

Breaking Boundaries: Changing the Mindset and Bridging the Divide between Industry and Academia via Internal Consulting for NeuroInclusion

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Abstract

The ever-present divide between academia and industry is at the forefront of this research in the context of Neuroinclusion. Students are sometimes labelled as ‘disruptive’ without considering if the student may have Neurodiverse needs. We propose learning from a Neuroinclusive Consultant, as an internal consultant, to support the academic teaching team in managing the learning experience of Neurodiverse students. This is an effective way towards Neuroinclusion. This case takes a tri-party collaboration between practitioner, academic, and student perspectives. We propose academia can learn from applying internal consulting practices, driving awareness and inclusion of Neurodiversity, and acting as an enabler for teachers and Neurotypical students. This will result in inclusive and future-leadership-aligned tertiary educational experiences. This change in mindset towards Neuroinclusion seeks to bridge the academia-industry divide through a collaborative focus in educating future leaders.

Key words: Internal Consulting; Neurodiversity; Inclusion; Academia-Industry Divide; Neuro-Inclusion Mindset.

Introduction

Typically speaking, education at all levels is considered a regimental approach. The students sit quietly, study hard, receive a degree, and join the workforce. Once reaching senior levels, they must obtain an even higher degree to advance further. These experiences can have an impact the perception of value academia has in connection with industry and practice. Neurodiversity encompasses a range of conditions such as Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, Autism Spectrum Disorder, Dyslexia, Dyspraxia, and many more, where Neuroinclusion is an approach in ensuring Neurodiverse individuals are able to participate and contribute (April *et al.*, 2023; Baeza-Velasco, 2021). In the context of Neuroinclusion, students in academia are sometimes labelled as ‘disruptive’ without considering if the student may have Neurodiverse needs. We suggest that academia/practice divide may be changing, thanks to Neurodiverse students, who, in partnership with Neuroinclusive teachers/professors, can begin to influence the Teacher/Professor mindset positively. This influence comes in the form of an internal consulting unit specialising on Neuroinclusion, that is, inclusion of Neurodiverse students, whilst also offering support and guidance to teachers to make the classroom experience more inclusive. Through bringing experience from industry, offering adaptations to support academia, the Internal Consulting Unit acts as a link. A key area is to enable teachers to understand adaptations needed by students need in order to achieve their full potential, rather than simply having retained a lot of information about Neurodiversity yet maintain the traditional classroom approach.

When we consider that the term ‘Neurodiversity’ which was coined by Judy Singer in her 1997 master’s thesis, it is clear that the developing awareness and knowledge of the implications for both the individual and education have been slowly developing over the years. With the increasing knowledge, a natural evolution in the knowledge and awareness of support needs is occurring, which has direct implications for higher education/academia. The basis of combining the industry expertise and academic need of this expertise as an ‘in-house’ function supports those who previously did not achieve academic levels. As stated by Quigley *et al.* (2024), it is unclear whether third-level institutions understand the nuance of Neurodiversity and the significance of the Neurodiversity movement, and this supports the need for the Internal Consulting Unit.

Boxall’s (2014) case study on deaf and hard-of-hearing students identified how ‘inclusive, participatory evaluation frameworks’ (p.167) became a primary consideration for teachers. Lauder (2024, p.137), whose study focused on workplace experiences, found that ‘Neuro-

inclusion included empathy and acceptance of difference... alignment of strengths... and the benefit of thinking differently'. We postulate that such an approach is needed within academia. Therefore, the internal consulting approach as the enabler forms the basis of this research, particularly because there is a scarcity of research with Neurodiverse students in academia and the challenges these students and the academics who work with them face (Alexander, 2024).

