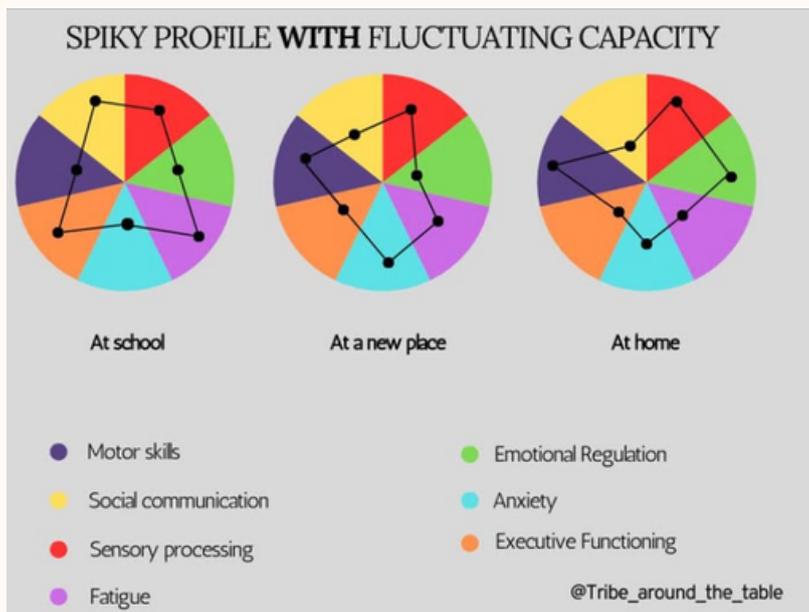




Hidden Talent: The Power of Spiky Profiles

In the ever-evolving understanding of human cognition, the concept of neurodivergence challenges the idea of uniformity in thinking and learning styles. Most people with neurodivergence are not just defined by a single label such as autism or ADHD. Many exhibit traits from multiple conditions, for instance, a person may be autistic and dyslexic simultaneously, blending different strengths and challenges from each neurodivergence. This complexity challenges simplistic views of neurodivergence and highlights the importance of looking beyond labels to see the whole individual.

One individual might exhibit exceptional working memory and mathematical ability (often linked to autism) but also have the hallmark reading difficulties of dyslexia. Another may have superior motor coordination and spatial awareness but struggle with sensory sensitivities or social interactions. and their spiky profile. This article explores what spiky profiles mean and why recognising them is essential for understanding and supporting neurodivergent individuals.



The term 'Spiky Profile', coined by Grant (2009) and popularised by Professor Amanda Kirby, relates to all people and particularly all forms of neurodivergence. A spiky profile refers to the uneven distribution of skills and abilities within an individual, creating a landscape of sharp peaks and deep valleys in their cognitive and functional capacities.

What Does Having a Spiky Profile Mean?

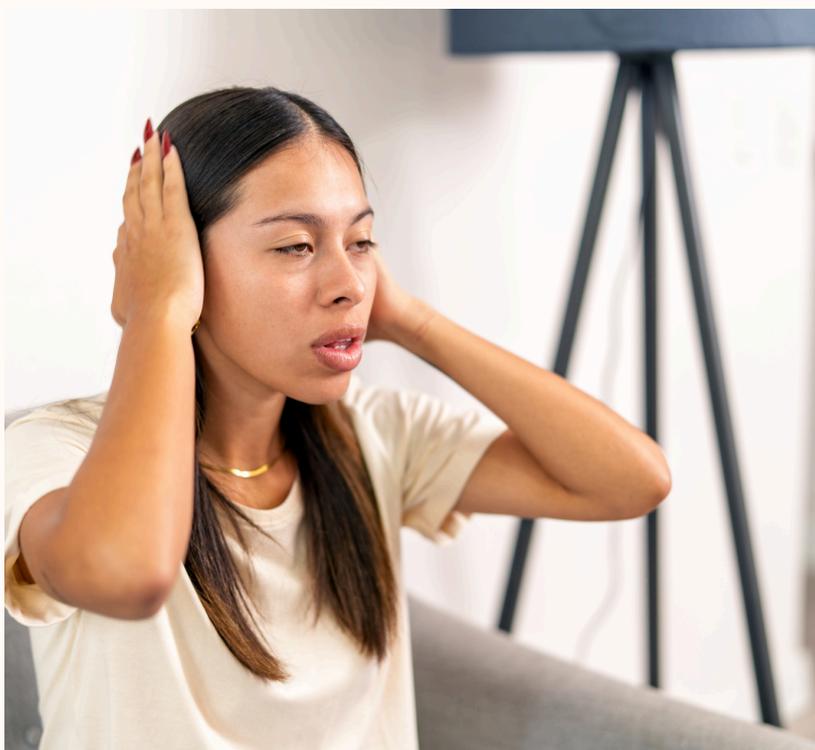
Unlike the neurotypical brain, which tends to present relatively balanced or "flat" performance across various domains, a neurodivergent person's abilities can be highly specialized in some areas while notably struggling in others. Individuals with a spiky profile might have extraordinary talents in specific areas such as mathematics, dance, or art, while struggling significantly in other areas like social communication, organisation, or fine motor skills. This uneven skill distribution forms a unique cognitive fingerprint for each person.

