

Corporate Mentorship Programs for Neurodivergent Employees

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ABSTRACT:

While many organisations are beginning to see neurodiversity as a talent in the workplace, autistic, ADHD, dyslexic, dyspraxia and sufferers of Tourette syndrome still have a lack of clarity in their organisation and receive inconsistent support and/or psychological safety. Existing evidence has focused on mentorship in the educational and early career transition space and not specifically in terms of sustained employment in the corporate world. To investigate whether the design, implementation and experience quality of corporate mentoring programs were related to job satisfaction, perceived belonging, career development perception, retention intention, self-reported performance and burnout, and whether psychological safety was a mediator in these relationships, this study employed a cross sectional survey of 200 neurodivergent employees recruited from five strata of neurodiversity through stratified random sampling. All three program quality constructs were below acceptable levels ($\alpha = -.26$ to $.09$) and there was no significant relationship between program quality and any outcome variable in bivariate correlations or multiple regression analyses (all $p > .08$). There were no significant indirect effects via psychological safety, as determined by bootstrapped mediation analyses. No significant differences were found among the outcomes across mentor type (1-way ANOVA); however, there were significant differences among the outcomes across communication mode with the feeling of belonging being higher for virtual mentoring than for hybrid mentoring ($p = .004$). The results here indicate that the design of the program itself may not be enough to alter the workplace experience of neurodivergent workers, and that the format in which the communication is delivered and the workplace culture more broadly should be considered more important than the program design, when taken alone.

Keywords: neurodiversity, workplace mentorship, psychological safety, autism spectrum disorder, ADHD, employee retention, inclusive employment, corporate mentoring programs

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Introduction

Many workplaces are starting to understand that a significant number of their employees process

information, communicate, and think differently than they might expect to "default" when it comes to thinking, talking, and information management. Autism, attention-

deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), dyspraxia (developmental coordination disorder), dyslexia and Tourette syndrome are being increasingly talked about as not a lack of something, but as a variation in some things. Autism, attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), development coordination disorder (dyspraxia), dyslexia and Tourette's syndrome are increasingly described as not a lack of something, but a variation in some things, and these variations come with their own workplace strengths and challenges (Bruyère & Colella, 2022). This change in perspective has paralleled the rising interest of employers in neurodiversity and its emerging status as a talent and inclusion strategy, especially in knowledge-intensive industries where pattern recognition, concentration, and creative problem-solving are valued (Sinha & Sinha, 2024; Tariq, 2024).

However, the reality for neurodivergent workers in the daily world of work is still fraught with challenges. Many autistic workers report that communication expectations, norms, and sensory requirements are vague or not clearly defined, and often are not designed to accommodate their communicative style (Hayward et al., 2020). Structures that emphasize the importance of traditional performance may devalue or even punish the characteristic patterns of ADHD, including irregular attention and non-linear task engagement, despite the fact that these patterns can additionally be advantageous to good problem-solving skills (Robbins, 2017).

Adults with developmental coordination disorder are also often subject to ongoing, and still poorly recognised, barriers to tasks associated with coordination (Cleaton et al., 2021, Tal Saban & Kirby, 2018), and dyslexic workers continue to face a lack of, or inconsistent, reasonable adjustments to written communication in the workplace (Doyle, 2019; Wissell et al., 2022).

In all of these situations, there is a common thread—many of the challenges faced by neurodivergent workers stem not so much from their own abilities as from a lack of alignment with the norms of the organization and the

differences in their cognitive and communication styles (Follmer & Spoor, 2026).

A recurring theme across this body of research is the impact that relationships with supervisors and co-workers have on the success or failure of neurodivergent employees. Martin et al. (2023) concluded that the quality of the relationship between autistic employees and their supervisors was associated with ongoing employment, and Waisman-Nitzan et al. (2019) reported that the informal understanding developed through direct interaction with the employer was more important for whether the employer would provide accommodations than formal policy.

In particular, psychological safety has emerged as a key factor enabling autistic employees and leaders to express their needs and engage fully in the workplace (Follmer & Spoor, 2026). The findings suggest mentorship as a potential and an underutilized strategy: a deliberate, structured, and intentional relationship, might offer the individualized understanding, communication adaptation and psychological safety that more generic organisational policy can't effectively provide at scale.

But the handful of studies that does focus on mentorship for a neurodivergent population has focused on the transition to education and early career, not continuous employment within the corporate world. Buckley et al. (2022) reported that prepping up an autistic performing arts professional in a mentoring programme decreased feelings of isolation and supplied career guidance, while Schindler and Boney (2022) connected structured mentoring to higher graduation outcomes for university students with a variety of diagnoses.

Heron et al. (2023) looked at mentoring relationships between faculty and staff members, and Crudden et al. (2025) at mentoring as a way to increase labor force participation generally for students with intellectual disabilities.

While these studies can provide important context on the creation and adaptation of mentoring relationships for neurodivergent individuals, there is still a gap in knowledge: very little is known about the design, implementation,

and evaluation of mentoring in both the language of role performance and organizational culture in the context of sustained corporate employment, where demands are significantly different than those in educational or transition settings.