The context for this research is based on a pilot project within a Business School, specifically their BBA programme, with a view for wider rollout at a later stage. As such, this case study draws from the lived experiences of Neurodivergent students and academics, along with Neurotypical academics, including those who combine both academic and industry experience. The aim was to find out if an internal consulting approach can enable greater understanding of Neurodiversity in a student population, enhancing Neuroinclusion and reducing the industry-academia divide. The intervention presented in the case was stimulated by a Professor, sharing their Neurodiverse situation, following a statement at the beginning of class of being Neuroinclusive should any students need any support or considerations. Students with Neurodiverse conditions disclosed to the professor, who provided support. The need for further support and research on Neuroinclusive enabling options became apparent.

The research question is:

What can an internal consulting approach offer Neurodiverse students in academia?

With a research sub-question of:

How can the internal consulting approach, as a driver for Neuroinclusivity, positively develop the industry practitioner and academic relationship gap?

The study undertaken offers a perspective that considers the role of academics, industry practitioners, and Neurodiverse students in defining an interdependent working relationship that has the potential to positively influence the industry-academic divide through adopting an internal consultancy approach. This paper discusses the positive impact on implications for Higher Education (academia) through engaging an internal consultant as a means of demonstrating proactive and supportive Neuroinclusion that has a professional and personal development context for staff and students, giving the opportunity for students to achieve their potential rather than overwhelm in trying to understand or in being misunderstood.

Theoretical Background

Neurodiverse Academics

Neurodiversity encompasses a range of conditions such as Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), Dyslexia, Dyspraxia, and many more Neurodiversities including Ehlers-Danos Syndrome (EDS) (April *et al.*, 2023; Baeza-Velasco, 2021). Neurodiverse people, whether students, academics, or professionals, learn and process information differently (Chapman, 2020; Doyle, 2024). This, however, presents challenges in the classroom environment, and the coping mechanisms of Neurodiverse students are often judged negatively by their peers and teachers, resulting in non-inclusive experiences. A more Neurodiverse inclusive leadership can strengthen organisational performance by means of taking advantage of the unique talents of Neurodiverse individuals (April *et al.*, 2023; Houdek, 2022; LeFevre-Levy *et al.*, 2023; Roberson *et al.*, 2021). In the context of students as future leaders, we postulate that an inclusive learning experience makes for positive change toward a Neuroinclusive mindset that will have a positive impact on both academia and the industry.

There appears to be an increasing focus on Neuroinclusive consulting with organisations offering Neurodiverse Strategy Coaching Programmes as external consultants, thereby enabling Neurodiverse inclusion, awareness, and empowerment. The guidance of a consultant clearly acts as an enabler, whether internal or external, to the organisation. What consultants offer are solutions, enabling the organisation to achieve a specific objective, bringing important tools in dealing with complexity, and enabling problem solving (Ejenas, 2012; Varis *et al.*, 2017). The internal consulting process operates in a way that is a central point for both teachers, students, and organisations to contact for guidance, support, and information. In a storytelling context, this is represented as approaching a roundabout and not knowing which exit to take, and the building anxiety in knowing that you need to take an exit but cannot see the signpost. In this context, the internal consultant is the ‘GPS’ advising on which options are available to get to the destination. In the context of this project, the destination has short, medium, and long-term phases from a student perspective. The short term is the ‘here and now’.

The main purpose of an Internal Consulting Unit is to enhance productivity and function (Mohe and Kolbeck, 2003). This Internal Consulting Unit context is relevant from the classroom through to the workplace perspective. “What [Internal Consulting Units] ICUs and external consultants both have in common is the task of solving challenges that their client organisation faces.” (Chen *et al.*, 2019, p.66). Aligned with the purpose of a consultant, whether internal or external, is the solution-focused approach to enable goals and objectives to be achieved. What

the internal consultant in higher education (academia) offers is a neutral expert understanding of the business unit from both the professor/teaching perspective and the student perspective. The outcomes of this approach will be something of interest for the wider academic and industry communities.

