

Closing the Manager Gap:

How Top Organizations Drive Performance Through Coordinated Support

See how targeted workplace support for neurodiversity, disability, and caregiving enables managers and drives better team performance.



Introduction

Organizations are recognizing that employees think and communicate differently; many are caring for children and families, including those with cognitive differences, disabilities, or specific needs—all while trying to accomplish their everyday work goals.

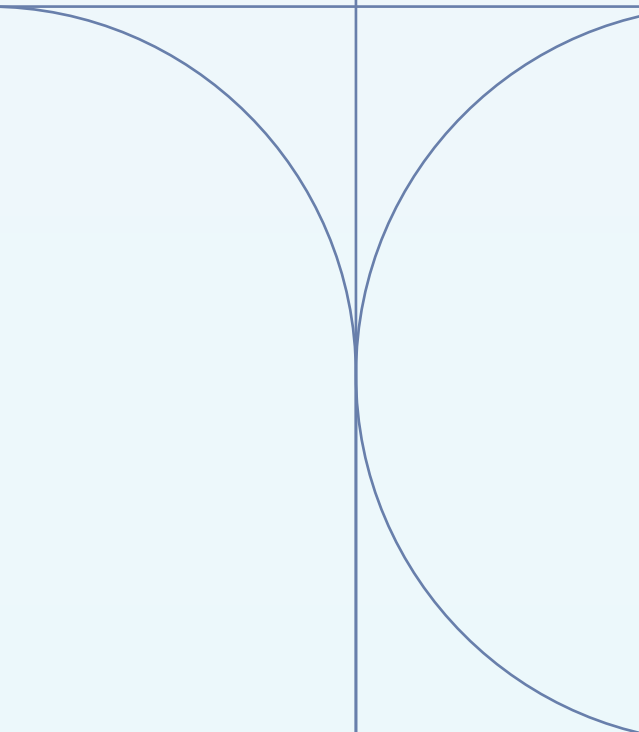
These aren't edge cases. They're the majority.

When an employee struggles, they often look to their manager for support—the same manager who's also trying to run a meeting, hit a deadline, and keep their team from burning out.

Managers are expected to navigate these realities while still driving performance. But the systems designed to guide them haven't kept up.

Support is often reactive, crisis-based, and fragmented—spread across inconsistent tools, vendors, and point solutions. Managers are frequently left to bridge the gaps on their own, leading to individual strain and operational slow down.

This translates to missed targets, variable team performance, and increased pressure on human resources, all of which impacts business outcomes—costing organizations far more than they realize.



The New Workforce Reality

Employees are balancing competing demands both inside and outside of work, affecting their ability to focus, communicate, and perform.

Some of these realities include:

- Neurodiversity, including autism, ADHD, dyslexia and other cognitive differences
- Disability and health-related needs
- Caregiving responsibilities, including neurodivergent and disabled dependents

The data reinforces this:

15–20%
of the global workforce is neurodivergent.¹

53%
of millennial and Gen Z employees self-identify as neurodivergent.²

1 in 5
employees is a caregiver.³

These factors are not rare — they are a normal and growing part of the workforce.

Yet most workplace systems still treat these individuals as exceptions rather than designing for them by default. Support is often limited to crisis support or limited care navigation from an EAP or mental health benefit.

When needs aren’t effectively supported, the impact extends beyond the individual and into team performance and business outcomes. For managers, this shows up every day in conversations, performance management, and decision-making.

The gap between what managers are expected to navigate and what they are prepared to handle is significant—and growing.

What This Looks Like in Practice

Situation: A high-performing employee is returning to the office after medical leave. She has sensory needs that weren’t an issue when the team was remote.

Manager challenge: Maintain performance expectations while adjusting the work environment and communication approach—without clear guidance on how to do either.

Reality: The manager is expected to support both morale and performance but hasn’t been given clear guidance on how to navigate the situation. As a result, they rely on their own judgement in the moment.

Gap: Decisions are made through trial and error and eventually get escalated to HR or an EAP, rather than supported by a consistent, expert-backed approach.

Impact: Performance slips. Deadlines are missed. The manager absorbs the pressure. The cycle repeats, and the impact is significant.

Only 39% of employees with disabilities disclose their condition to their manager⁴

The Manager Gap

The gap isn't about expectations.
It's about enablement.

Managers are expected to navigate complex employee needs while maintaining consistent execution—but most haven't been equipped to do so.

In many organizations, resources are fragmented, leaving managers to connect the dots themselves. In fact, **only 35% of senior managers have received neurodiversity training⁵**, and many rely on HR for in-the-moment help because of limited guidance.

As a result, support becomes less predictable and often shaped by individual experience and comfort levels rather than a shared approach across the organization.

The impact comes at a cost:

- Missed deadlines and reduced productivity
- Strained communication and collaboration
- Increased burnout and employee absenteeism
- Increased turnover
- Challenges addressed reactively, after performance slips

But when managers are equipped with the right tools and expertise, the impact is measurable.



How Organizations Are Closing the Manager Gap

Organizations leading the way aren't relying on awareness alone.

They're addressing the root cause of fragmented support and building systems that enable managers to drive performance without adding to their workload.

The result isn't just better manager resources. It is more consistent outcomes across teams, increased productivity, and reduced strain on HR.