Meanwhile, work on neurodiversity in organizations has grown to focus on inclusive leadership and cultural change (Barbosa & Real de Oliveira, 2026; Nagirikandalage et al., 2026), and has begun to include a broader range of employment barriers and supports (Southey et al., 2024; Coplan et al., 2021). There has been comparatively little research on how a specific and structured intervention like mentorship can be designed to be adapted to the communication styles, processing strengths and work environment needs of autism, ADHD, dyslexia, dyspraxia and TS; and how the effectiveness of such a program can be assessed in the corporate environment.

This study seeks to fill that gap. It explores the design, implementation, and measurement of corporate mentorship programs that are sensitive to the unique needs of neurodivergent employees, as reported by employees in their experiences of program design quality, implementation fidelity and outcomes (psychological safety, job satisfaction, and intention to stay with the organization). The study seeks to offer a practical model for organizations developing neuro-inclusive mentorship programs and a quantitative evaluation of whether such modification of mentorship programs is meaningful and improves the workplace experience for neurodivergent employees.

The rest of this paper details the methodology employed to answer this question, summarizes the findings, and elaborates upon the implications for the practice and future research of organizations.

Methodology

The study used a quantitative, cross-sectional survey design to look at the relationships among the design, implementation, and evaluation of corporate mentoring programs, and workplace outcomes for neurodivergent employees. A survey design was chosen because the question of the research could not have been answered with depth of qualitative inquiry alone, and required capturing the perceptions of a relatively large and widely dispersed group of employees, across multiple conditions, organizations and industries.

To minimize self-selection bias, which is common in previous workplace studies of neurodiversity, a stratified random sampling method was used to ensure participants were selected. The population of interest was adults (aged 18 and older) who are employed and who identify as being neurodivergent in any of five categories: autism spectrum disorder, attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder, dyslexia, developmental coordination disorder (dyspraxia), and Tourette syndrome.

The sampling frame was developed from employer-provided rosters and membership on a neurodiversity employee resource group (ERG) (as available) and added to by a verified panel provider screening for employment and neurodivergent self-identification as needed.

In this frame, each stratum was given a known and equal probability of selection using a simple random sampling procedure with random number assignment within each stratum. The process is shown in steps in figure 1. The sample size ($N = 200$) was determined using power considerations for multiple regression analysis, and was proportionalized across the strata as shown in Table 1 to ensure adequate power to detect a medium effect size ($f^2 = .15$) at $\alpha = .05$ for a planned set of predictors.

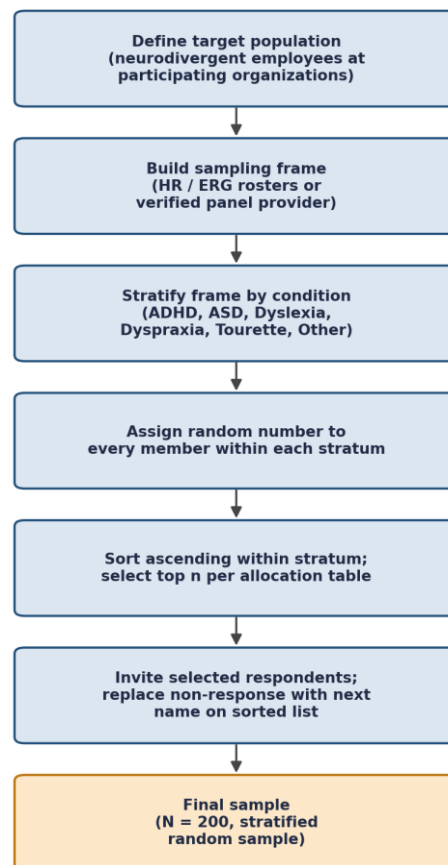


Figure 1 Stratified Random Sampling and Data Collection Procedure

Table 1 Strata Allocation for Stratified Random Sampling (N = 200)

Stratum (Condition)	Est. Population Share	Allocated n	Selection Method
ADHD	38%	76	Simple random sample within stratum
Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)	27%	54	Simple random sample within stratum
Dyslexia	20%	40	Simple random sample within stratum
Dyspraxia (DCD)	9%	18	Simple random sample within stratum
Tourette Syndrome	3%	6	Simple random sample within stratum
Multiple / Other co-occurring	3%	6	Simple random sample within stratum
Total	100%	200	—

Note. Population share figures are illustrative and should be replaced with the organization's actual sampling frame counts or a cited prevalence source prior to submission.

Structured, self-administered online questionnaire was used to gather the data. The instrument was structured within the central framework of the study, conceptualising the quality of mentorship programmes as developing over three sequential phases: design, implementation and evaluation, where the

outcome of interest was the perspectives of the employees on the effectiveness of the programme. Figure 2 shows this conceptual model, which includes psychological safety as a hypothesized mechanism between program quality and retention intention and job satisfaction.