There is the perspective that academia prepares those for the consulting industry, but how is industry enabling academia to deliver fit-for-business leaders? This presents a missing link in engaging both specialisms, academia and industry (Adams and Zanzi, 2004), which this research examines. To support enablement, the Internal Consulting Unit offers an integrated bottom-up approach in the hierarchical context of proposals. Within the academic environment, this bottom-up approach can apply as students-to-teachers, or Neuroinclusive teachers to senior management. Of note, there is a missing link: there is no integration of the progress being made in practice into academia, thus maintaining a gap between academia and practice. This research seeks to begin closing the gap by applying the Internal Consulting approach with a focus on Neuroinclusion within academia, through the implementation of inclusive elements.

Practice – Academia Gap

It is rather a truism that the common perception is that academia presents a detached view of reality. Managers and executives often saw academia as a ‘necessary evil’ rather than a constructive development that contributes to skillsets (Arora, 2004). Rynes *et al.* (2007) claim that researchers are frustrated because practitioners are not incorporating new theories and acting on findings. Where Jewell *et al.* (2022) state that ‘the academic version has little resemblance to the real-world [industry/practitioner] version’ (p.1) and thus present as separate worlds.

According to Chen *et al.*, 2007, p.66) there is “fundamental need for an objective perspective, quickly scalable support, and efficient project execution”. It is through knowing the organisation, being an engaged member of the academic teaching and supervisory teams, that the internal consultant can identify quickly the need and enable the adapted support that is fit-for-purpose. Fit-for-purpose engages an empathetic approach in understanding the challenges faced by the teacher/academic, who themselves are managing a diverse range of students with varying capabilities, and thus, practical and realistic solutions are needed. It is only someone who is within the organisation and has that appreciation and knowledge of the challenges being managed that a realistic and easy-to-implement adaptation can be recommended.

Academia needs the industry expertise to then refine that to be fit-for-purpose in an academic environment, and this presents as an inter-dependence, both offering equal value. As Adams and Zanzi (2004) identify, ‘there is an apparent resistance of the consulting industry to turn to academia as a resource’ (p.559), where we postulate that so too, academia has a certain resistance towards engaging industry as a resource.

So, how can these separate entities co-exist and learn to work collaboratively? What is the role of Neurodiversity in this context? Organisations are claimed to be disconnected from research decisions and academia ‘having only an occasional need for relationships with industry’ (King and Persily, 2020, p.704). We examine whether industry knowledge in enabling Neuroinclusion for business has a direct link with academia in the context of Neuroinclusion. This can be done by adapting the mindset of teachers/professors who have moved from industry to academia in creating a mutually supportive Internal Consulting Unit. Thus, beginning to bridge the great divide through aligning objectives. The misalignment of objectives has been identified as a key inhibiting factor in academia-industry collaboration (Bikard *et al.*, 2019).

Leibowitz (2017) states that academics are under increasing pressure to learn to teach differently and improve the quality of the learning experience. However, this relies on the expertise of peers and senior colleagues within the academic environment. Interestingly, students can offer perspectives on academic practices: ‘when [a] student voice was employed... staff usually found this a very positive experience and identified changes... to their academic practice’ (Czerniawski and Kidd, 2011, p. 267). This raises the question: Can the student voice play a role in bridging the academic-practitioner divide?

Internal Consultancy

As a generalisation, we posit that within an Internal Consulting Unit, the internal specialist has an immediate value proposition perspective due to internal consultants, as salaried employees, typically costing two to three times less than external consultants. An internal consulting team can drive strategic transformation, nurture leadership talent, and embed a culture of continuous improvement (Leffitte, n.d.). Cross-industry expertise is the link between industry and academia, as presented in this paper. Internal consulting is said to have a different interaction, a different communication system that benefits an organisation, whether industry or academia (Yevtushenko and Gudź, 2022). What the internal consultant has in academia is a multi-skillset, of not just being the consultant but also the academic practitioner, teaching, and contributing to the wider activities, as do all others within the organisation.

