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HR-Led Co-Design for Neuroinclusion: A Critical Pragmatist and Sociotechnical Systems Approach to Transforming Neuronormative Organisations

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ABSTRACT

Despite growing interest in neurodiversity in the workplace, most organisational responses remain fragmented, compliance-driven, and disconnected from the lived realities of neurodivergent individuals. This paper addresses the limitations of current approaches by proposing a process model of HR-led co-design for neuroinclusion, grounded in a dual-theoretical framework that combines critical pragmatism and sociotechnical systems (STS) theory. Drawing on an abductive synthesis of literature and practice-based insights, we develop a process model that identifies four interrelated organisational challenges: ignorance and lack of buy-in, legal ambiguity, disclosure dilemmas, and resistance to systemic change. The model offers a set of HR-led co-design interventions and outcomes that centre neurodivergent perspectives in redesigning policies, practices, and organisational systems. Critical pragmatism provides the ethical and epistemological foundation for participatory inquiry and institutional transformation, while STS supports the structural integration of inclusive practices. This paper contributes to HRM theory by repositioning HR as a catalyst for collaborative, recursive, and justice-oriented organisational change. Implications for future research and practice include the need for participatory, cross-contextual, and intersectional studies of neuroinclusion, as well as attention to the design and evaluation of HR systems that enable meaningful co-production.

1 | Introduction

Across the globe, neurodivergent individuals, that is, those with cognitive, sensory, or neurological differences such as ADHD, autism, dyslexia, and others, continue to face structural and systemic disadvantages in the workplace despite growing societal awareness of neurodiversity (Doyle and Mcdowall 2023; Singer 1999). Studies based on medical identification suggest that between 15 and 20% of the worldwide population exhibits neurodivergence (Drabble et al. 2023). Beyond the medical frames (Baron-Cohen 2017) of neurodiversity, there are also social, cultural, embodied and legal frames (M. F. Özbilgin et al. 2023) that present a complex demography.

Although neurodiversity is increasingly recognised in educational, medical, and policy domains (Palmer et al. 2019), most organisations remain designed around neuronormativity, the assumption that neurotypical functioning is the default, desirable, and efficient mode of working (Benson 2023; Erbil et al. 2025; Russo et al. 2022). Huijg (2020) presents neuronormativity as a disciplinary logic that shapes organisational expectations around productivity, communication, and interaction in line with neurotypical individuals and their work patterns, rather than as a neutral or descriptive standard. Neuronormative design often renders neurodivergent individuals invisible, misrecognised, or marginalised within workplace systems (Doyle and Mcdowall 2023; Russell and Rothenberg 2024). Most HR

interventions fail to capture and combat neuronormativity (Erbil et al. 2025), focus narrowly on awareness training or disclosure protocols, remain top-down, compliance-oriented, and unable to dismantle the deep-rooted organisational norm of neuronormativity. In short, neuronormativity remains unchallenged and the neurotypical modes of thinking, behaving, and communicating continue to inform organisational design (Benson 2023; Huijg 2020; Russo et al. 2022).

This paper addresses a key theoretical and practical gap: How can HR move from symbolic gestures of neuroinclusion to systemic transformation? While prior studies acknowledge the limitations of conventional inclusion strategies (Russell and Rothenberg 2024), they rarely offer a processual, participatory framework for redesigning organisations around neurodivergent needs and capabilities. We respond to this gap by developing a process model of HR-led co-design for neuroinclusion, which moves beyond legal compliance and individual accommodations to propose a participatory, systems-level approach grounded in critical pragmatism and sociotechnical systems theory (STS). To develop our model, we adopted an abductive approach (Peirce 1934), which enabled us to iteratively move between theoretical insights (Timmermans and Tavory 2012) and organisational realities (Mantere and Ketokivi 2013).

Our contribution is threefold. First, we offer a novel conceptual framework that integrates the ethical imperatives of critical pragmatism (Dewey, 1909/2009) with the structural change logics of sociotechnical systems theory (Pasmore 1988; Emery and Trist 1973). Second, we position co-design as a transformative HR methodology that centres neurodivergent individuals as co-architects of inclusive work systems. Third, we provide an abductively developed process model that outlines the antecedents, interventions, and outcomes of HR-led neuroinclusion efforts. This model is designed to be both theoretically grounded and transformative in diverse organisational contexts. It advances systemic neuroinclusion in organisations. It is not intended as an empirical account of neurodivergent experience, nor a philosophical redefinition of neuroinclusion, but as a theory-informed, systems-level intervention framework.

To respond to these challenges and advance a systematic approach to neuroinclusion, we develop a conceptual framework that draws on three foundational concepts: critical pragmatism, sociotechnical systems theory (STS), and co-design. In the next section, we explain how these concepts inform our process model, offering an ethical, structural, and participatory foundation for HR-led transformation. We then present the model itself, outlining the key organisational challenges, co-design interventions, and anticipated outcomes. Finally, we reflect on the implications of our model for HRM theory and practice, and propose directions for future research.

1.1 | Foundational Concepts

This paper draws on three foundational concepts namely critical pragmatism, STS, and co-design as its overarching philosophical and ethical orientation, guiding how we frame problems of exclusion and possibilities for HR-lef institutional transformation towards neuroinclusion. First, critical pragmatism (Dewey, 1909/2009) is an emancipatory approach that offers theoretical development on social problems that need framing for policy development and translation of those theoretical ideas into practical action. In line with critical pragmatism, the concepts of emancipation and change agency have been extensively discussed in the management literature (Alvesson and Willmott 1992; Groutsis et al. 2020; Nentwich et al. 2015). This paper uses critical pragmatism as a theoretical and philosophical approach to address the antecedents, interventions and outcomes of HR-led co-design of neuroinclusion at work. As an emancipatory approach, critical pragmatism combines the practical orientation of pragmatism with a focus on challenging structural inequalities, misrecognition, and systems of oppression. It emphasises participatory problem-solving and the co-creation of inclusive institutional arrangements that reflect the needs and experiences of marginalised groups. Critical pragmatism and the advocacy for social justice are closely aligned (Morgan 2014) and transformation emerges through collaborative redefinition of institutional norms and systems.

