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"Better to Keep Quiet": Current Practices and the Systemic Barriers to Neuroinclusion in Singapore-Based Organisations

—A Reflexive Thematic Analysis of HR, Leadership, Ecosystem and Lived-Experience Perspectives

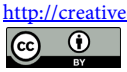
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Abstract

Neurodivergent adults remain persistently under-employed relative to their share of the population, yet most workplace research is Western-centred and oriented toward individual accommodations rather than organisation-wide cultural change. Drawing on an interpretivist, qualitative study of 23 participants across four stakeholder groups—business leaders (BL), HR and learning-and-development heads (HRLD), ecosystem partners (EP) and self-declared neurodivergent professionals (SDND)—in Singapore-based organisations, this paper examines current neuroinclusion practices (RO1) and the barriers and enablers to embedding them (RO2). Using reflexive thematic analysis, eight themes are developed. Current practice is ad hoc, informal and dependent on individual goodwill; promising initiatives such as employee resource groups and strengths-based job redesign exist but do not scale. Five barriers and enablers are identified: a self-reinforcing "stigma-silence" loop in which non-disclosure and masking function as trust signals rather than deficits; HR systems built on neurotypical norms; an HR function that is willing but not equipped for strategic change; a genuine paradox in which technology and AI both enable and exclude; and ecosystem support that is transactional and fragmented. The findings extend biopsychosocial and social-relational models into the hierarchical, face-saving cultural context of Singapore and reframe low disclosure as an indicator of organisational culture. Implications position HR as a strategic co-designer of neuroinclusion and call for measurement, neurodiversity-aware technology audits, and strategic (rather than transactional) ecosystem partnerships.

Keywords

Neurodiversity, Neuroinclusion, Disclosure and Masking, Psychological Safety, HR Systems, Artificial Intelligence, Singapore, Reflexive Thematic Analysis

1. Introduction

Neurodiversity has entered corporate agendas only recently, even as diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) has been established as a strategic priority. Prevalence estimates vary with the conditions included and the population studied, but suggest that up to one in five people may be neurodivergent—encompassing autism, ADHD, dyslexia, dyspraxia and related conditions—yet the employment rates of neurodivergent adults lag well behind their representation in the population (Doyle, 2020; Volpone & Hennekam, 2026). This gap constitutes both a moral challenge and a strategic opportunity, because a growing evidence base links neuroinclusive practice with gains in innovation, problem-solving and resilience (BCG, 2025; Vargas-Salas et al., 2025).

Two features of the existing literature motivate this study. First, few peer-reviewed studies examine how Asia-based organisations respond to neurodiversity, making the region a critical but underserved site of inquiry (Hirota et al., 2024; Harrison & Mosen, 2025). Indeed, on some global estimates 85% - 90% of neurodivergent adults experience unemployment or underemployment—a combined figure whose precise value depends on the conditions and definitions applied (Kalmanovich-Cohen & Stanton, 2025)—and one that is neither well documented nor systematically addressed in Asian labour markets. What remains unknown is not simply that Asian evidence is scarce, but how organisational systems, disclosure dynamics, HR practices, technology and ecosystem relationships interact to sustain or dismantle neuroinclusion—the question this study pursues in the Singaporean context. Second, systematic reviews find that most workplace research focuses on individual accommodations or localised initiatives rather than organisation-wide culture change or HR's strategic role across the employee life cycle (Vargas-Salas et al., 2025; Volpone & Hennekam, 2026). In Singapore specifically, the Enabling Masterplan 2030 has raised the employment-rate target for persons with disabilities to 40%, and SG Enable has expanded an employer-support ecosystem and the Enabling Mark accreditation to recognise disability-inclusive organisations, signalling a shift toward larger-scale approaches to inclusion (Ministry of Social and Family Development, 2022; SG Enable, 2025). Multinationals operating in the city-state have begun to move in the same direction through structured neurodiversity programmes. Nevertheless, recent evidence shows that neurodivergent employees continue to experience inconsistent inclusion outcomes, suggesting that organisational intent is not translating into reliable lived experience (BCG, 2025).

This paper—the first of a two-part study—addresses the first two research objectives. Research Objective 1 (RO1) examines existing neuroinclusive practices in Singapore-based organisations. Research Objective 2 (RO2) identifies the organisational enablers and barriers to embedding neuroinclusive culture, including the role of emerging technologies and AI-enabled tools. The remainder of this paper reviews the relevant literature, sets out the qualitative method, presents eight themes with verbatim participant data, and discusses their theoretical and practical implications for HR. Although it is the first of a two-part study, this paper is designed to stand alone: RO1 and RO2 are addressed in full here, while leadership readiness and a framework for embedding neuroinclusive culture are deferred to the companion paper.