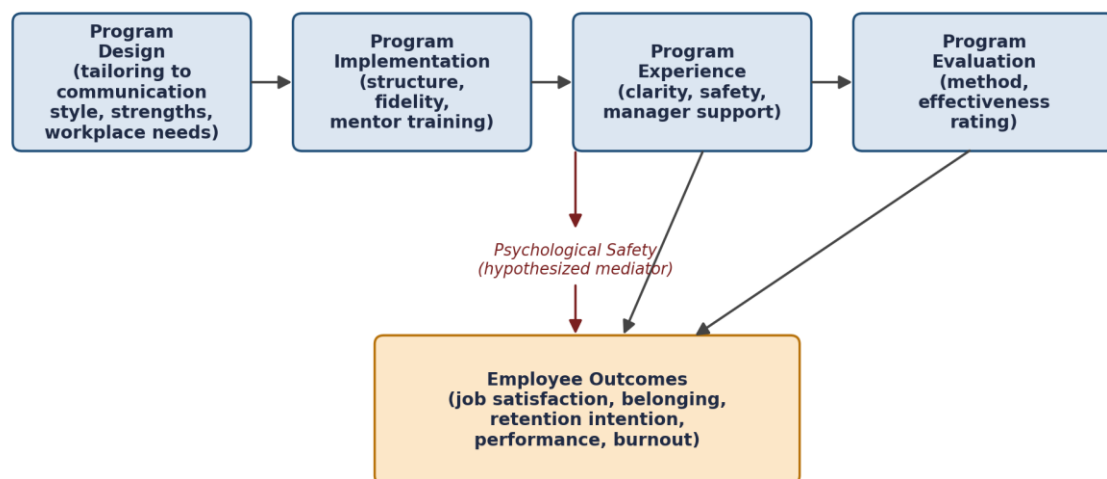


Figure 2 Conceptual Framework Linking Program Design, Implementation, Experience, Evaluation, and Employee Outcomes

Demographic and organizational characteristics included in the questionnaire were age, gender, job level, industry, job tenure, company size, country or region, disclosure status, remote/office arrangement, prior mentorship experience. Design-phase variables included whether a needs assessment was conducted, the amount of communication style and processing strengths incorporated in program design, workplace-needs identification, and mentor-matching criteria. Implementation-phase variables included program enrollment, length of program, type of mentor, meeting frequency, communication mode, program structure, program training adequacy, program implementation fidelity, and accommodations provided. Program-experience variables included program clarity of expectations, program flexibility, perceived psychological safety,

disclosure-comfort, and manager support. Evaluation-phase variables included whether program was formally evaluated, the method used for evaluation, perceived overall effectiveness. Job satisfaction, perceived belonging, career development perception, retention intention, self-reported performance, and burnout/stress level were the outcome variables. Categorical, binary, and continuous items (such as the type of mentoring, program length or the presence or absence of a needs assessment) were used as descriptive or control items in the design, implementation, and program-experience phases, except for the five-point Likert-type items, which were added together to create composite scores. Table 2 provides a summary of the complete item set for each construct with the subset employed in the composite items.

Table 2 Study Variables and Measurement

Construct / Phase	Variables Included	Total Items	Items in Composite Score
Design	Needs assessment conducted; communication-style tailoring; processing-strengths use; workplace-needs identification; mentor-matching criteria	5	3 (Likert items only)
Implementation	Program enrollment; duration; mentor type; meeting frequency; communication mode; structure; mentor training adequacy; implementation fidelity; accommodations provided	9	3 (Likert items only)
Program Experience	Clarity of expectations; flexibility of format; psychological safety; disclosure comfort; manager support	5	5 (all Likert items)
Evaluation	Whether evaluated; evaluation method; perceived effectiveness rating	3	Not composited (analyzed individually)
Outcomes	Job satisfaction; perceived belonging; career development perception; retention intention; self-reported performance; burnout/stress	6	Not composited (each is a separate outcome)
Demographic & Control	Age; gender; job role level; industry; tenure; company size; country/region; disclosure status; remote/office arrangement; prior mentorship experience	10	Not applicable

Note. All Likert items were measured on a 5-point scale. Categorical, binary, and continuous items within each phase (e.g., mentor type, program duration) were retained as separate descriptive or control variables rather than folded into composite scores. Design, Implementation, and Program Experience composites were computed as the mean of their respective Likert items only, following confirmation of adequate internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha).

The instrument would be examined for face and content validity prior to full scale administration, with a small sample of neurodivergent employees to ensure clarity and appropriateness of item wording across the different conditions represented (as communication preferences and reading load can vary meaningfully by condition). Internal consistency of each multi-item construct was tested using Cronbach's alpha and values below .70 were considered to be minimal

acceptable reliability, requiring item-level examination prior to any further analyses.

The study has been designed keeping in mind the ethical considerations. All respondents were asked to participate voluntarily and there was no requirement for them to provide a clinical diagnosis or disclose a diagnosis in order to participate as many of the neurodivergent adults who participated were not formally diagnosed. The survey instrument included provisions for informed consent, confidentiality, and the ability to withdraw at any time, typical practices in studies of employees talking about sensitive workplace experiences.