Critical pragmatists realise that emancipation is necessary to gain recognition and a form of resistance from oppressive and often discriminatory systems and structures. Honneth (1996) views emancipation as a means to fight against deteriorating institutions and social injustice in the quest for self-recognition. The demand for recognition of neurodiversity in neuronormative organisations is thus pivotal for living a fulfiled and autonomous life. Recognition from a critical pragmatic sense is 'the measure in virtue of which rights are achieved and institutionalised' (Midtgarden 2012, 510). Emancipation describes the process through which individuals and groups become freed from repressive social and ideological conditions, particularly those that place socially unnecessary restrictions upon developing and articulating human consciousness. Critical pragmatism provides a helpful theoretical lens through which we can explore the emancipatory redesign of organisations in ways that prioritise neuroinclusion. Emancipation here serves as a force of liberation from misrecognition, in both the societal and workplace context, enabling (neurodivergent) individuals in neuronormative organisations to attain self-realisation and feel valued and recognised (Honneth 2010). Following the principles of critical pragmatism, initiating the transformation of neuronormative organisations into neuroinclusive ones hinges on the recognition of neurodivergent individuals at the societal and institutional levels.

Second, we propose co-design as a critical pragmatist, that is, participative and emancipatory, strategy for redesigning organisations to support neuroinclusion in a way that empowers neurodivergent individuals to redesign organisations (M. F. Özbilgin 2024). Historically, co-design has emerged from various traditions, including community, socio-technical, co-creative, and social design, each shaped by differing actors, contexts, and goals (Zamenopoulos and Alexiou 2018) to inculcate pragmatic solutions to problems of exclusion, discrimination and disadvantage when the current design only caters to a narrow minority interest (Hewett and Shantz 2021; M. F. Özbilgin et al. 2024; M. F. Özbilgin et al. 2025). It is widely used across applied disciplines to

involve users in shaping services, systems, or organisations (M. F. Özbilgin et al. 2024). Defined as a collaborative process where individuals with diverse agendas and expertise work together to address shared concerns and envision better futures, co-design is increasingly recognised as a pragmatic and inclusive approach (Hewett and Shantz 2021; M. F. Özbilgin et al. 2025). In HRM, it offers an emancipatory pathway for interventions that include marginalised voices in shaping organisational change (Hewett and Shantz 2021).

There are calls for co-design in academic research practices (Bansal and Sharma 2022; Sharma and Bansal 2020; M. F. Özbilgin and Erbil 2025). In these papers, we question whether scholars address the big questions, grand challenges and societal problems (Biggart 2016) facing contemporary organisations and society together with key stakeholders and marginalised communities. Gümüsay and Reinecke (2021) further suggest that academics and professionals should co-create methodological and theoretical toolkits for inclusion. In this paper, we suggest co-design as an emancipatory application of critical pragmatism fosters a comprehensive understanding of neurodiversity, transitioning from surface-level accommodations to deeper-level critical reflections through participatory engagement.

Third, the sociotechnical systems (STS) theory (Pasmore 1988; Emery and Trist 1973) is an organisational theory that advocates for the joint optimisation of both technical systems (e.g., tools, processes, structures) and social systems (e.g., people, culture, relationships) to achieve effectiveness and well-being at work. Complementing this, STS provides a systems-level design lens for conceptualising HR-led co-design as a structural intervention to reshape organisational forms, processes, and technologies.

This dual framework of critical pragmatism and SRS allows us to conceptualise neuroinclusion not as a set of discrete adjustments, but as a participatory redesign of organisational systems and structures. Through this lens, we argue that meaningful neuroinclusion could be possible by co-creating work environments that value divergent ways of thinking and being, while simultaneously addressing the technical, social, and institutional configurations that inhibit such inclusion. To clarify the conceptual foundations of our model, Table 1 summarises key constructs, co-design, critical pragmatism, and STS, alongside their definitions and relevance to our framework.

1.2 | Developing a Process Model of HR-Led Co-Design for Systemic Neuroinclusion

AI-led HRM interventions have a history fraught with biases and discriminatory practices when it comes to serving minorities and minoritised people (Bircan and Özbilgin 2025; M. F. Özbilgin, Erbil, Demirbağ, et al. 2025; Vassilopoulou et al. 2024). HR-led neuroinclusion remains under-theorised and top-down, and limited in capturing the bottom-up process of involving neurodivergent individuals in the design of the terms of their inclusion (Russell and Rothenberg 2024). The theoretical expansion that we offer addresses this gap and presents HR-led interventions for neuroinclusion involving a co-design that addresses the challenges of managing neurodiversity in organisations. Critical pragmatism informs how we analyse the antecedent challenges, by treating them not as fixed categories, but as dynamic tensions that require collective reflection, and how we propose solutions through co-designed HR interventions.