For example, an autistic individual might have an exceptional ability to focus intensely on details or excel at logical reasoning but might face difficulties in social communication or executive functioning. Similarly, someone with Dyslexia might struggle with reading and writing yet demonstrate creative problem-solving and innovative thinking.

The idea of a "spiky profile" vividly illustrates a unique pattern of cognitive abilities: a combination of remarkable strengths and significant challenges. This pattern is crucial in appreciating the hidden talents of neurodivergent people and reframing how society perceives neurological differences.

Why Recognising Spiky Profiles Matters

Understanding spiky profiles is transformational for how educators, employers, and society at large approach support and inclusion. A strengths-based approach, focused on maximising an individual's peaks while accommodating their valleys, allows for truly personalized environments where neurodivergent individuals can thrive. Education and workplaces can benefit greatly by understanding these profiles to foster inclusivity and adapt environments flexibly.



Example 1: Sarah, an autistic dyslexic software developer. Sarah excels at complex problem-solving and pattern recognition in coding, her autistic traits supporting intense focus and detail orientation. However, her dyslexia make reading dense technical documents tiring and challenging. By using assistive technology like text-to-speech software and having flexible deadlines for reading-heavy tasks, Sarah's team supports her strengths while helping her overcome challenges.

Example 2: James, with ADHD and dyspraxia traits.

James has incredible creativity and a flair for big-picture thinking (often seen in ADHD), yet struggles with fine motor coordination due to dyspraxia. At work, providing ergonomic tools and allowing movement breaks has helped him channel his creativity effectively without being hindered by physical coordination issues.

In practical terms, appreciating spiky profiles can lead to more inclusive workplaces. Likewise, educational strategies that acknowledge these profiles can help learners thrive by nurturing talents and addressing challenges with appropriate accommodations.

Developing Supportive Strategies

No two spiky profiles are identical, requiring individualized approaches. Personalized strategies might include using specific tools, flexible scheduling, sensory adjustments, or communication accommodations. By creating environments that respect these profiles, individuals can maximize their potential and contribute uniquely to society.

Tailoring support for spiky profiles means recognizing each individual's unique mix of strengths and challenges:

- **Assistive technology** such as speech-to-text and mind mapping software can aid communication and organisation.
- **Work environment adaptations** might include quiet spaces to reduce sensory overload or flexible work hours to accommodate concentration cycles.
- **Personalised mentoring** and coaching help align work responsibilities to peak strengths while managing difficulties.
- **Inclusive hiring processes** that allow alternative communication styles and assessment methods help capture candidates' true potential.

Employers who adopt a spiky profile awareness benefit from well-supported, highly productive teams, harnessing the diverse talents neurodivergent individuals bring.

Embracing the Diversity of Minds

The concept of spiky profiles calls us to rethink traditional notions of ability and intelligence. Neurodivergence is not about uniform deficits but about a mosaic of extraordinary talents and challenges. No two spiky profiles are the same. This individuality is a source of richness and innovation in education, workplaces, and society.#

Recognising and celebrating the power of spiky profiles means creating more inclusive, flexible environments where everyone has the opportunity to contribute their unique abilities. It allows neurodivergent people to shine not despite their differences but because of them.



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