



**LEAD THE PACK CONSULTING**

Leadership Coaching and Education

# **We're All Wired Differently**

**And That's a Good Thing for Relationships**



Inclusion isn't about accommodation - it's about leadership that creates psychological safety and unlocks trust, creativity, and collaboration.

Author: Peter Lijnse, MBRM

Peter Lijnse is an experienced Business Relationship Management (BRM) leadership coach, speaker, author, and facilitator. He supports organizations in building and maturing their BRM capabilities, while also coaching leaders to maximize the value those capabilities deliver.

Together with Elka Schrijver, Peter co-authored Leading with Impact and Leading with BRM, and most recently they published a business novel, The Hexagon Effect, which follows the journey of a BRM navigating complex organizational challenges.

Drawing on experience across multiple industries, Peter is a sought-after keynote speaker and workshop facilitator on the topics of BRM, leadership, and the power of relationships to drive results.

Explore the Lead and Succeed book series [here](https://www.amazon.com/dp/B0CK7ZHXS8), or copy and paste the link into your browser: <https://www.amazon.com/dp/B0CK7ZHXS8>

Contact Information:

+1 403-991-6312

[info@leadthepackconsulting.com](mailto:info@leadthepackconsulting.com)

© Copyright 2025 Lead the Pack Consulting. All rights reserved.



Most leaders believe they're good at building relationships, but if they overlook how differently people think and engage, those relationships may not be as strong as they seem. Inclusion, especially neuroinclusion, isn't just about fairness; it's about unlocking the kind of trust and collaboration that drives real results. Research by Deloitte (2024<sup>1</sup>) shows that neuroinclusion fuels innovation and strengthens collaboration by bringing diverse thinking styles into the conversation—something every leader needs to succeed.

This article explores how recognizing and embracing diverse cognitive styles can strengthen business relationship management (BRM) leadership skills and create more inclusive, resilient, and high-performing organizations.

## What is Neuroinclusion?

Neuroinclusion is the practice of intentionally creating environments where all cognitive styles are welcomed, respected, and supported, not just accommodated. It's rooted in the understanding that human brains are wired in wonderfully different ways. People process information, solve problems, communicate, and interact in diverse ways; this diversity is not a flaw to fix but a strength to embrace.

Traditionally, workplaces and training programs have been built around what's often called the neuronormative ideal, a narrow standard of how people are expected to think, speak, and behave. This standard has historically marginalized those whose cognitive styles fall outside of that norm, including individuals with autism, ADHD, dyslexia, and other forms of neurodivergence. Often, the expectation has been for neurodivergent people to adapt, mask, or change in order to fit in.

Neuroinclusion flips that script. Rather than asking individuals to conform, it asks organizations and leaders to expand how they design meetings, how they communicate, and how they evaluate contribution. It challenges the outdated medical model that frames neurodivergence as a deficit, and instead embraces the social model of disability, which sees barriers as something created by systems, not people's brains.<sup>2</sup>

Neuroinclusion is about both accessibility and belonging. It's about creating spaces where no one has to hide how they think in order to be heard. When applied thoughtfully, especially in the context of business relationship management leadership capabilities, it transforms how we connect, collaborate, and lead.



# Why Neuroinclusion Matters in BRM

People think, process, and relate in different ways. That's why neuroinclusion is so essential to BRM.

At the heart of BRM is the ability to foster trust, navigate complexity, and bring people together around common goals. But if our approach to relationship-building only works for those who communicate in expected, socially fluent, or fast-thinking ways, we risk excluding others, sometimes without even realizing it. Neuroinclusion broadens our perspective and reminds us that collaboration can look different depending on how someone engages with the world.

Many neurodivergent individuals bring unique strengths to relationship-building; precision, systems thinking, creative problem-solving, deep empathy, and the ability to ask challenging yet important questions. However, these strengths often go unrecognized if only conventional signs of engagement, such as quick responses, smooth eye contact, or a particular kind of interpersonal ease, are being sought. When different relational styles are overlooked, valuable insights are missed, and the complementary fabric being built is weakened.

Neuroinclusion helps leaders become more effective not just with individuals who are openly neurodivergent, but with everyone. By learning to recognize and adapt to diverse cognitive patterns, leaders become more skilled in facilitating inclusive dialogue, co-creating value with a wider range of stakeholders, and navigating situations with more psychological safety.

## What if You Are Neurodivergent as a BRM Leader?

Leading with relationships can be demanding, especially when a person's brain works differently from the norm. In most workplaces, the 'norm'—what's often referred to as neurotypical (Cleveland Clinic, 2023<sup>3</sup>) - emphasizes quick responses, eye contact, and reading unspoken cues. Importantly, neurotypical does not mean 'better' or 'default'; it simply reflects what is more common. For those who don't naturally operate in these ways, the pressure to conform can make relationship-building even more challenging.