Our process model of HR-led co-design for neuroinclusion iteratively links insights from empirical patterns, practitioner dilemmas, and theoretical frameworks. The four antecedent challenges namely (i) legal ambiguity, (ii) stakeholder ignorance, (iii) disclosure dilemmas, and (iv) resistance to change, were inferred from converging evidence in HRM, neurodiversity, and inclusion literature (Austin and Pisano 2017; Baker et al. 2020; Doyle 2020; Erbil et al. 2025; Hennekam et al. 2023; M. F. Özbilgin 2024). From these challenges, we abductively derived four HR-led co-design interventions, drawing on inclusive design theory and participatory HR practice (Hewett and Shantz 2021; Vincent et al. 2024; Zamenopoulos and Alexiou 2018), to address both structural and cultural aspects of exclusion. The four predicted outcomes of recognition, realisation of potential, engagement, and reduced barriers, are not assumed outputs but plausible consequences inferred from critical gaps in current practice and supported by research on inclusive climates and employee voice (Ali et al. 2024; Bell et al. 2011; Morillas 2023; Nishii 2013). This abductive process ensures that the model is both theoretically grounded and practically responsive to the complex realities of neuroinclusion in contemporary organisations. This approach enabled us to identify recurring tensions within the literature and practice, and to construct a model that is both grounded in existing knowledge and responsive to transformative challenges. To

TABLE 1 | Foundational concepts and their role in the process model of HR-led co-design.

Term	Definition	Function within the process model
Co-design	A collaborative methodology that involves diverse stakeholders, including neurodivergent individuals, in shaping inclusive HR-led interventions.	Operates as the participatory mechanism through which HR facilitates inclusive diagnosis, design, and delivery.
Critical pragmatism	A justice-oriented framework that engages diverse stakeholders in identifying and addressing structural barriers to neuroinclusion through participatory HR-led practices.	Frames the ethical and epistemological foundation of the model, guiding its transformative orientation.
Sociotechnical systems (STS) theory	A systems-based approach advocating the joint optimisation of social and technical elements within HR-led co-design.	Informs the multilevel structure of the framework by linking technical configurations with inclusive practices.

provide further clarity, these outcomes can also be considered across the employee life cycle, from recruitment and onboarding through development, performance management, and retention, providing a structuring lens. This approach would allow the HR to explore unique challenges and accommodations specific to the phases of the employee life cycle (Doyle and McDowall 2022).

The process model of HR-led co-design for neuroinclusion offers a practical and systems-oriented framework for recognising and addressing the entrenched barriers that neurodivergent individuals face in organisational life. Our model articulates a dynamic loop that connects four core challenges to corresponding HR-led co-design interventions and anticipates specific organisational outcomes. It is grounded in Dewey's (1909/2009) logic of problem-driven inquiry, where organisational transformation begins with the recognition of persistent tensions or breakdowns in practice, followed by participatory reflection and collaborative design, culminating in contextually relevant action. Crucially, the model includes a feedback mechanism: the outcomes of each intervention inform how organisations perceive, respond to, and refine their engagement with future challenges, forming a continuous learning loop (see Figure 1).

To operationalise the process model, HR professionals and managers can identify the challenges obstructing neuroinclusion through observable organisational dynamics, including employee feedback, stalled diversity efforts, and uncertainty in applying legal frameworks to neurodivergent conditions (Ezerins et al. 2023; Erbil et al. 2025). Ignorance and lack of buy-in may be reflected in managerial scepticism or the absence of strategic commitment. At the same time, legal ambiguity often emerges when accommodation frameworks fail to account for episodic, invisible, or self-diagnosed conditions. Disclosure dilemmas become apparent when neurodivergent employees hesitate to request support, withdraw from recruitment processes, or avoid revealing their needs due to fear of stigma. Resistance to change manifests in rhetorical commitments to inclusion not backed by resources, accountability, or leadership engagement. In response to these challenges, we propose a set of HR-led co-design interventions developed collaboratively with neurodivergent stakeholders: shared inquiry and awareness-building to address ignorance; inclusive policy development to clarify legal interpretation; relational, trust-based support pathways to navigate disclosure; and embedded feedback mechanisms to counter resistance. Outcomes of these interventions can be assessed through qualitative and quantitative metrics, such as increased voluntary disclosure, higher engagement and retention, and more inclusive climate scores, and are treated as iterative inputs into future cycles of organisational learning. Each loop of the model, from challenge to intervention to outcome, offers HR practitioners a structured yet flexible pathway for transforming neuroinclusion. Rather than viewing outcomes as fixed endpoints, the model conceptualises each as part of a recursive learning process that adapts to organisational context, maturity, and evolving inclusion challenges.

Below we delve into aspects of the HR-led codesign model and explain the four challenges, a set of HR-led interventions, and concomitant outcomes.