Data analysis was carried out in a step-wise manner. Descriptive statistics were used to describe the characteristics of the samples and distribution of the variables. Only Likert-type constructs of the design and implementation and program-experience constructs were used to create composite scores, as it was determined that the categorical and continuous items in those

constructs were reliable; categorical and continuous items for the other phases of the program were analyzed as descriptive and control variables, respectively. Bivariate correlations were used to explore relationships between the design, implementation composites and the six outcome variables. Multiple regression was then used to determine if the design quality, implementation quality, and program experience predicted each outcome variable, controlling for relevant demographic covariates, after checking for the assumption of the multiple regression which included (normality of residuals, homoscedasticity, and multicollinearity via Variance Inflation Factors) that were tested prior to the multiple regression analysis interpretation. If the conceptual model suggested an indirect path (i.e., the relationship between program design and implementation with retention and satisfaction via psychological safety), then mediation analysis was planned with bootstrapped indirect-effects approach. To assess if there were meaningful differences in the outcomes based on mentor type, or communication mode, a one-way analysis of variance was conducted. IBM SPSS was used for all analyses.

This design enables the study to go beyond whether mentorship is effective for neurodivergent employees, to identifying the specific aspects of design or implementation that will be most strongly linked with positive outcomes for these employees, and how those outcomes are likely to operate psychologically.

Result

Sample Characteristics

The final sample consisted of $N = 200$ employed adults who self-claimed to be neurodivergent. As in the proportional stratified sampling design, the distribution of respondents by condition strata was as follows: ADHD ($n = 76$, 38.0%); autism spectrum disorder ($n = 54$, 27.0%); dyslexia ($n = 40$, 20.0%); developmental coordination disorder/dyspraxia ($n = 18$, 9.0%); Tourette syndrome ($n = 6$, 3.0%); and multiple/other conditions ($n = 6$, 3.0%). Respondents ranged in age from 20 to 58 years ($M = 39.89$, $SD = 11.01$) and had a mean organizational tenure of 7.17 years ($SD = 4.13$, range = 0.4–15.0). Most had been diagnosed at work (71.5%) and had previous experience of mentorship (69.5%). Table 3 presents all demographic and program-participation data.

Table 3

Sample Characteristics of Respondents ($N = 200$)

Note. Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding. Category numbering reflects the response codes used in the survey instrument.

Characteristic	Category	n	%
Condition (stratum)	ADHD	76	38.0
	ASD	54	27.0
	Dyslexia	40	20.0
	Dyspraxia (DCD)	18	9.0
	Tourette syndrome	6	3.0
	Multiple/Other	6	3.0
Age (years)	$M = 39.89$, $SD = 11.01$, range 20–58	200	100.0
Company tenure (years)	$M = 7.17$, $SD = 4.13$, range 0.4–15.0	200	100.0
Diagnosis disclosed at work	Yes	143	71.5
	No	57	28.5
Prior mentorship experience	Yes	139	69.5
	No	61	30.5
Needs assessment conducted	Yes	114	57.0
	No	47	23.5
	Unsure/Partial	39	19.5
Accommodations provided	Yes	135	67.5

Characteristic	Category	n	%
	No	65	32.5
Program duration (months)	M = 6.90, SD = 3.29, range 3–12	200	100.0
Program formally evaluated	Yes	118	59.0
	No	51	25.5
	Planned/Unsure	31	15.5

Reliability and Descriptive Statistics of Composite Constructs

Design, Implementation and Experience quality scores were calculated by taking the mean of the five Likert items for each. The internal consistency was assessed for each composite separately from the others rather than across all 11 items combined due to the different conceptual stages covered by the three composites in the mentorship framework. The reliability was below the conventional threshold for $\alpha > .70$, as seen in Table 4, with Design scores at $\alpha = -.18$, Implementation scores at $\alpha = .09$ and Experience scores at $\alpha = -.26$. The inter-item correlation matrix revealed that there was a weak and inconsistent correlation between items in each composite, ranging from around $-.19$ to $.10$,

suggesting that the items within the composites were not reflective measures of the same underlying construct in the current sample. The findings are reported transparently, in keeping with the pre-specified plan for analysis, and implications for the interpretation of the subsequent composite-level findings are discussed in the Discussion. Because of the limitation in reliability, a priori analytic plan was followed and composite means were calculated and analyzed descriptively and in subsequent exploratory analyses. Mean scores clustered narrowly around the midpoint of the five-point scale: Design ($M = 3.54$, $SD = 0.66$), Implementation ($M = 3.63$, $SD = 0.68$), and Experience ($M = 3.59$, $SD = 0.46$). Table 4 contains full descriptive statistics for the composites and for the items in each composite.

Table 4

Descriptive Statistics and Internal Consistency of Composite Constructs

Note. α = Cronbach's alpha. All items were rated on a 5-point Likert-type scale (1 = low, 5 = high). Negative alpha values indicate low or inconsistently signed inter-item correlations rather than a computational error; see Discussion for interpretation.