2. Literature Review

2.1. From Deficit to Difference: A Strengths-Based View

Dwyer (2022) defines neurodiversity as natural variation in cognitive functioning, shifting the focus from "fixing" individuals to redesigning environments. Under this framing, conditions such as autism, ADHD and dyslexia are treated as human diversity rather than deficit. Doyle's (2020) biopsychosocial model supports this argument in the workplace: employment outcomes result from interactions between individual profiles, social context and organisational ways of working, so that when problems arise, the individual is rarely the root cause; systemic barriers are. Botha et al. (2024) further remind researchers that the neurodiversity concept was developed collectively by the community it describes, underscoring the importance of lived-experience voice in any analysis of workplace inclusion. Practitioner and scholarly accounts alike reframe neurodivergent characteristics—pattern recognition, hyperfocus and attention to detail—not as impairments to be managed but as potential sources of competitive advantage when environments are intentionally designed (Austin & Pisano, 2017; Kersten et al., 2025).

2.2. Neurotypical HR Systems and the Ulrich Gap

Volpone and Hennekam's (2026) review of 244 papers finds evidence concentrated on accommodations and occupational health, with little attention to recruitment, performance management, career progression or organisation-wide culture change; Vargas-Salas et al. (2025) reach similar conclusions. This is a misalignment with Ulrich's (1997) model of HR roles, in which HR is expected to move beyond Administrative Expert to become Change Agent, Employee Champion and Strategic Partner. Yet LeFevre-Levy et al. (2023) and Kersten et al. (2025) observe that neurodivergent talent strategies are rarely integrated into business strategy, even in organisations that publicly commit to neuroinclusion. Kersten et al. (2025) advocate a strengths-based HRM approach in which work is designed around capability and fit rather than force-fitted to existing norms.

2.3. The Stigma-Silence Loop and (Neuro) Divergent Safe Space

Milton's (2012) double empathy problem locates communication breakdowns between neurotypes in a mutual gap rather than in neurodivergent deficit. Building on this, Felix and Hennekam (2026) argue for (neuro)divergent safe spaces in which norms, practices and leadership behaviours protect neurodivergent employees from psycho-emotional harm. Non-disclosure and masking are increasingly understood not as individual choices to be corrected but as rational responses to unsafe environments (Kalmanovich-Cohen & Stanton, 2025). The tension is now well documented: early disclosure can improve equity in recruitment, selection and retention, yet the fear of stigma and adverse reaction keeps many employees silent, leaving them to weigh the costs of masking against the risks of disclosure (Kidwell et al., 2023; Kalmanovich-Cohen & Stanton, 2025). In multicultural Asian settings, Fong and Tripathi (2021) show that "helping relationships" are shaped by race, language, disability and immigration histories, and that face-saving cultures can intensify the reluctance to disclose invisible conditions.

2.4. The Technology Paradox

As AI-enabled hiring tools and performance analytics become widespread, deployment without neurodiversity-aware design risks algorithmic exclusion even in organisations that intend to be inclusive (Kersten et al., 2025; Ray, 2026). At the same time, assistive and AI productivity tools can reduce cognitive load and social-performance pressure, enabling neurodivergent professionals to demonstrate their strengths (Ray, 2026). Technology is therefore best understood as double-edged, with outcomes depending on governance and design rather than on the tools themselves.

2.5. The Asian and Singapore Context

SG Enable (2025) reports that roughly one in seven workers in Singapore is neurodivergent, with low and uneven disclosure. BCG (2025) finds leadership support and psychological safety to be inconsistent across organisations, with stigma, face-saving and hierarchical norms discouraging disclosure. Ecosystem partners such as government agencies and NGOs are positioned to bridge the gap between corporate readiness and the benefits of hiring neurodivergent talent, yet their involvement is often transactional rather than strategic (BCG, 2025). These conditions frame the two research objectives addressed here.

3. Method

An interpretivist paradigm underpins the study, on the premise that neuroinclusion is not an objective phenomenon measurable through standardised metrics but is co-created through the perspectives of HR heads, business leaders, neurodivergent individuals and ecosystem partners as they engage with policy, practice and everyday workplace interaction (Hatch, 1993; Schneider et al., 2013). Because the field is newly emergent, fragmented and largely Western, no single established

framework exists to be tested; themes were therefore developed inductively from interview data.