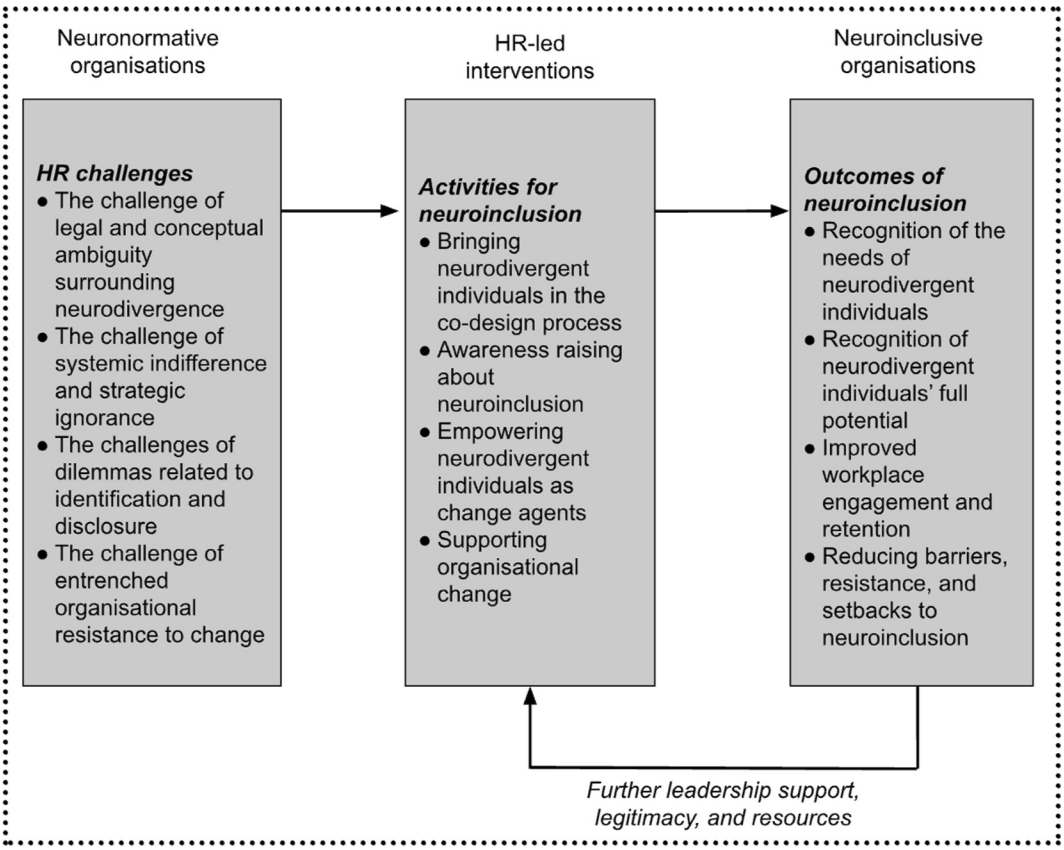

FIGURE 1 | The process model of HR-led co-design for neuroinclusion in organisations: antecedents, interventions and outcomes.

1.3 | Four Challenges in Neuronormative Organisations That Foreground HR-Led Neuroinclusion

Drawing on recent integrative reviews (e.g., Ezerins et al. 2024), empirical studies (Doyle and Mcdowall 2023; Erbil et al. 2025), and applied legal commentary (Baker et al. 2020), we identified recurring organisational dilemmas related to neuroinclusion. These challenges are not proposed as exhaustive but as conceptually significant entry points that reflect common breakdowns in current neurodiversity strategies. Foregrounding the process of neuroinclusion in organisations requires an understanding of the key challenges facing the emergence of neuroinclusion in organisations. This section explores four fundamental challenges that face the emergence of neuroinclusion in organisations.

First, the ambiguity surrounding neurodivergence presents a foundational challenge. Although legal frameworks such as the United Nations (UN) (2006). the Equality Act (UK), and the ADA (US) offer some protection for individuals with diagnosed conditions; they often fall short of capturing the lived realities and diverse identities of neurodivergent individuals, especially those without formal diagnosis or who reject pathologising labels (Baker et al. 2020; Baron-Cohen 2019). Rather than an outright legal failure, the issue lies in the disconnect between evolving case law and the capacity of HR professionals to interpret and apply it meaningfully (Andreassen et al. 2024; Moeller 2025). This ambiguity leads to uneven implementation and a default to minimal compliance, hindering the proactive development of inclusive organisational practices (McMahon et al. 2022; M. F. Özbilgin et al. 2023).

Second, a pervasive lack of awareness and stakeholder buy-in obstructs systemic change. Drawing from the sociology of ignorance (McGoey 2012), we differentiate between unknowing and the active disregard of neurodivergent realities. Indifference, as Ezerins et al. (2024) and Erbil et al. (2025) demonstrate, often manifests as managerial scepticism or passive resistance to inclusion efforts. Neuronormative assumptions can be so deeply embedded that both dominant and marginalised actors internalise and reproduce them (Hennekam et al. 2023; Kryger 2023). Without leadership engagement and accountability structures, even well-meaning initiatives remain isolated or symbolic (Johnson and Joshi 2016; Saltes 2022).

Third, the dilemma of identification and disclosure remains a persistent barrier to neuroinclusion. Many neurodivergent employees avoid disclosure due to stigma, fear of career disadvantage, or lack of formal diagnosis (Doyle et al. 2022; Drabble et al. 2023). Building on Goffman's (1963/2009) concept of passing and revealing, research has shown how neurodivergent individuals engage in strategic identity management to conform to expected professional norms (Santuzzi and Keating 2022; M. F. Özbilgin et al. 2023). Disclosure is further complicated for individuals at the intersection of neurodivergence and other marginalised identities, such as gender or ethnicity, where compounded stigma often results in deeper concealment (Barnett 2024).

Fourth, entrenched forms of resistance to change within organisational structures reinforces neuronormativity. Efforts towards neuroinclusion often encounter backlash from sceptical leadership, conservative policy framings, or cultural norms that privilege the status quo (Foss and Klein 2023; McDowall et al. 2023). HRinitiatives may be dismissed as woke or viewed as burdensome, particularly when not clearly tied to business strategy or performance outcomes (Khan et al. 2023; Vassilopoulou et al. 2016). As Dobbin and Kalev (2016) warn, interventions lacking integration into leadership and HR systems tend to fail. The challenge is therefore not only cultural but also structural, calling for sustained leadership engagement and institutional redesign (Russell and Rothenberg 2024).