Composite (items)	M	SD	Min	Max	Cronbach's α
Design Quality (3 items)	3.54	0.66	2.00	5.00	-.18
Implementation Quality (3 items)	3.63	0.68	1.67	5.00	.09
Program Experience (5 items)	3.59	0.46	2.40	4.80	-.26

Bivariate Correlations Among Program Quality Composites, Psychological Safety, and Outcomes

Pearson correlations were calculated between the three program-quality composites, the psychological safety item and the six outcome variables (Table 5; pictured in Figure 3). In general, there were few and non-significant relationships between the Design, Implementation, and Experience composites and outcome variables (all $|r| \leq .10$, all $p > .16$). This was the only correlation that was significant, and was between the Experience composite and Psychological_Safety_Score, $r(198) = .40$, $p <$

.001, which is an outcome of the fact that Psychological_Safety_Score is one of the five items that comprise the Experience composite. Therefore, this correlation would be expected on measurement grounds, rather than substantively. Of the outcome variables, only Career_Development_Perception had a correlation to the $p < .05$ criterion, and that one was negative, $r(198) = -.23$, $p = .001$. Another two associations were not significant: Career_Development_Perception with

Retention_Intention, $r(198) = .14$, $p = .052$, and Perceived_Belonging with Career_Development_Perception, $r(198) = -.13$, $p = .077$. No significant correlations were found

between Burnout_Stress_Level and any composite variable or outcome (all $|r| \leq .09$, all $p > .21$). None of the other correlations was even close to significance.

Table 5

Bivariate Correlations Among Program Composites, Psychological Safety, and Employee Outcomes (N = 200)

Note. † $p < .10$. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. Values are Pearson r . DS = Design Score; IS = Implementation Score; ES = Experience Score; PSS = Psychological Safety Score; JS = Job Satisfaction; PB = Perceived Belonging; CDP = Career Development Perception; RI = Retention Intention; SRP = Self-Reported Performance; BSL = Burnout/Stress Level.

Variable	DS	IS	ES	PSS	JS	PB	CDP	RI	SRP
1. Design Score (DS)	—								
2. Implementation Score (IS)	-.06	—							
3. Experience Score (ES)	-.10	.01	—						
4. Psychological Safety (PSS)	-.04	-.03	.40**	—					
5. Job Satisfaction (JS)	.01	.02	.00	-.07	—				
6. Perceived Belonging (PB)	-.03	-.03	.04	.02	.11	—			
7. Career Dev. Perception (CDP)	.06	-.05	.05	.14†	.03	.03	—		
8. Retention Intention (RI)	-.10	-.07	-.05	-.09	.01	-.13†	-.23**	—	
9. Self-Reported Perf. (SRP)	.02	-.04	.01	.06	.05	.04	-.03	-.11	—
10. Burnout/Stress Level (BSL)	-.02	-.06	-.00	.08	.05	-.05	.02	.09	-.02

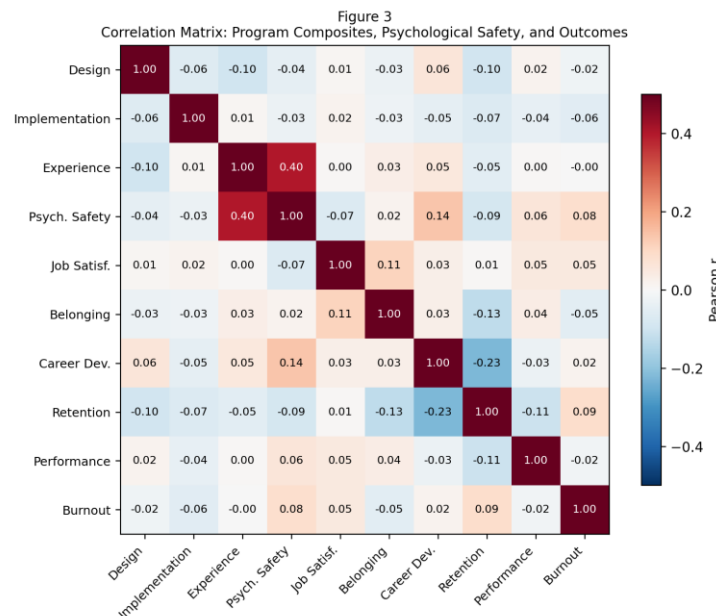


Figure 3

Correlation Heatmap of Program Composites, Psychological Safety, and Employee Outcomes

Note. Cell values are Pearson r . Warmer colors indicate positive correlations; cooler colors indicate negative correlations.