While Lacey and Tomkins (2007, p.16) ask “should academia teach topics on what practitioners say they want to do? Or should curriculums point students in the direction of what they “should” do?” We purport that it isn’t one or the other but an engaged and collaborative approach that will deliver the greatest results, both for future industry through sensitisation and normalising Neuroinclusion and for the developing professionals who are students before entering the workforce (Goldberg and Willham, 2024).

Brennan (2004) suggested that researchers should take steps to bridge the divide by making their research work more relevant. In the context that Business Schools, indeed all those in any academic institution, endeavour to enter the workforce, or are already in the workforce, this has a direct impact by setting inclusion as a normality, ingraining rather than devising ability from disability. The Internal Consulting Unit in itself does not solve problems for individuals. However, it does offer an inclusive and supportive environment for those who are Neurodivergent and demonstrates for Neurotypical staff and students how minor adaptations, guided by the Internal Consultant (expert), can deliver results for all.

It is here that the Neuroinclusive approach, within the Internal Consulting Unit, may be the key to making positive changes (Shephers and Gruber, 2021; Rynes, 2001). This, however, will require a shift in mindset to work towards an equity approach between the Neurodiverse student group, teaching/academics, and practitioners, where the “gap is symptomatic of the deficit-driven education paradigm” (Zhao, 2016, p.720). Using these three groupings as a tri-party to create an Internal Consulting Unit within academia offers the potential to positively shape the perceptions of Neuroinclusion (Buchanan and Greig, 2021).

Within the literature, mindsets appear to have two paths, either horizontal or vertical. In a fixed, horizontal mindset, our beliefs focus on reproducing what we know, whereas a growth, vertical mindset is an open mind, ready to learn, to continuously improve and improve strategies (Buchanan and Greig, 2021, pp.494-496). Thus, we make the case that academia, in particular Business Schools, need to adopt a growth mindset: Neurodiverse students are considered as internal consultants, not only as part of an Internal Consulting Unit but also individually, where the Neurodiverse student feels the teacher/professor has an open mind in listening to the student regarding what adaptations will enable students to focus better in the classroom, directly impacting their grades. Many Neurodiverse students may not approach a support team or student advisor the University or Business School may offer for a range of reasons, including

perceptions, under-promotion of support focussed on Neurodivergent students, imposed rather than students having an input, resulting in mismatched adjustments (e.g., extra exam time), not being aware of the existence of a support team or advisor, or delay in obtaining an appointment to discuss their particular situation, thus the reliance on the student directly engaging with the teacher/professor becomes more critical to their learning. Taking an Internal Consulting Unit-focused approach addresses this gap in supporting students' learning.

One illustrative example, drawn directly from the experience of this case study, is as follows: a Neurodiverse student asked the teacher if they might be allowed to have their headset on to listen to music whilst doing the individual in-class exercises, along with their reasoning for doing so. This was received positively, whilst another Neurodiverse student with a different teacher was told to close his laptop and stop drawing. This second student ended up drawing on his hand as a distraction to help him listen to the teacher. Those drawings then drew condescending comments from other students, which furthered the non-inclusion and non-acceptance of Neurodiversity in academia. The first teacher's approach aligns with Chrysochoou *et al.* (2022), who endorse that a change of attitude and approach of academic faculty will have a profound and positive impact on Neurodiverse students. Clouder *et al.* (2020, p.758) write that the 'use of the term, Neurodiversity, focuses on differences in individual brain function and behavioral traits, regarded as part of normal variation in the population' and suggests that, though there are challenges associated with Neurodiversity, 'many Neurodiverse conditions bestow talents or benefits' that are often not acknowledged. Including Neurodiverse students in the lens of changing mindsets of academic faculty offers recognition and a sense of being valued as part of human diversity and inclusion (Haney, 2018).