2 | HR-Led Co-Design Interventions for Systemic Change Towards Neuroinclusion: Integrating Sociotechnical Systems Theory

While critical pragmatism underpins our philosophical approach to institutional transformation, we operationalise our intervention strategy through STS (Pasmore 1988; Emery and Trist 1973) emphasises the joint optimisation of social and technical systems, making it a useful design framework for implementing HR-led co-design interventions that are both inclusive and structurally embedded. In this sense, STS provides the organisational design scaffolding for the practical application of critical pragmatism. Our HR-led co-design interventions are structured to integrate neurodivergent knowledge into both the social dynamics (e.g., culture, leadership, interaction norms) and technical systems (e.g., policy, technology, workspace) of organisations.

2.1 | Bringing Neurodivergent Individuals in the Co-Design Process

The effectiveness of co-design has been well established in domains such as healthcare, education, and service design, where it has been shown to improve system responsiveness, equity, and user satisfaction (Bate and Robert 2023; Zamenopoulos and Alexiou 2018). In healthcare, for example, co-design has led to measurable improvements in service quality, particularly in designing for complex, marginalised, or stigmatised user groups (Palmer et al. 2019). These successes demonstrate the potential for co-design to generate structural rather than merely symbolic change, making it an attractive intervention model for HRM contexts grappling with neurodiversity. By contrast, traditional organisational practices such as Employee Resource Groups (ERGs), while important for peer support and visibility, have not yielded widespread improvements in neurodivergent employment outcomes (Hennekam and Follmer 2024). Scholars such as Colella and Bruyère (2011), Silver et al. (2023), and Patton (2019) argue that while disclosure may increase, this does not necessarily lead to substantive organisational redesign or reduce stigma. Co-design offers a way forward by embedding neurodivergent individuals as participants in symbolic representation (as in ERGs) andco-architects of organisational

systems, policies, and environments (M. F. Özbilgin 2024). It therefore addresses a critical gap between participation and transformation, one that ERGs alone have struggled to bridge. Drawing on evidence from adjacent disciplines, we argue that HR-led co-design has the potential to translate lived experience into lasting institutional change.

Despite the growing awareness of neurodiversity on a public level, the hidden potential of co-design has not been fully utilised as a crucial tool to incorporate individuals with neurodiversity into organisational life and integrate them into the success of these organisations. While stakeholder participation has been employed in certain diversity domains, such as gender equality (Iivari et al. 2023), there has been an insufficient emphasis on its impact on other forms of diversity, particularly neurodiversity. Bringing neurodivergent individuals into the co-design process could help the HR-led co-design activities to have bottom-up legitimacy and wider buy-in from end-users and neurodivergent stakeholders. In their paper D. M. Rousseau and ten Have (2022) suggest that incorporating stakeholders in the process of management of change is fundamental to the success of any change intervention. In line with this, HR-led co-design interventions should bring neurodivergent individuals to the same table as other stakeholders that shape organisational design and redesign efforts.

In co-design, multiple parties, such as researchers and managers, come together to study a problem of common interest and develop solutions (Sharma and Bansal 2020). Lüscher and Lewis (2008) describe that co-design or the collaborative process can be used to work together through paradoxes of belonging and learning, and others argue that the future of organisations depends on the co-creation of knowledge with managers. Through co-design, the communities of research and practice produce rigorous and relevant knowledge and study more closely aligned with managers' interests and open new creative pathways to managerial action (Bansal and Sharma 2022). Neurodiversity initiatives represent an emerging global trend in management, as noted by Austin and Pisano (2017). However, critical scholarship warns that these initiatives are very limited in number and scope (Bernick 2023; Silver et al. 2023). Despite the existence of a few initiatives within the technology industry, which has the resources and infrastructure to address reasonable adjustments for neuroinclusion through technology, the role of technology in supporting workforce neurodiversity remains largely unexplored (Walkowiak 2023). The field of HR is witnessing a transformative shift with the increasing role of artificial intelligence (AI) in assisting decision-making related to employee relations and workforce management (Malik et al., 2023). Digital transformation has opened up new avenues for enhancing neuroinclusion. Walkowiak (2021) highlights the contribution of assistive technologies as a significant source for creating productivity complementarities with the skills of neurodivergent individuals. Such technological developments enable the inclusion of neurodivergent individuals through co-design to be fit for purpose. The participation of neurodivergent individuals in HR-led co-design processes is indispensable for understanding their unique needs to design algorithm-based processes and measuring the effectiveness of these applications. The creation of algorithm-driven HRM models requires a collaborative network that leverages a co-design approach, engaging key stakeholders, including neurodivergent individuals.

2.2 | Awareness Raising About Neuroinclusion

Tackling resistance to neuroinclusion demands a comprehensive strategy that prioritises awareness-raising across structural, cultural, and interpersonal domains (Moore et al. 2017). This focus on awareness unveils how resistance manifests, from subtle indifference to overt opposition against neuroinclusive practices. By heightening consciousness of structural impediments, such as inflexible organisational policies, we expose their failure to accommodate the unique needs of neurodivergent individuals (Khan et al. 2023). Amplifying awareness of cultural factors reveals biases favouring neuronormativity. At the interpersonal level, fostering greater understanding among colleagues strengthens support and provides legitimacy for neuroinclusion (Annabi and Locke 2019). Integrating these insights into HR-led interventions for neuroinclusion may bridge the gap between awareness and action. However, we also suggest caution about the tendency of organisations to overemphasise awareness and underplay the need for structural and cultural change as Dobbin and Kalev (2016) highlight as a significant reason why many diversity and inclusion interventions fail.