For neurodivergent BRM leaders, the unwritten rules of communication and social interaction can feel out of sync with how they naturally operate. But being neurodivergent doesn't diminish their ability to build trust. In fact, it can offer a powerful, authentic approach to leadership when they understand and embrace their own trust dynamic.





Frances Frei's Trust Triangle<sup>4</sup> describes three core elements of trust: authenticity, logic, and empathy. When trust falters, it's often because one of these areas has a “wobble”—a moment where others perceive a gap, whether or not one actually exists.

- A **logic wobble** occurs when ideas aren't landing clearly or seem flawed, even if they're solid.
- An **authenticity wobble** shows up when others feel like they're holding back or not being their real self, even if they are.
- An **empathy wobble** arises when people don't feel seen or understood, even if the leader's intentions are caring.

Here's the key—everyone experiences these wobbles. But for neurodivergent leaders, the risk of being misunderstood in these areas can be higher, simply because how they express trust may differ from what others expect.

They might naturally lead with **logic**—using structured thinking, clarity, and systems to guide decisions. People trust their competence, but if that's not paired with some visible connection or flexibility, others may feel they're distant or rigid.

Or they may shine in **authenticity**—valuing honesty, consistency, and showing up exactly as they are. That builds deep trust, but if others are used to more polished or emotionally curated leadership, they might misread that directness as unfiltered or abrupt.

They might also express **empathy** in unconventional but powerful ways—like advocating for fairness, respecting autonomy, or deeply supporting others behind the scenes. But if they're less expressive in the moment, others might not see their empathy as clearly.

The opportunity lies in naming and owning their strengths, and helping others understand them. If they're aware of where their own trust wobble may occur, they can address it without trying to be someone they're not. Maybe that means explaining their approach to collaboration or being explicit about their care, even if it's not always shown through words.

Neurodivergent leaders don't need to compensate; they need to **lead intentionally**. When they align their strengths with clarity and build relationships on their terms, they model a leadership style rooted in trust, authenticity, and inclusivity. And that's what truly strengthens relationships.



# The Risk of Exclusion—When Good Intentions Aren't Enough

Most leaders want to be inclusive. They care about people and they value collaboration. But even with the best of intentions, it's possible for leaders to unintentionally create environments that exclude, especially when they rely on unexamined norms around how people “should” participate, communicate, or contribute.

Unintentional exclusion is especially relevant in relationship-centred leadership. If everyone is expected to speak up in meetings, think on their feet, make eye contact, or follow unspoken social cues, there is a risk of disregarding those whose brains work differently. And because many neurodivergent individuals don't disclose their differences—or may not even have a formal diagnosis—the exclusion often goes unnoticed. It appears as disengagement, a lack of contribution, or even resistance. But more often, it's simply misalignment between how someone operates and how the environment is designed.

Here's the uncomfortable truth: **inclusion doesn't happen by default.** It has to be built intentionally. That means examining the norms taken for granted: fast-paced brainstorming sessions, verbal-only discussions, informal decision-making, or unstructured collaboration. These formats often favour extroversion, speed, and verbal fluency—traits that align more closely with neurotypical patterns.

When leaders fail to ask: *Who might this format unintentionally exclude?*, they reinforce the belief that only one way of engaging is valid. This directly narrows their relationship network and silences some of the most thoughtful, creative, and analytically strong contributors.

Being inclusive as a BRM leader means recognizing that exclusion isn't always visible. (For practical frameworks on building neuroinclusive workplaces, see *The Canary Code* by Ludmila Praslova<sup>5</sup> ) It means understanding that silence isn't always a sign of disinterest, that a lack of eye contact isn't necessarily disrespectful, and that delayed responses aren't always an indicator of a lack of competence. It also means creating more structured, flexible, and responsive ways for people to participate and co-create value.

The good news? These shifts don't dilute effectiveness; they strengthen it. When more people can meaningfully engage, our relationships become deeper, our solutions become more innovative, and our organizations become more resilient.



# There Is No Average Brain—Why Individuality Matters

In his book *The End of Average*, Todd Rose dismantles the myth of the “average person.” His research shows that designing for the so-called average fails real people, because no one is actually average. Instead, Rose introduces three principles with powerful implications for leadership and relationship-building: the **Jaggedness Principle**, the **Context Principle**, and the **Pathways Principle**.