A qualitative design based on semi-structured interviews was adopted, allowing empathetic active listening, follow-up questioning and clarification. Between February and early May 2026, 23 participants were interviewed across four groups: business leaders (8), ecosystem partners (5), HR and L&D heads (6) and self-declared neurodivergent professionals (4). Participants were purposively recruited from the researcher's and the client's professional networks; all were over 21, had at least three years' work experience, and consented to anonymised participation. Sample size was guided by Malterud et al.'s (2016) concept of information power and by Fugard and Potts's (2015) guidance that 15 - 25 interviews can generate meaningful themes. Data were analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2006, 2019) reflexive thematic analysis, treating researcher subjectivity as an analytic resource. Analysis followed the six recursive phases: transcripts were read repeatedly for familiarisation; initial codes were generated close to the data, working primarily inductively rather than from an a priori framework; codes were collated into candidate themes; themes were reviewed against both the coded extracts and the full corpus; and themes were defined, named and mapped to the two research objectives and their sub-themes. The move from the eight themes to the overarching stigma-silence loop was an abductive, synthesising step in which the inductively derived themes were related to existing constructs—notably Doyle's biopsychosocial model, Milton's double empathy problem and Felix and Hennekam's (neuro)divergent safe space—rather than tested against them; this interplay between inductive coding and existing theory is stated explicitly to avoid overstating either. Consistent with reflexive thematic analysis, the researcher's own position—as an HR practitioner with professional and personal proximity to neurodivergence, and as a potential implementer of the resulting recommendations—was treated as an analytic resource rather than a source of contamination, and was interrogated throughout coding to guard against confirmation bias.

To preserve analytic depth while protecting anonymity, verbatim extracts in this paper are drawn from six information-rich cases spanning all four groups, triangulated against the full corpus and the cross-group response mapping. These six were selected because their accounts were the most detailed and, between them, spoke to all eight themes; the remaining seventeen interviews informed coding and theme development and were examined for disconfirming and deviant cases. The extracts are therefore illustrative of patterns identified across the corpus rather than representative counts, and no theme rests on a single participant. Participants are identified by group code: HRLD-1 (a senior HR business partner who is herself neurodivergent and a parent of a neurodivergent child); HRLD-2 (a learning-and-development head); BL-1 (the founder of a training enterprise with an explicit social mission); BL-2 (a senior leader with regional experience across European and American firms); BL-3 (a business leader and parent-carer of an autistic adult); and EP-1 (an ecosystem partner and neurodivergent practitioner).

Extracts have been lightly edited for readability without altering meaning; ellipses denote omitted material and square brackets denote clarifications.

Ethical approval and consent

Ethical approval for the study was granted the University's Research Ethics Policy. Participation was voluntary and based on informed consent. Participants were adults (over 21) with at least three years' work experience; they received an information sheet, provided written consent before interview, were free to decline any question, and could withdraw at any time, including withdrawing their data prior to submission of the report. Confidentiality and anonymity were protected throughout. Participant names, designations and other identifying details were not reported; individuals are identified only by group code, and the client organisation is anonymised. Interviews were audio- or video-recorded only with consent, with written notes taken otherwise. During interviewing and interpretation, the researcher's prior assumptions were interrogated reflexively throughout coding, and coding decisions were checked against disconfirming cases and triangulated across stakeholder groups and the full corpus to guard against confirmation bias. In reporting, care has been taken to distinguish participants' accounts and perceptions from the researcher's own interpretive synthesis, most clearly in the integrative model.

4. Findings

One overarching pattern emerged: neuroinclusion in Singapore-based organisations is informal and not embedded in organisational systems, processes or culture. A few good practices exist, but prevailing mindsets and legacy HR systems do not support their sustainable adoption. Eight themes are presented below, mapped to the two research objectives.

