions as a form of risk mitigation. Organizations that respond to this shift are positioning themselves for greater consistency, operational resilience, and performance stability.



## RethinkCare's Commitment to Supporting Neurodiverse Workplaces

As organizations move from awareness to execution, many find that everyday work demands place increasing pressure on employees, managers, and caregivers. Behavioral and cognitive challenges often surface as missed deadlines, inconsistent follow-through, and increased managerial load.

RethinkCare is designed to address these pressures. Through expert-led behavioral coaching and skill-building, RethinkCare helps employees, managers, and caregivers manage everyday demands that affect performance at work and home.

Short, targeted learning pathways and specialized coaching address a range of cognitive and caregiving needs, while equipping managers with clear, actionable guidance to lead across different working styles and performance requirements.

Organizations choose RethinkCare to reduce day-to-day disruption, strengthen manager effectiveness, and support global workforces at scale, driving measurable improvements in reliability, retention, and performance.

To learn how RethinkCare can help your team, contact [support@rethinkcare.com](mailto:support@rethinkcare.com).



FEATURED EXPERT

## Angela Nelson, Ed.D., BCBA

Dr. Angela Nelson is the Vice President of Operations and Executive Director of Clinical Services at RethinkCare. Dr. Nelson oversees RethinkCare's consultation services and content generation for Parenting and Professional solutions. She joined Rethink in 2011 and specializes in working with parents raising children and teens with learning, social, and behavioral challenges, as well as organizations motivated to expand their neurodiversity efforts. Dr. Nelson holds a Doctorate in Education from the University of Southern California (USC), Master's degree in Counseling from California State University, Northridge, a Bachelor's degree in Psychology from UCLA, and is a Board Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA).



*Organizations that fail to support neurodivergent employees, working caregivers of neurodivergent children, and the managers leading them won't just miss an opportunity — they'll fall behind. The differentiator now is meaningful support.”*



RethinkCare.com

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