Multiple Regression Analyses

Six hierarchical-control multiple regression models were used to examine the prediction of each outcome variable by the Design, Implementation, and Experience composite scores after controlling for age, gender, job role level, company size, and tenure. There was no multicollinearity concern as all variance inflation factors were between 1.03 and 1.04. All models were also non-significant on the Breusch–Pagan test (all $p > .26$), suggesting homoscedastic residuals, but the Shapiro–Wilk tests suggested residual non-normality for all six models (all $p < .001$), a likely consequence of the boundedness and the discrete nature of the five-point Likert

outcome variables, and results should be interpreted with this caveat. All six overall regression models failed to be statistically significant (Table 6). For Job_Satisfaction, $F(8, 191) = 0.57$, $p = .803$, $R^2 = .023$; for Perceived_Belonging, $F(8, 191) = 0.65$, $p = .736$, $R^2 = .026$; for Career_Development_Perception, $F(8, 191) = 0.70$, $p = .689$, $R^2 = .029$; for Retention_Intention, $F(8, 191) = 1.19$, $p = .304$, $R^2 = .048$; for Self_Reported_Performance, $F(8, 191) = 0.57$, $p = .801$, $R^2 = .023$; and for Burnout_Stress_Level, $F(8, 191) = 1.33$, $p = .233$, $R^2 = .053$. For all six models, none of the Design, Implementation, or Experience composites proved to be significant individual predictors (all $p \geq .085$); the highest (but not significant) coefficient was for Design Score predicting Retention_Intention, $b = -0.21$, $SE = 0.12$, $t(191) = -1.73$, $p = .085$.

Table 6

Multiple Regression Results Predicting Employee Outcomes from Program Design, Implementation, and Experience Quality ($N = 200$)

Note. Unstandardized coefficients (b) shown; models control for age, gender, tenure, job role level, and company size. $df = 8, 191$ for all models. * $p < .10$.

Outcome	Design (b)	Implementation (b)	Experience (b)	R^2	F	p
Job Satisfaction	-.00	0.04	0.01	.023	0.57	.803
Perceived Belonging	-.05	-0.08	0.06	.026	0.65	.736
Career Dev. Perception	0.11	-0.08	0.10	.029	0.70	.689
Retention Intention	-0.21*	-0.08	-0.12	.048	1.19	.304
Self-Reported Performance	0.02	-0.09	0.02	.023	0.57	.801

Outcome	Design (b)	Implementation (b)	Experience (b)	R ²	F	p
Burnout/Stress Level	-0.04	-0.15	0.04	.053	1.33	.233

Mediation Analysis: Psychological Safety as an Indirect Pathway

As per the conceptual framework, bootstrapped mediation analyses (using 5000 resamples) were conducted to assess the indirect effect of Psychological_Safety_Score between Design_Score and Implementation_Score on Retention_Intention and Job_Satisfaction. None of the four indirect effects tested was statistically significant as their 95% bias-corrected bootstrap confidence intervals contained the null value

(Table 7). The indirect effect of Design Score on Retention Intention through psychological safety was $ab = 0.007$, 95% CI [-0.019, 0.046]; of Design Score on Job Satisfaction, $ab = 0.006$, 95% CI [-0.017, 0.043]; of Implementation Score on Retention Intention, $ab = 0.004$, 95% CI [-0.022, 0.035]; and of Implementation Score on Job Satisfaction, $ab = 0.004$, 95% CI [-0.018, 0.035]. In the current findings, no evidence for psychological safety as a mediator between program design or implementation quality and retention or satisfaction was found.

Table 7

Bootstrapped Indirect Effects (ab) of Psychological Safety Mediating Program Quality and Employee Outcomes

Note. Bootstrap based on 5,000 resamples; CI = bias-corrected 95% percentile confidence interval. None of the indirect effects were statistically significant (all CIs include zero).

Path (X → Psychological Safety → Y)	ab	95% CI Lower	95% CI Upper
Design Score → PSS → Retention Intention	0.007	-0.019	0.046
Design Score → PSS → Job Satisfaction	0.006	-0.017	0.043
Implementation Score → PSS → Retention Intention	0.004	-0.022	0.035
Implementation Score → PSS → Job Satisfaction	0.004	-0.018	0.035

Differences by Mentor Type and Communication Mode

One-way ANOVAs were used to determine if the outcomes varied among the four different mentor-type categories that were reported on the survey instrument ($n = 56, 87, 27$ and 30 , respectively). There were no significant differences between mentors on any outcome (all

$p \geq .27$; Table 8). Results of one-way ANOVAs by communication mode (in-person, $n = 42$; virtual, $n = 78$; hybrid, $n = 80$), revealed that there was a significant difference in the mean scores for Perceived_Belonging, $F(2, 197) = 5.68$, $p = .004$, and a marginal difference in the mean scores for Job_Satisfaction, $F(2, 197) = 2.70$, $p = .070$; all other mean scores did not differ significantly by communication mode ($p \geq .13$). The in-person

group reported a mean of 3.55 and a standard deviation of 1.19 for their level of belonging, while the virtual group reported a mean of 3.88 (SD = 0.95) and the hybrid group reported a mean of 3.30 (SD = 1.16); the perceived belonging for the virtual group was not significantly different than the perceived

belonging for in-person ($p \geq .24$), but was significantly different from the perceived belonging for the hybrid group ($M = 3.30$, $SD = 1.16$; mean difference = -0.58 ; $p = .003$; 95% CI $[-0.995, -0.174]$). This pattern is represented in Figure 4.