4.1. RO1—Current Neuroinclusion Practices

Theme 1: Ad hoc, informal and dependent on individual goodwill

Across the four stakeholder groups, neuroinclusive practice was described as resting on supportive individuals rather than organisational commitment. Where good things happened, they happened because a particular manager "got it", not because policy required it. A business leader and parent-carer captured the baseline plainly:

"*None that I know of. From my own experience, it feels like individual leaders trying their best to support neurodiverse individuals using their own resources.*"

—BL-3

An L&D head described the same absence of formal structure inside otherwise well-run organisations:

"*We don't have a formal HR structure around* [*neuro*]*diversity… it's not mentioned in the handbook… we do not have people who come out and say 'I have neurodivergence.'*"

—HRLD-2

Where organisations did respond, the response was reactive and legalistic. A senior HR leader observed that, in the absence of statutory obligation, action defaults to the minimum:

"*It's very much about what is the legal requirement, what do I have to do… right now legal is the standard for everything. Nothing is more reactive—very, very reactive.*"

—HRLD-1

This theme confirms Doyle and McDowall's (2021) finding that workplace responses to neurodivergence remain fragmented and individualised. The implication for HR is direct: goodwill cannot be left to chance; it must be codified into systems and processes if it is to survive changes of manager or leadership.

Theme 2: Good practices exist but do not scale

Pockets of promise were visible—most often employee resource groups (ERGs) for neurodivergent staff and their caregivers, which provide grassroots support. Yet these initiatives rarely scaled, constrained by tight budgets and the absence of governance. An ecosystem practitioner emphasised that awareness activity, while a useful entry point, seldom becomes systemic on its own:

"*The most common starting point is awareness—workshops, lunch-and-learn sessions… but they rarely translate into lasting systemic change on their own.*"

—EP-1

Even organisations with substantive credentials kept them low-key. BL-1, whose enterprise holds the Enabling Mark accreditation, had not publicised it: "I have it already—I just never put it on the website." The pattern echoes BCG's (2025) observation of a maturity gap: organisations may run pilots or stand up ERGs, but integration into HR architecture, governance and measurement has not occurred.

Theme 3: Emergent strengths-based job redesign

The most encouraging counter-pattern was a shift from accommodation toward intentional redesign of jobs, workflows and workspaces. BL-1 articulated this as a reversal of the usual logic:

"*Instead of looking at existing job roles and trying to find people to fit those roles, I thought about what kind of roles can I design for those people. It's about job design.*"

—BL-1

The same leader described building a payment-verification role around an autistic employee's eye for accuracy—"complete, accurate, timely… he doesn't miss anything"—and reframed the managerial stance as one of seeing capability rather than deficit: "using people to their strengths… you see the person half-full instead of half-empty." An L&D head reached a similar conclusion after a difficult fit, recognising that the issue was role design rather than the person:

"*It sounds like this person is not the correct spec for this type of job. It could be that she is the correct spec for another type of job—but this is not it.*"

—HRLD-2

These accounts reinforce Doyle's (2020) biopsychosocial framing and Kersten

et al.'s (2025) strengths-based perspective: when work is designed around capability and fit, benefits often extend to the wider team, not only the neurodivergent individual.

4.2. RO2—Barriers and Enablers

Taken together, the next five themes indicate that neuroinclusion is a systems issue rather than a series of stand-alone awareness initiatives.

Theme 4: Disclosure, masking and the stigma-silence loop

The most consistent theme across all interviews was a self-reinforcing loop of stigma and silence. Fear of judgement, reprisal or performance penalty prevented most neurodivergent participants from disclosing. HRLD-1, herself neurodivergent, was unequivocal:

"*One is awareness, two is shame. No one wants to say that they're different… Will they put me on a performance plan? Will there be an impact to me? Will they exit me?… Better keep quiet.*"

—HRLD-1

She described masking as the safer strategy—"if you put a mask on, the mask is safer"—and stated that she would not disclose again "up until such a point when I feel one thousand percent comfortable… my reputation has been set… everyone has my back." EP-1 named the systemic consequence of this individual calculus:

"*Neurodivergent employees frequently choose not to disclose… This silence, in turn, means that organisations receive no signal that neuroinclusive practices are needed, and leaders conclude—incorrectly—that neurodiversity is not a relevant issue in their workforce.*"

—EP-1

BL-3 linked non-disclosure to material discrimination beyond the workplace, noting that "my son is refused all medical coverage because he is ASD, even though he has zero co-morbidities and zero support needs"—evidence that the surrounding institutional lens still frames neurodivergence as a severe medical condition. These accounts surface a critical reframing, consistent with Felix and Hennekam (2026): low disclosure is not a problem for organisations to "solve" at the individual level but a trust signal and an indicator of organisational culture.