Awareness-raising activities in HR-led interventions with co-design take the form of information gathering from stakeholders to understand the current status, and particular needs of neurodivergent individuals to reach their full potential. While Richards et al. (2019) highlight important individual-level challenges, such as the emotional labour involved in managing neurodiversity, we place greater emphasis on how organisational systems can be designed to respond to these needs. When paired with evidence-based HR insights, such information can inform the design of neuroinclusion strategies that embed cascaded responsibility, from macro-organisational structures to meso-group processes and micro-level behavioural norms. Vincent et al. (2024) warn that HR-led interventions for diversity and inclusion should go beyond responsibilising individuals for their own inclusion and hold groups, organisations and other institutional actors accountable for inclusion in a cascaded way. Shared understanding among stakeholders about chains of responsibility for inclusion, fostered through co-design offers the potential to address some of the barriers suggested in the HR literature on managing neurodiversity, including co-worker reactions and claims of reverse discrimination (Khan et al. 2023). HR-led transformation through co-design secures buy-in with its bottom up process and secures awareness raising without polarising stakeholder opinions that top-down initiatives often encounter. To further ensure the model's organisational relevance, we integrate insights from Doyle and McDowall's (2022) biopsychosocial model, which outlines how neuroinclusion can be aligned with organisational processes such as recruitment, onboarding, and performance management. Their structured roadmap demonstrates how centring neurodivergent needs can be made actionable through HR practices that also support managerial clarity and operational goals. This connection

strengthens our model's potential for practical implementation and bridges the gap between individual experiences and systemic organisational design.

2.3 | Empowering Neurodivergent Individuals as Change Agents

In examining neurodiversity, it emerges as imperative to acknowledge the vulnerability experienced by neurodivergent individuals who are associated with historically marginalised groups, such as women, LGBTQ + individuals, and people of colour (Doyle et al. 2022). The strategic application of co-design methodologies addresses such vulnerabilities by shifting the epicentre of power away from administrative hierarchies towards a model of egalitarian, participatory engagement (M. F. Özbilgin 2024). Co-design champions pluralistic inclusion, articulating intersectionality within organisational practices (M. F. Özbilgin and Erbil 2024). Intersectionality is the framework that explores the interconnectedness of race, gender, class, and other identities, determining how they collectively influence individual experiences of oppression and privilege (Crenshaw 1991). Co-design ensures the integration of diverse experiences and needs of all stakeholders, particularly emphasising individuals from marginalised demographic groups with atypical backgrounds (Vacca 2022).

Adopting co-design helps dismantle neuronormative ideologies by embracing intersectionality, thereby fostering an inclusive organisational setting for neurodivergent individuals (Erbil et al. 2025). Fundamental to the co-design is the emancipatory turn through which neurodivergent individuals become agents of change having key roles in organisational redesign, through empowered co-design. This may take the form of representation of not only internal neurodivergent individuals but also the mobilisation of external knowledge from learnt organisations and actors. To extend the notion of co-design, M. F. Özbilgin (2024) proposes co-ownership, which entails the involvement of individuals from diverse categories in decision-making processes, as a result of which they co-own the ultimate design. Co-ownership emphasises the integration of diverse community needs in training initiatives and the comprehensive design of systems and institutional structures and their ongoing ownership and involvement beyond the design phase. By integrating neurodivergent individuals into the decision-making and operational frameworks, the concept of co-ownership empowers them to exert a significant influence on organisational dynamics.

Co-design lays the foundation for a leadership style that enables neurodivergent individuals to manifest their authentic selves within organisations. Ayaz et al. (2024) underscore the predominance of typical leaders from dominant backgrounds who view diversity as challenging in normative organisations. The inclusive transformation of organisations enables the emergence of atypical leaders who may support neurodivergent individuals' potential and values. The intentional adoption of intersectionality into the organisational narrative underscores the role of co-design in fostering neuroinclusive organisations, establishing it as a critical strategic framework for creating authentically inclusive spaces for the diverse spectrum of experiences of individuals from atypical backgrounds.

HR-led co-design for neuroinclusion faces backlash as it rebalances and negotiates power and resources among workers. Co-design should address such backlash and resistance to make sure what Nash (2024) highlights as daily negotiations and accommodations happen. The office environment thus becomes a negotiated space where neurodiverse employees do not struggle to have their needs met, often leading to feelings of engagement, belonging and inclusion. In particular, neurotypical individuals could be empowered as allies (M. F. Özbilgin and Erbil 2024) to support the inclusion of neurodiverse individuals, and to combat social pressures arising from the shared space. Open communication about the challenges and pressures of shared workspaces can benefit neurodiverse individuals by making it easier for them to articulate how these environments may be redesigned to enable their inclusion (Nash 2024).

2.4 | Supporting Organisational Change and Development Through Co-Design

Co-design helps organisations to develop innovative and inclusive solutions through various stakeholders' involvements, in particular the voice of stakeholders who are affected by the processes but were not involved in the process design (Hewett and Shantz 2021). Voice mechanisms are essential tools for reforming organisations, while silence harms possibilities of reform and entrenches the status quo (Bell et al. 2011; Erbil 2025; Erbil and Özbilgin 2024; Camgoz et al. 2023). Pragmatically, co-design has great potential to translate theoretical knowledge into practical action.