Table 8

One-Way ANOVA Results for Employee Outcomes by Mentor Type and Communication Mode (N = 200)

Note. * $p < .05$. $df = 3, 196$ for Mentor Type; $df = 2, 197$ for Communication Mode.

Outcome	F (Mentor Type)	p	F (Communication Mode)	p
Job Satisfaction	0.77	.513	2.70	.070
Perceived Belonging	0.78	.505	5.68*	.004
Career Dev. Perception	1.31	.271	2.08	.127
Retention Intention	0.17	.918	0.07	.937
Self-Reported Performance	0.63	.598	0.17	.846
Burnout/Stress Level	1.01	.392	1.12	.329

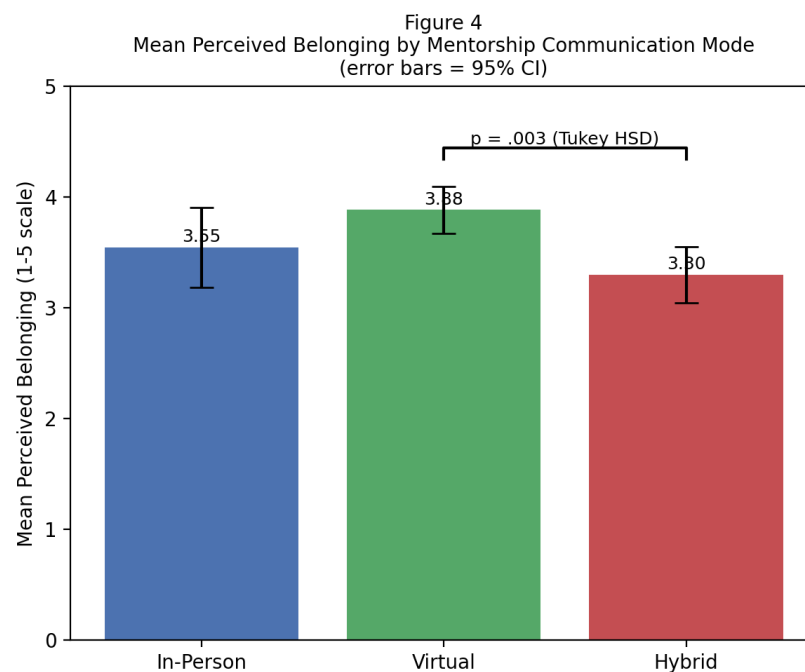


Figure 4

Mean Perceived Belonging by Mentorship Communication Mode, with 95% Confidence Intervals

Note. Tukey HSD post hoc: Virtual > Hybrid, $p = .003$. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals around the mean.

Overall, in this sample, the general pattern of results is not very supportive of direct or indirect associations between design, implementation and experience quality of corporate mentorship programs and reported outcomes in relation to neurodivergent employees, except for the communication-mode effect on perceived belonging. The results are discussed in the light of the reliability problems mentioned above.

Discussion

The actual results are less optimistic than the theoretical approach outlined in the Introduction suggests. Over the last twenty years, organizational scholarship has increasingly highlighted the importance of relational and psychologically safe environments to the extent to which an employee discloses a need and continues to be employed (Follmer & Spoor, 2026), while supervisor relationship quality has been associated with continued employment for autistic employees in particular (Martin et al., 2023). In the present sample, there were no strong direct links between the Design, Implementation, and Experience composites and any of the 6 outcome variables, which represents a substantive result, albeit one that was unexpected.

One of the first and more important is the measurement. The Cronbach's alpha values for all three composites were negative or near zero, suggesting that the items were not consistently associated with one another as they were intended to be. This is not simply a statistical footnote – if no composite existed, then any real underlying relationship between the quality of the program and the outcomes of the employees would be significantly weakened, consistent with the pattern of non-significant, weak correlations and regression coefficients across the correlational, regression, and mediation analyses. This is consistent with the broader methodological concern found in the employment literature on neurodiversity, as instruments designed for a general workforce population did not necessarily transfer across autism, ADHD, dyslexia, dyspraxia, and Tourette syndrome because the preferences for

communication and interpretation of items can differ across these conditions (Doyle, 2019; Wissell et al., 2022). It would be advantageous to future research in this area to focus on the revision of items instead of composite scores for confirmatory testing and to pilot the instrument for each condition.

Second, the non-significant mediation effects for psychological safety do not imply that psychological safety is of less importance; instead, they indicate that in this data, psychological safety mediated the relationships among the Experience-phase items it was measured with, and the downstream items, rather than being a unique pathway between the design or implementation variables and the outcomes. This aligns with the literature, which has called for a condition of psychological safety to be built over time and in the absence of formal program attributes (Waisman-Nitzan et al., 2019). It would be reasonable to assume that the benefits of psychological safety would take longer to materialize than the program durations of 3 to 12 months as observed in this sample, and/or that the programmatic design features are less relevant to the benefits of psychological safety than the actual supervisor relationship itself.