Theme 5: HR systems built on neurotypical norms

Hiring, onboarding and performance management were described as designed around neurotypical assumptions—rewarding speed, verbal fluency and real-time multitasking that do not correlate strongly with on-the-job performance. An L&D head recounted how an interview format disadvantaged a capable candidate whose answers ran "a bit off-tension", and reflected candidly on the bias that disclosure can trigger:

"*If I had known that she was ADHD, and if I was the hiring manager, I would not have hired her for this position.*"

—HRLD-2

This admission illustrates precisely why disclosure feels unsafe (Theme 4) and

why neurotypical norms embedded in selection processes reproduce exclusion. EP-1 extended the point to automated systems, warning that AI-driven screening can "systematically disadvantage neurodivergent candidates—penalising non-linear career histories [and] atypical communication styles." BL-2 characterised much corporate DEI as "very veneer… demographic diversity", arguing that where a declaration box exists, "if somebody checks that box, that person is probably not going to be invited to interview… a way of screening." The data align with Volpone and Hennekam (2026): HR systems continue to operate within legacy, neurotypical assumptions.

Theme 6: HR is willing but not equipped

Nearly all participants judged HR to be poorly positioned to lead neuroinclusive culture change. Willingness was present, but capability gaps, absent training and a lack of practical frameworks were pervasive. HRLD-1 articulated a structural constraint that is rarely stated so plainly:

"*HR is not an employee advocate. We are not paid by the employees—it's a great marketing trick… I am employed by the business; my salary is paid by the business.*"

—HRLD-1

She added that organisational metrics offer no purchase for this work: "there's no KPI for empathy… there's no KPI for emotional intelligence." BL-3 reached the same conclusion from the demand side: "most HR I meet is driven by business needs rather than the other way round. And right now I don't see companies with a business need for neurodiversity." Tellingly, when confronted with two neurodivergent team members, HRLD-2 turned not to HR but to a consumer AI tool for sense-making:

"*My greatest help was actually ChatGPT…*" [*asking*] "*what's the possibility of someone having ADHD or ADD or even Asperger's based on this*?"

—HRLD-2

The data support LeFevre-Levy et al. (2023): HR must first be upskilled and then repositioned to fulfil Ulrich's higher-order roles before it can act as an effective enabler of neuroinclusive transformation. At present, HR is regarded as a competent administrative and compliance function with limited influence in the boardroom, and neuroinclusion is frequently treated as a low-priority or CSR task.

Theme 7: The paradox of technology and AI

Technology emerged as a genuine paradox—simultaneously an enabler of inclusion and a new vector of exclusion—though, because the number of concrete AI-related cases was small, these findings are best read as exploratory. On the enabling side, participants described concrete gains. HRLD-1 used sound and movement to regulate attention: "when I put music on I zone out everything", and relocating to a quieter space "helps my brain settle." HRLD-2 argued for investing in tools that reduce cognitive load—meeting transcription and task platforms that "take away the mental cognitive load of doing work." EP-1 catalogued assistive

value from text-to-speech, asynchronous communication and AI writing support as "external scaffolding for executive function", while BL-1 recounted, from the deaf and disability communities, that "technology is an enabler… if you enable them." BL-3 even suggested that automated systems might, in principle, be fairer than people:

"*I've not seen it actually happen, but I feel like AI might be less prone to discrimination than humans*."

—BL-3

Yet the same participants named the countervailing risk. EP-1 cautioned that AI recruitment tools "deployed without neurodiversity audits… can entrench exclusion at the very first stage of the employment life cycle", and HRLD-1 reported an implementation in which some neurodivergent CVs "may have been excluded because they did not match… known patterns." These perceptions align with Kersten et al. (2025), who argue that poorly governed algorithms can scale bias and entrench exclusion at the very first stage of the employment life cycle; the present study documents participants' concerns and experiences rather than establishing algorithmic discrimination empirically. A subtler risk also surfaced—that productivity and monitoring tools can amplify neurotypical norms of pace and visibility, penalising the asynchronous, non-linear rhythms on which several participants said they depend. What distinguished inclusion from exclusion in these accounts was therefore less the technology itself than its governance: the same capability that provides external scaffolding for executive function can, if deployed without scrutiny, become a new screen. The practical corollary, following EP-1, is to conduct a neurodiversity technology audit—reviewing HR and L&D tools through the lens of neurodivergent user experience—before assuming that digital tools are inherently inclusive.