Allyship has emerged as a critical strategic approach for organisational change, focussing specifically on neuroinclusion. Allyship represents a process where individuals possessing privilege, authority, and power actively champion and support the calls for equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) articulated by marginalised or disadvantaged groups (M. F. Özbilgin 2022). Allyship facilitates equal opportunities and the development of inclusive environments for neurodivergent individuals within organisational settings. Leaders demonstrate allyship through a range of definitive actions aimed at improving the experiences of neurodiverse employees and furthering the essential goals of neuroinclusion. These actions include formulating and enacting policies tailored to meet the distinct needs of neurodiverse individuals, engaging in the fight against discriminatory practices, and initiating activities to raise awareness that challenges entrenched misconceptions and biases. For neuroinclusive transformation within organisations, allyship may help to transcend the limitations of a traditional, unidirectional, top-down strategy. Leaders can adopt a reciprocal learning stance, remaining open to the insights and perspectives acquired from those they ally with. Through this approach, allyship equips organisations to discern and respond to needs and rights often overlooked within the established neuronormative contexts.

Jonsen and Özbilgin (2013) explain that HR-led transformation has a process of maturity. Organisations which are starting the process of HR-led transformation towards inclusion need to focus on awareness raising, information gathering and giving practices, training and education activities which at a later stage should be supplemented by transformation of HR systems and structures with relevant accommodation, flexibility and technological support mechanisms. Authors argue that deeper-level inclusion requires maturity, legitimacy, internal and external leadership support and adequate resourcing. Therefore, the ultimate goal of organisational change and development for neuroinclusion will require time, investment and maturity for organisations and could flourish if the earlier interventions successfully prepare the organisation for a change and development of its culture, structures and routines to become neuroinclusive.

3 | Outcomes of HR-Led Co-Design for Neuroinclusion in Organisations

In this process model, similar to other models (e.g., Nishii and Özbilgin 2007), there are predicted positive outcomes of neuroinclusion. We predict four different positive outcomes based on previous research. First, research suggests that organisations which focus on neuroinclusion recognise the particular needs of neurodivergent individuals for neuroinclusion and that they can freely bring their identities to work (Nishii 2013). The recognition and accommodation of neurodiversity is pivotal to the individual as their neurodivergence has most likely been organisationally supported in school contexts. The recognition of the supportive organisation can be multifaceted. For example, recognition can occur by carefully identifying individuals strengths and contributions to the organisations. This identification can lead to the neuroinclusive job design to make better fit with neurodivergent employees' potential. These job design practices can include but are not limited to idiosyncratic work timings, workload, spaces and development (D. Rousseau 2015). In order to identify how and when neurodiverse employees work best, organisation leaders may engage in active conversations to identify their workers' needs (Patton 2019) to translate these into design and to accrue positive outcomes such as heightened recognition of neuroinclusion.

Second, HR-led co-design makes it possible for organisations to recognise the full potential of neurodivergent individuals throughout the recruitment process (Erickson et al. 2014). Here organisations can focus on assessing the neurodivergent individuals' potential and capabilities rather than conducting formalised interviews. HR-led co design can happen through the training and development process (Krzeminska et al. 2019) In the onboarding process, sufficient time and breaks need to be provided to assist employees to acclimatise to the new work environment. In addition, trainers who are specialised and accustomed to neurodiversity shall lead onboarding and other core training and development sessions.

In line with Weber et al. (2024), we contend that interventions to secure neuroinclusion benefit all employees. Organisations can transform to a more neuroinclusive and supportive environment by designing their systems that focus on errors to foster learning and growth and skills (Kluger and Nir 2010). Rather than using feedback as a disciplinary mechanism, the organisation values neurological differences as integral components of human diversity, recognising them as assets rather than deficits that need correction (Seitz and Choo 2022). Misrecognition (Bourdieu, 1997/2000), that is devaluation of the human capital of a marginalised group by the dominant group or normative systems, is a process which neurodivergent individuals experience in their engagement with organisations. HR-led co-design offers to recognise, reveal and mobilise the full potential of neurodivergent individuals and other marginalised groups, providing a better place to work for all, involving active participation and engagement of employees to shape the term of their own inclusion (Morillas 2023). Adjustments such as managing light and noise or providing decompression spaces not only support neurodivergent workers but also make workplaces more human-centred for employees experiencing health conditions, fatigue, or life pressures (Weber et al. 2024).

Third, HR-led co-design of inclusion activities improves workplace engagement and retention. Neurodivergent individuals show heightened organisational commitment, improved motivation, and participation in decision-making (Ali et al. 2024). HR-led interventions for neuroinclusion result in higher retention rates by reducing turnover and lowering absenteeism. According to Khan et al. (2023), this is largely due to the enhanced sense of belonging that neurodivergent individuals experience in neuroinclusive workplaces. Furthermore, Hennekam and Follmer's (2024) study shows that HR-led inclusive interventions increase neurodivergent individuals' job satisfaction and ensure a stronger identification with their organisation. Additionally, these interventions contribute to a more positive organisational culture, fostering mutual respect and understanding among all employees (Gümüsay and Reinecke 2021).

In addition, HR-led interventions may lead to identity and community building as well as employees recognising their neurodivergent identities. With this organisations encourage individuals to bring their full selves to work (Nishii 2013) and be celebrated for their unique identities. Through HR practices some organisations already may engage in such efforts such as by celebrating and increasing awareness of individual identities and engaging the workforce in community building or sports events. These practices can be extended to include intersectional identities of the neurodiverse workforce to increase their sense of belonging and acceptance within the organisation. Simultaneously such practices may reduce discrimination and stigma (Santuzzi and Keating 2022).