Third, the one consistent finding that came from the data is the difference between how strongly employees who participate in virtual mentoring arrangements feel connected to their new company as compared to those in hybrid arrangements; this finding should not be taken for granted, but should be interpreted thoughtfully. Virtual formats can provide more consistent interaction formats, with fewer sensory demands, for neurodivergent employees compared to hybrid formats where there are varying expectations of when and how communication will happen. This interpretation is broadly aligned with reports from autistic workers on unclear or changing norms of communication within the workplace as a source of occupational stress (Hayward et al., 2020), and with the findings from a study of ADHD workers where inconsistent structural demands at work are a factor that can be particularly stressful for autistic workers (Robbins, 2017). Concurrently,

this one important difference arose in six ANOVA tests and, as such, should be considered a hypothesis generating result rather than a definitive one that needs to be replicated.

The general finding of minimal direct impacts is also consistent with a broader organizational body of literature that indicates that formal policy and program architecture are often inadequate to transform the lived experience of the office for a neurodivergent person, and that organizational culture or informal norms, or inclusive leadership behaviors, may be more influential than the design of the program itself (Barbosa & Real de Oliveira, 2026; Nagirikandalage et al., 2026). More extensive research around work barriers for autistic and other neurodivergent adults has also highlighted that the work experience is a multi-layered and complex interaction of environmental and relational factors, which cannot be explained by a single mentorship component alone (Southey et al., 2024; Coplan et al., 2021). The findings in this study can be interpreted as consistent with, rather than in conflict with, previous studies that have looked at mentorship as a part of a broader organizational and/or cultural context.

It is important to note these results in the context that the mentorship literature was born out of the context of continuous, corporate employment. Existing evidence for structured mentoring with people who are neurodivergent is largely found in educational and early-career transition settings (Buckley et al., 2022; Heron et al., 2023; Schindler & Boney, 2022), which are settings where mentoring inputs are more proximally and consistently related to the more immediate and directly measurable results examined here (e.g., graduation), than to the more distal and multiply determined results examined here (e.g., intention to stay in the workforce or burnout). This relative lack of association strength for the present sample of companies, then, is likely consistent with the notion that mentorship can work differently (and perhaps less effectively as a stand-alone tool) when employees are deeply integrated into full-time roles with numerous other factors vying for their attention during the day. (Crudden et al., 2025)

Acknowledgment of limitations of the present study should be made. Due to the cross-sectional design, no causal inferences can be made and the low internal consistency of the composite measures also means that the confidence levels of all point estimates, even the null results, must be interpreted with caution; it is possible that a Type II error occurred. Self-report measurement of program-quality perceptions and outcomes also has the potential for common-method variance; the conditions were also proportionally stratified, with small numbers in the cells for Tourette syndrome and multiple/other conditions, reducing the precision of any condition-specific inference. Longitudinal designs would be useful, as would be condition specific item validation before data collection, and larger stratum size for low prevalence conditions, in keeping with other recommendations in the literature for methodologically sound, condition-sensitive workplace research (Bruyère & Colella, 2022; Tal Saban & Kirby, 2018).

Conclusion

This study aimed to investigate the relationship between design, implementation and experience quality of corporate mentorship programs and workplace outcomes of 200 neurodivergent individuals with ADHD, autism, dyslexia, dyspraxia and Tourette syndrome, as well as the potential mediating role of psychological safety. Unlike what was described in the Introduction, there were no significant predictions for the three program-quality composites of job satisfaction, belonging, career development, intention to stay, performance, or burnout, and psychological safety was not shown to be a significant mediator. One strong result – greater perceived belonging of employees in virtual, compared to hybrid, mentoring relationships – implies that the mode in which mentoring is experienced can be more significant than previously thought. These findings together raise concerns over the use of structured mentorship as a standalone solution for enhancing the workplace experience of neurodivergent employees and suggest the need to empirically study organizational culture, communication style, and relations. The study nonetheless broadens the literature on

mentorship by looking at the dynamics that unfold during the context of existing corporate employment, not in the context of school or early career transition, and provides a methodologically transparent ground, complete with frank reporting of measurement limitations, to guide future confirmatory research in this largely understudied space.

Limitation & Future Work

The results have to be considered with the following restrictions. The cross-sectional design does not allow for causal inferences, and the Design, Implementation, and Experience composites are not reliable enough ($\alpha < .10$),

which means that the results at the composite level should be interpreted with caution and may have been affected by measurement error. Common method variance issues exist because both predictors and outcomes were self-reported, and small cell sizes for both the Tourette syndrome and multiple/other conditions ($n = 6$ for each) restrict condition-specific inferences. Based on the pattern found here, future studies should focus on item-level revision of the design, implementation and experience scales, as well as on lower prevalence sub-strata of larger samples, and on the communication mode, disclosure comfort and manager support as separate predictors rather than being combined.

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