Theme 8: Transactional, fragmented ecosystem support

Ecosystem partners—government agencies and NGOs—were valued as enablers for organisations lacking in-house experience, but engagement tended to be narrow and short-lived. A recurring pattern was a company approaching a partner for a small pilot (for example, hiring a handful of autistic analysts), receiving support, and then failing to follow up or build a longer-term partnership. Where deeper collaboration did occur, it was leader-driven: BL-1 described being invited by SG Enable into a partnership and securing the Enabling Mark, but treated the relationship as mission rather than marketing. The contrast between these modes is instructive. Transactional engagement treats the ecosystem partner as a one-off supplier of candidates or awareness sessions, and dissipates once the immediate need is met; strategic engagement treats the partner as a co-designer of capability the organisation does not yet possess in-house. The evidence supports BCG's (2025) view that strategic partnership with ecosystem stakeholders is itself a marker of more mature neuroinclusive practice—and that most current engagement falls short of it. For an HR function that is willing but under-equipped (Theme 6), such partnerships represent the most immediate route to building the capability re-

quired to move from goodwill to systems.

5. An Integrative Model: The Stigma-Silence Loop

The eight themes are not eight independent findings; read together, they describe a single dynamic. Synthesising them yields the study's central conceptual contribution—the stigma-silence loop shown in Figure 1—which explains why neuroinclusion in Singapore-based organisations remains fragile even where genuine goodwill exists. The model is a self-reinforcing cycle: each stage produces the conditions for the next, and the whole turns back on itself. It is offered as a conceptual and diagnostic synthesis grounded in the data rather than as a statistically tested causal structure.

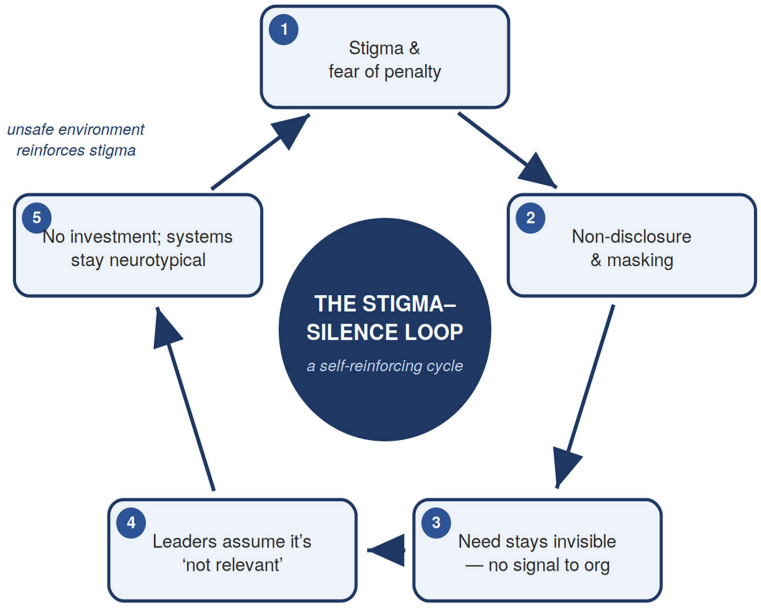


Figure 1. The Stigma-Silence Loop: a conceptual model of how neuroinclusion is blocked and enabled in Singapore-based organisations. Systemic amplifiers (left) intensify the vicious cycle; circuit-breakers (right) convert it into a virtuous cycle in which safe disclosure generates the signal that justifies investment. Source: author's analysis (2026). Nodes represent organisational properties evidenced across the themes, whereas the amplifier and circuit-breaker labels are an analytic overlay derived from the researcher's synthesis rather than discrete empirical findings.

The vicious cycle turns clockwise. It begins with stigma and the fear of penalty (node 1), amplified in hierarchical, face-saving cultures where singling oneself out carries real social risk (Theme 4). That fear produces non-disclosure and masking (node 2): rational self-protection rather than reticence. Because employees stay silent, the organisation receives no signal that neuroinclusive practice is needed (node 3)—the need is real but invisible. Leaders, seeing no demand, infer that neurodiversity is "not a relevant issue" in their workforce (node 4), a conclusion EP-1 described as reached "incorrectly." With no perceived business case, nothing is invested, and hiring, performance and technology systems remain built on neurotypical assumptions (node 5; Themes 5-7). The environment stays unsafe, which reproduces the stigma at node 1 and closes the loop. This transition was articulated by EP-1, whose account of silence yielding "no signal… [so that] leaders conclude—incorrectly—that neurodiversity is not a relevant issue" corresponds closely to the move from node 2 to node 4, and echoed accounts given across the stakeholder groups. The clockwise ordering is an analytic device rather than a claim of fixed sequence: in practice the stages overlap, recur and are shaped by context.