HR-led co-design for neuroinclusion reduces barriers, resistance, and setbacks to neuroinclusion. While some scholars extensively discuss the obstacles and barriers within the workplace (Kulkarni and Lengnick-Hall 2014), we argue that HR-led co-design may mitigate these obstacles and barriers. Involving neurodivergent individuals in the co-design process fosters a sense of ownership and empowerment (M. F. Özbilgin 2024), leading to greater acceptance and engagement with the initiatives. Co-design enhances the efficacy of neuroinclusion programs and also mitigates resistance and setbacks within the organisation (Annabi and Locke 2019). By cultivating a culture

of continuous improvement and adaptability, HR-led co-design is instrumental in promoting a more inclusive workplace. These initiatives lead to better outcomes for both neurodivergent individuals and the organisation, fostering a sense of authenticity, reducing barriers and overcoming challenges associated with neuroinclusion (Fotheringham et al. 2023).

HR-led co-design also promotes the dissemination of a collaborative culture within the organisation, leading to positive ripple effects in team dynamics, innovative problem-solving, and overall performance. By engaging in co-design, neurodivergent and neurotypical individuals may synergise their complementary skills, fostering an environment where diverse perspectives are not only valued but leveraged for collective success. Such a collaborative culture, initiated through co-design, thus enhances team cohesion and drives the organisation towards more innovative and effective outcomes (Klinksiek et al. 2023). Additionally, individually identifying employee strengths provides insight into neurodiversity for leaders and stakeholders that can help them accrue organisational and team-level benefits of design fit for purpose. Furthermore, this understanding can lead to increased respect, dignity, and recognition of the value of individuals who are deemed neurodivergent (Seitz and Choo 2022). In addition, the HR-led co-design for neuroinclusion may lead to the increased hiring of neurodiverse employees, eliminate tokenism, and combat backlash against neurodivergent employees (Volpone et al. 2022).

4 | Conclusions

This paper offers a theoretical intervention into the field of HRM by proposing a process model of HR-led co-design for neuroinclusion. In response to persistent critiques of neuronormativity, the privileging of neurotypical modes of working and being within organisational systems (Huijg 2020), we argue that inclusion efforts need to move beyond preformative or compliance-based responses. Our contribution lies in developing a dual-theoretical framework that integrates critical pragmatism (Forester 2013) with sociotechnical systems theory (Pasmore 1988; Emery and Trist 1973) to conceptualise neuroinclusion as a participatory and systemic organisational process.

We extend HRM theory in two ways. First, by introducing critical pragmatism as an ethical and participatory approach to institutional inquiry, we position HR not only as a functional actor but also as a reflexive agent capable of disrupting exclusionary norms. Pragmatism here is not reduced to utility, but framed as a moral philosophy of inclusive change, aligning with emerging calls in HRM for justice-centred approaches (Cooke. 2024). Second, by incorporating sociotechnical systems theory, we theorise how HR can lead structural reconfiguration of policies, processes, and technologies in ways that embed neurodivergent experience into organisational design.

The process model identifies four intersecting challenges: definitional ambiguity surrounding neurodivergence, systemic indifference and strategic ignorance, dilemmas of disclosure and identification, and entrenched organisational resistance to change. These were abductively derived from recent reviews and practice-based accounts. In response, we propose four forms of HR-led co-design: involving neurodivergent individuals in the co-design process, building shared understanding, fostering neurodivergent leadership, and supporting iterative organisational change. While the model is conceptual, it offers a foundation for future empirical research on neuroinclusion in HRM. Our model contributes to HRM theory by reimagining inclusion not as accommodation but as co-produced redesign, enabling HR to act as a catalyst for neuroinclusive transformation grounded in both ethics and systems change. In this paper, we view disclosure as a voluntary outcome of psychological safety and safeguards, not as the starting point for identifying needs (Santuzzi and Keating 2022).

4.1 | Future Research Directions

Building on this paper's conceptualisation of HR-led co-design for neuroinclusion, several future research directions are warranted to develop, refine, and empirically test the framework. First, there is a clear need for empirical validation of co-design interventions in diverse organisational settings. While co-design has shown promise in healthcare and education (Palmer et al. 2019), its impact within HRM, particularly in neuroinclusion, remains underexplored. Researchers could examine how co-design shapes employee experiences, disclosure patterns, performance, and retention among neurodivergent individuals. Such studies are crucial given persistent critiques of the limited efficacy of traditional diversity interventions (Dobbin and Kalev 2016). Methodologically, longitudinal and participatory research design would offer valuable insights into the implementation dynamics and outcomes of co-design.

Second, future research should explore the interaction between HR-led co-design and institutional context. Comparative studies across sectors, national systems, and organisational cultures can help identify the enablers and constraints of neuroinclusive practices. As Chanlat and Özbilgin (2024) argue, institutional variation shapes the interpretation and uptake of inclusion strategies. In particular, supportive versus hostile legal or political contexts (Küskü et al. 2021) may demand different configurations of co-design, ranging from grassroots-led efforts to formally integrated HR systems. Understanding how co-design is adapted, or resisted, across such contexts would enhance its practical relevance and theoretical depth.

Third, we urge further inquiry into the intersectionality of neurodiversity with other axes of identity. Research shows that neurodivergent individuals who are also racialised, gendered, or economically marginalised face compounded forms of misrecognition (Botha and Gillespie-Lynch 2022). Future studies could investigate how intersecting identities shape experiences of inclusion, access to accommodations, and voice within co-design processes. This would deepen the relational understanding of neuroinclusion and strengthen its grounding in equity-driven HRM.

Finally, the evolving nature of work calls for research on the role of digital tools and remote work environments in enabling or constraining neuroinclusion. Building on the work of

Walkowiak (2021), scholars might explore how technology can be used to personalise inclusion strategies, support neurodivergent autonomy, or create new barriers. Examining the ethical and practical implications of digital inclusion tools, especially in hybrid and remote contexts, is a critical emerging frontier.

Data Availability Statement

Data sharing not applicable to this article as no datasets were generated or analysed during the current study.

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