- **The Jaggedness Principle** shows that human abilities and traits are multi-dimensional and uneven. No cognitive or relational style can be reduced to a single score or stereotype. Each person has a “jagged profile” of strengths, challenges, and preferences. For example, one team member may excel at systems thinking but find real-time brainstorming draining, while another may be a deep listener who requires more processing time for complex decisions. Ignoring these differences means overlooking unique contributions that directly strengthen relationships and results.
- **The Context Principle** shows that environment shapes performance. A person who struggles to contribute in a chaotic, unstructured meeting may thrive in a well-facilitated session with clear agendas and visual supports. The way conversations, processes, and spaces are designed determines whose talents emerge and whose remain hidden. By shaping context intentionally, BRM leaders create conditions where diverse cognitive styles consistently shine.
- **The Pathways Principle** shows that there is no single “right” way to learn, engage, or succeed. Just as people reach goals through different routes and at different paces, they also build trust, collaborate, and communicate in unique ways. Relationship-centred leadership requires honoring these multiple pathways rather than forcing everyone into the same mold. By doing so, leaders enable people to contribute authentically and fully.

Taken together, these principles illustrate that the myth of average is not just outdated; it’s a barrier to inclusion and performance. Neuroinclusion is about designing for the reality of human individuality. When BRM leaders embed the jaggedness, context, and pathways principles into their daily practices, they don’t just accommodate difference, they unlock the full potential of the people they build relationships with.





# Designing BRM Practices with Universal Inclusion in Mind

What if inclusion wasn't something that was added after the fact but something built into relationship practices from the start?

That's the mindset behind Universal Design for Learning (UDL), a framework originally developed for education, now increasingly relevant in leadership and workplace design<sup>6</sup>. UDL is based on a simple, powerful principle—variation in how people learn, communicate, and process is not an exception; it's the norm. If designed with that principle in mind, the need for individual accommodations is reduced and environments are created where everyone can thrive.

For BRM leaders, this shift is essential. Instead of creating a one-size-fits-all approach and making exceptions for those who don't fit, they design flexible practices that accommodate diverse ways of thinking, participating, and contributing without requiring anyone to ask for special treatment.

UDL focuses on three key dimensions that align perfectly with relationship-centred leadership:

- **Multiple means of engagement (the why):** Recognize that people are motivated differently. Some love real-time collaboration, others prefer reflection. Some people feel energized by group dialogue, while others are energized by one-on-one conversations. Designing relationship-building opportunities that offer varied modes of engagement enables people to participate in ways that best suit them.
- **Multiple means of representation (the what):** Not everyone processes information the same way. Supporting relationship work with visual tools (like Impact Canvases<sup>7</sup>, diagrams, or timelines), written summaries, or real-time note-taking helps people follow, understand, and contribute, especially those with processing differences.
- **Multiple means of action and expression (the how):** Just as people absorb information differently, they also contribute in different ways. Providing options for how people share insights—whether through live conversation, written input, or visual feedback—makes relationship-building more inclusive and dynamic.

Designing with inclusion in mind also reduces the burden on neurodivergent individuals to self-advocate. When flexibility and clarity are built in, no one has to choose between being true to themselves and participating fully.

These design decisions aren't just better for neurodivergent individuals—they're better for everyone. People who are introverted, anxious, overwhelmed, or navigating a bad day also benefit from systems that offer multiple paths to contribution.

BRM leaders don't just facilitate conversations—they shape the environments where trust, value, and collaboration happen. When those environments are built on universal inclusion, relationship-building becomes broader, deeper, and more sustainable.





# Neuroinclusion as a Strategic Advantage in Relationship-Centred Organizations

Neuroinclusion is not just a question of equity; it's a lever for performance. The current dynamic, interconnected world causes organizations to increasingly face complex challenges where cause and effect aren't immediately visible and where multiple perspectives are required to make sense of the situation. It's in these situations where neuroinclusion becomes not just helpful, but essential.

The **Cynefin framework**<sup>8</sup> suggests that in complex environments, no single person has the complete answer. Solutions must emerge through experimentation, collaboration, and the integration of diverse insights. Homogeneous thinking can lead to blind spots, but when different cognitive approaches are included—whether linear or lateral, fast or reflective, intuitive or structured—the chances of uncovering breakthrough solutions are increased.

Neurodivergent individuals often bring exactly the kind of perspectives needed in complexity: systems thinking, pattern recognition, unique framing of problems, and the ability to challenge assumptions. But unless the environment is inclusive, offering psychological safety and flexibility in how people engage, those perspectives remain invisible or undervalued.

Relationship-centred organizations depend on people connecting across silos and functions to co-create value. That work is strongest when it includes a full spectrum of thinking. BRM leaders are in a prime position to design and foster these inclusive spaces. When environments are created where all cognitive styles are actively welcomed, stronger partnerships, richer collaboration, and greater adaptability are built.

The result? Better decisions. More innovation. Greater trust. And, ultimately, **greater impact on the conditions of the organization itself**—its culture, resilience, and ability to learn and evolve.