The systemic barriers identified under RO2 are not parallel obstacles sitting beside the loop; they are its amplifiers (**Figure 1**, left). Neurotypical HR systems (Theme 5) and an under-equipped HR function (Theme 6) mean that even a disclosed need meets a sympathetic individual rather than a responsive system, so disclosure rarely pays off—which teaches employees to keep masking. Un-audited technology (Theme 7) scales the same exclusion at the first stage of the life cycle, and transactional ecosystem engagement (Theme 8) leaves the organisation without the external capability that might otherwise break the pattern. Together these produce the low-maturity equilibrium that BCG (2025) documents: stable, self-justifying, and resistant to one-off awareness activity.

Precisely because it is a feedback system, the loop also shows where intervention bites. Breaking any single link begins to slow the cycle, but the highest-leverage points are those that make disclosure safe and make the resulting signal actionable. Psychological safety and leader attunement weaken the coercive pull from node 1 to node 2; codifying goodwill into systems (Theme 1) ensures a disclosed need meets a process rather than a personality; strengths-based job redesign (Theme 3) converts difference into demonstrable value; a neurodiversity technology audit (Theme 7) stops tools from re-imposing neurotypical norms; and strategic—rather than transactional—ecosystem partnership (Theme 8) supplies the capability HR presently lacks. When these circuit-breakers operate together, the polarity of the loop reverses: safe disclosure yields a richer signal, which justifies investment, which produces a safer environment, which in turn invites more disclosure—the virtuous cycle at the right of **Figure 1**.

Theoretically, the model extends two existing ideas by rendering them dynamic. Felix and Hennekam's (2026) (neuro)divergent safe space and Milton's (2012) double empathy problem both explain why safety matters; the stigma-silence loop

explains how its absence is endogenously maintained and self-perpetuating. It also elevates disclosure—often treated in the literature as a measurement nuisance—to a pivotal explanatory variable in the system, and it operationalises Doyle's (2020) biopsychosocial claim that barriers are systemic, since every node in the loop is an organisational property rather than an individual deficit. For practitioners, the same figure doubles as a diagnostic: an organisation can locate itself at whichever node best describes its current state and read directly across to the circuit-breaker most likely to move it, making the model a practical entry point for the HR and leadership interventions developed in the companion paper.

6. Discussion

The findings converge on a single proposition: in Singapore-based organisations, neuroinclusion is real but fragile—enacted by individuals, un-codified in systems, and culturally suppressed at the point of disclosure. Three points deserve emphasis.

First, the study reframes disclosure. Rather than treating low disclosure as a data problem to be fixed by encouraging employees to "come forward", the accounts of HRLD-1, BL-3 and EP-1 show non-disclosure and masking to be rational, self-protective responses to environments perceived as unsafe. This extends Felix and Hennekam's (2026) concept of (neuro)divergent safe space by positioning disclosure rates as a diagnostic indicator of organisational culture: where safety is genuine, disclosure follows; where it is not, silence persists—and, as EP-1 notes, that silence is then misread as absence of need. In hierarchical, face-saving cultural settings—including multicultural Singapore, whose distinctive institutional, economic and employment conditions should not be read as standing for "Asia" as a whole (Fong & Tripathi, 2021)—this loop is amplified, not created.

Second, the barriers are systemic rather than individual, consistent with the biopsychosocial and social-relational models (Doyle, 2020; Dwyer, 2022). Neurotypical norms embedded in selection and performance systems (Theme 5), an HR function structurally paid by and accountable to the business (Theme 6), and unaudited technology (Theme 7) together reproduce exclusion irrespective of any individual's goodwill. The candour of HRLD-1—that HR "is not an employee advocate"—is uncomfortable but analytically important: it locates the constraint in role design and incentive structure, not in the character of practitioners.

A further point concerns the human cost of the loop. Masking is not a neutral survival strategy; it exacts a documented toll on wellbeing and sustainable performance (Kidwell et al., 2023). EP-1's account of interpreting his own struggles as personal failings "for the first 37 years" of his life, and HRLD-1's reflection that late recognition and appropriate support produced "the version of me… I have never been", illustrate how much capability is suppressed while difference is concealed. Reading disclosure as a culture indicator therefore has an ethical dimension as well as a strategic one: environments that compel masking do not merely lose information, they impose a burden that erodes the very performance organi-

sations claim to prize.