What Effective Manager Support Looks Like

Category	Effective Approach	Common Pitfall	Practical Example
Manager Resources	Provide practical tools that managers can use in real situations: short-form guidance, structured resources, and access to expert coaching for complex challenges.	Relying on one-time awareness training that doesn't translate to day-to-day behavior change.	A manager notices an employee struggling with communication and follow-through. They engage with a dynamic support experience that adapts to the situation and delivers curated guidance, resources, and next steps in real time.
Access to Support	Make support easy to reach in the moment, so managers can quickly find answers without disrupting their workflow.	Requiring managers to navigate multiple systems or submit a request just to get help.	A manager preparing for a sensitive performance conversation connects with an expert in real-time for guidance on how to handle it effectively.
Workforce Coverage	Address the full range of factors that affect focus and performance, including neurodiversity, disability, and caregiving.	Building programs around a narrow set of needs that leaves much of the workforce underserved.	An employee is balancing caregiving responsibilities and a stressful workload. They access a digital library of content to find strategies for managing their time and setting healthy boundaries.
Accessibility	Design support that's available to everyone. Employees shouldn't have to self-identify or disclose a condition to access resources that help them perform.	Gating support behind disclosure, reducing reach and putting the burden on the employee.	An employee trying to navigate a disability-related need connects with a trained navigator who helps them identify next steps, easing their burden and supporting follow through.

Is Your Organization Ready? 14 Questions to Find Out.

For benefits leaders, the expanding role of managers creates an opportunity to rethink how workplace support is structured, delivered, and experienced across the organization.

These questions are designed to help you identify gaps and evaluate whether your current approach can drive consistent performance at scale.

Manager Capability

1. Are managers equipped with practical ways to support their teams, or are you relying on awareness training alone?
2. When managers face complex situations with employees, do they have a clear place to turn for guidance or are they expected to figure it out on their own?
3. How confident are managers in supporting a range of employee needs, including neurodiversity, disability, and caregiving?
4. Are managers empowered to take action in real situations—or simply given information?

Access and Experience

5. How easily can managers access tools and expertise when they need them?
6. Does support exist in formats that fit how managers work (e.g., quick guidance, video tutorials, online coaching)?
7. Are resources centralized and easy to navigate or spread across tools and programs?
8. Is support consistent across teams, regardless of manager experience, location or comfort level?

Scope and Impact

9. Does your approach address the full range of factors that impact performance, or focus on an isolated group of needs?
10. How well does it reflect the realities employees bring to work, including life outside of it?
11. Are employees required to disclose their needs or diagnoses in order to receive support?
12. Does your approach proactively address challenges or mainly respond once an employee is in crisis, after performance is impacted?
13. How are you measuring whether manager support is improving performance, engagement, and retention?
14. Can your approach scale across global teams and functions while maintaining predictable outcomes?

If these questions surface gaps, you're not alone—this is the new workforce reality.

Organizations are still adapting to the realities of a neurodiverse work environment. But many are already seeing meaningful improvements in team performance and manager effectiveness by taking a more coordinated approach to workplace support.

What a More Coordinated Approach Looks Like in Practice

Most benefit solutions are fragmented and built to address needs in isolation, or in case of emergency. But today's challenges don't exist in silos. They're interconnected.

Closing the manager gap isn't just about adding more resources to an already crowded benefits stack. It's about making support consistent, connected, and accessible in the moments that matter—before performance slips, before HR gets called, or before a good manager burns out trying to figure it out alone.

Organizations that take a more coordinated approach are seeing measurable business impact. A Forrester Total Economic Impact™ study found that **even a 3% improvement in productivity can translate into \$2.8M in gains, with payback in under six months.**⁷

RethinkCare offers a single, coordinated system that provides global workplaces with consistent, intuitive ways to access the guidance and expertise they need to manage real-world, day-to-day complexities.

How RethinkCare Works

Digital Library

Guidance when it's needed most

Challenges can be addressed in the moment—without delay or guesswork—so productivity doesn't stall while employees search for answers.

Coaching

Expert support for real-life situations

Expert guidance brings clarity and direction when support is needed, so next steps are informed, and progress continues.

Guided Journeys

Skills that strengthen over time

Over time, employees build the skills needed to handle everyday work and life challenges, leading to more consistent outcomes across teams.

Navigation

Follow-through that ensures momentum

Life complications can make the next steps uncertain. Ongoing human support helps point the way and carry actions through completion.

When managers are consistently equipped, the entire workforce performs differently.

RethinkCare helps organizations make that level of support scalable—so better outcomes aren't the exception, but the standard.

[Request a Demo →](#)

RethinkCare



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Sources:

- 1 British Medical Bulletin, [Neurodiversity at work: a biopsychosocial model and the impact on working adults](#)
- 2 Deloitte, [2023 Gen Z and Millennial Survey](#)
- 3 Rosalynn Carter Institute for Caregivers, [Invisible Overtime: What employers need to know about caregivers](#)
- 4 American Enterprise Institute, [Embracing Neurodiversity at Work: Unleashing America's Largest Untapped Talent Pool](#)
- 5 City & Guilds Foundation, [Neurodiversity Index Report 2026](#)
- 6 RethinkCare, [The State of Neurodiversity in the Workplace: Supporting Performance, Leadership Effectiveness, and Retention in Today's Workforce](#)
- 7 Forrester TEI Study, [The Total Economic Impact™ of RethinkCare, 2025](#)