Neuroinclusion isn't just a gesture of goodwill. It's a strategic practice for navigating complexity, strengthening relationships, and creating lasting value.



# Small Shifts, Big Impact: Everyday Actions for BRM Leaders to Foster Neuroinclusion

Neuroinclusion doesn't require a complete system overhaul. Often, it starts with small, intentional shifts in how BRMs prepare, engage, and follow up in their relationship work. These micro-adjustments signal respect, create safety, and allow more people to show up fully, especially those with less visible cognitive differences.

Here are some practical shifts BRM leaders can make throughout the relationship lifecycle:

## Before a Relationship Conversation or Engagement

- **Share agendas or goals in advance:** Give stakeholders time to process and reflect before they need to jump into a discussion.
- **Clarify format and expectations:** Let people know how the conversation will flow and what kind of input is welcomed.
- **Offer alternative input options:** Make space for written, visual, or one-on-one contributions, especially for those who engage differently.
- **Request clarity around engagement preferences:** Ask, "How do you best engage in these conversations?" Position yourself as a partner who adapts, and not one who expects sameness.

## During Conversations, Collaborations, or Co-Creation

- **Build in thinking time:** Pause after asking questions to allow for reflection before responses.
- **Use visual tools to guide dialogue:** Canvases, diagrams, and roadmaps help organize complexity and create shared clarity.
- **Acknowledge different engagement styles:** Understand that participation doesn't always mean speaking; it can mean listening deeply, taking notes, or contributing after the fact.
- **Model flexible language:** Phrases like "There are multiple ways to contribute here" normalize diverse interaction styles.

## After the Conversation

- **Follow up in multiple formats:** Written summaries or visual recaps reinforce clarity and allow continued engagement.
- **Create space for asynchronous input:** Invite additional thoughts via email, chat, or collaborative docs—especially valuable for reflective thinkers.
- **Acknowledge contributions beyond airtime:** Recognize those who synthesized ideas, deepened discussions, or helped others be heard.



## Ongoing BRM Practices

- **Design collaboration intentionally:** Ask yourself, “Does this structure favour speed or substance? Does it invite quiet brilliance?”
- **Establish inclusive relationship norms:** Promote diverse approaches to partnership and collaboration across teams and engagements.
- **Reflect regularly:** Who’s being heard? Who might not be? What assumptions are built into our ways of working?

These shifts support neurodivergent individuals and they strengthen every relationship. They create environments where more people can contribute meaningfully, where psychological safety becomes the norm, and diverse thinking fuels better outcomes.

## Conclusion: Inclusion Strengthens Relationships and Results

In a world where complexity is the norm and relationships are central to success, neuroinclusion isn’t optional—it’s foundational. Leaders who intentionally create environments that recognize and support diverse ways of thinking unlock deeper trust, greater creativity, and stronger collaboration. Relationship-centred leadership thrives because of difference.

Now is the time for leaders to act: embed neuroinclusion into every conversation, every collaboration, and every decision. By doing so, we bring more people into the dialogue, build stronger relationships, and deliver greater impact.

“There is no average brain—only unique perspectives waiting to be included. The question is: will we create the space for them?”



<sup>1</sup>  
Deloitte. 2024. “The Neurodiversity Advantage: How Neuroinclusion Can Unleash Innovation and Create Competitive Edge.” Deloitte Insights, July 2024.  
<https://www.deloitte.com/us/en/insights/topics/diversity-equity-inclusion/unleashing-innovation-with-neuroinclusion.html>.

<sup>2</sup>  
King et al. (2025) Neuroinclusion in CE/T: Empowering Inclusive Learning Environments. Sterling, VA: International Accreditors for Continuing Education and Training (IACET)

<sup>3</sup>  
Cleveland Clinic. 2023. “Neurotypical: What It Means.” Cleveland Clinic. Accessed August 20, 2025. <https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/articles/neurotypical>.

<sup>4</sup>  
Frei, Frances X. 2020. “Begin with Trust.” Harvard Business Review, May–June 2020.

<sup>5</sup>  
Praslova, Ludmila. 2023. The Canary Code: A Guide to Neurodiversity, Dignity, and Intersectional Belonging at Work. Oakland, CA: Berrett-Koehler.

<sup>6</sup>  
CAST. 2018. Universal Design for Learning Guidelines, Version 2.2. Wakefield, MA: CAST. <https://udlguidelines.cast.org>.

<sup>7</sup>  
Lijnse, Peter & Schrijver, Elka. 2023. Leading with Impact. Calgary, AB: Lead the Pack Consulting.

<sup>8</sup>  
Snowden, David J. 2007. “The Cynefin Framework.” Cognitive Edge. <https://thecynefin.co/>.