Third, the enablers point the way out. Theme 3's strengths-based job redesign is a proof of concept that difference can be converted to advantage when environments are intentionally shaped; BL-1's reversal of the fit logic—designing roles around people rather than filtering people through roles—operationalises exactly what Kersten et al. (2025) advocate. Technology, correctly governed, becomes scaffolding rather than screen. And ecosystem partners, engaged strategically rather than transactionally (Theme 8), can supply the capability HR presently lacks (Theme 6).

7. Implications

7.1. Theoretical Implications

The study contributes to neurodiversity scholarship in three ways. It extends the biopsychosocial and social-relational models into an under-studied Singaporean setting, contributing to the thin evidence base on neuroinclusion in Asia. It articulates a "stigma-silence loop" in which non-disclosure is both an outcome of, and an input to, a low-safety culture, offering disclosure rate as a culture indicator rather than a compliance metric. And it positions the technology paradox within maturity thinking: the same AI capabilities can raise or lower organisational readiness depending on governance, suggesting that neurodiversity-aware design should be treated as a readiness precondition, not an optional add-on.

7.2. Practical Implications for HR

For HR practice, the findings imply five moves. 1) Codify goodwill into systems so that inclusive practice survives changes of manager. 2) Audit hiring and performance-management processes for neurotypical bias—reducing reliance on speed, verbal fluency and real-time performance where these do not predict job outcomes. 3) Conduct a neurodiversity technology audit of HR and L&D tools before assuming they are inclusive. 4) Introduce measurement—voluntary disclosure trends, accommodation outcomes and retention—so that neuroinclusion becomes a tracked business capability rather than a values statement (EP-1). 5) Convert ecosystem relationships from transactional pilots into strategic partnerships that build internal capability. Underlying all five is the repositioning of HR itself, from administrative expert toward strategic co-designer—the subject of the companion paper. Table 1 organises these five moves by the organisational level primarily responsible for them.

8. Limitations

As a qualitative study, the aim is analytic insight rather than statistical generalisation. Recruitment through the researcher's and the client's professional networks carries a risk of self-selection and network bias: organisations and individuals already sympathetic to neuroinclusion may be over-represented, and the professional relationships involved may have introduced social desirability bias into

what participants chose to share. The empirical weight lies in Singapore, a comparatively policy-rich environment whose institutional and multicultural characteristics may not represent other Asian contexts, so the study cannot establish whether the stigma-silence loop operates in the same way beyond Singapore. The four self-declared neurodivergent participants are too few to represent the diversity of neurodivergent experience and, being volunteers, do not capture the experiences of those who remain hidden; experiences are also likely to differ across industries that are not evenly represented here. The number of concrete AI-related cases was too small for deep analysis, so the technology findings remain exploratory. The design is cross-sectional and offers no longitudinal evidence of how these dynamics change over time.

Table 1. HR and organisational actions for neuroinclusion, by level of responsibility.

Level	Recommended focus
Board/Leadership	Psychological safety, governance and accountability for neuroinclusion
HR	Codify goodwill into systems; audit recruitment and performance management for neurotypical bias; introduce measurement (voluntary disclosure trends, accommodation outcomes, retention)
Line managers	Manager capability and inclusive, strengths-based job design
Technology/IT	Neurodiversity-aware technology and algorithm audits
External ecosystem	Strategic (rather than transactional) partnerships with government agencies and NGOs
Employees	Voluntary disclosure and employee-voice mechanisms

9. Conclusion

Neuroinclusion in Singapore-based organisations is currently informal, fragile and dependent on individual goodwill. Its barriers—a stigma-silence loop, neurotypical HR systems, an under-equipped HR function, un-audited technology and transactional ecosystem support—are systemic and culturally amplified rather than attributable to individuals. Yet the enablers are already visible in strengths-based job redesign, well-governed technology and strategic partnership. The central task is to move neuroinclusion from goodwill to systems, which requires HR to be repositioned as a strategic co-designer and leaders to be equipped to sustain a psychologically safe culture. Those questions—leadership readiness and a framework for embedding neuroinclusive culture—are taken up in the companion paper.

Declaration of Generative Al and Al-Assisted Technologies in Manuscript Preparation

During the preparation of this manuscript, ChatGPT was consulted in several sentences to help improve the clarity of manuscript. AI Tools were not used to develop the research context, conduct data analysis, explain research findings or prepare references. The concepts, arguments, scholarly contributions in this paper

are entirely original. All AI generated suggestions were carefully revised by the author's own. The author takes full responsibility for the final manuscript.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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