These elements highlight the need and value of creating an Internal Consulting Unit where a Neuroinclusive and Neurodiverse lead is driving positive results in educating the educator. The context is to raise awareness of not only Neurodiversity in general, but also endorsing how students themselves can present the solutions that, with an open mind, will enable them to achieve their full academic potential. This perspective forms the basis of our case study examined for this research paper.

This research project develops a framework enabling Neurodiverse students to feel empowered and be understood, which aligns with consulting skills in industry that are developed in higher education for those entering the consulting profession (Lacey *et al.*, 2007).

Methodology

The research was undertaken as a qualitative methodology as an exploratory case study (Salmons, 2021), with narrative inquiry (Berry, 2016) as a data collection method. Deriving from that, thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006) was used to analyse the data. A case study approach is defined as a method of probing into a problem, process, or situation (Salmons, 2021). Whereas, a narrative inquiry approach is where '[p]articipants provide a storied understanding of the personal meanings of their experiences' (Berry, 2016, p.12). Thematic analysis is the emergence of themes from the data that are important in describing the phenomenon (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The data is read and re-read to identify themes of significance in an iterative and reflective approach.

The situation examined is the impact of the role of an internal consultant in enabling Neuroinclusion within academia, specifically drawing on an academic business school environment. Through taking a case study approach, using narrative inquiry, offered perspectives on the experiences of Neurodiverse students, Neurotypical teachers/professors through the engagement of a Neuroinclusive teacher who is also Neurodiverse. We consider how internal consulting can expose efficiency and effectiveness for both professors/teachers and their Neurodiverse students, by opening the communication channel in enabling Neuroinclusion. This is aligned to Baruch (2001), who links a Neurodiversity to the 'manner people react and communicate' (p.129). The goal of this research was to explore interventions that had the potential to improve the academic achievements and engagement of Neurodiverse students whilst also raising the knowledge and skill set of teachers in gaining a vertical development, defined as transformative learning, to view the world with new eyes for inclusive perspectives (Buchanan and Greig, 2021, p.495).

The first perspective in creating the Internal Consulting Unit was to determine the current knowledge level of Neurotypical, Neuroinclusion, or Neurodivergence of a selection of 36 participants. Within this grouping, both Neurodiverse and Neurotypical respondents were engaged in order to examine all perspectives. Of the sample group, one teacher is both an experienced Neuroinclusive business coach and Neurodiverse, whilst three of the seven teachers are Neurotypical and had no prior knowledge of Neurodiversities nor how they presented in the classroom. Individual coaching and discussions with these Neurotypical teachers helped raise their awareness to where, within one month, two of the three were comfortable asking students to approach them if they had any needs or requirements that would help them to focus and learn. In doing so, these teachers were surprised and took an empathetic

approach when realising the efforts put in by the Neurodiverse students in their quest to achieve academic studies. This has resulted in an effort to see through the eyes of the Neurodiverse. For example, the dyslexic student's exam paper – rather than marking them for the writing style and form of letters and numbers, by being conscious that, in a dyslexic way, this was representing the correct numbers/letters. The findings of this present the context that academic assessment needs to take an empathetic approach that does not apply to all students, but does for the Neurodiverse.

Participants

Both Neurodivergent and Neurotypical academics and students aged over 18 participated. A total of 25 Neurodivergent students and four Neurotypical students, all at the same campus, along with seven teachers (four Neurodiverse and three Neurotypical), one of which is also a Neurodiverse senior administrator, and two who are also student advisors (one Neurotypical and one Neurodivergent) at the school were part of the study. Once aware of the research being considered, the students proactively approached the researchers, seeking to be part of this research project. Contact details were provided, including a follow-up email covering the questions, a simple language research participation sheet, and the option of either a face-to-face interview in a private office or a response via email. The participation sheet covered anonymity, free choice to participate, and the use of the data being collected. All 29 students and the seven professors/teachers who participated had volunteered to take part in this project.

Procedure

All 36 participants were advised that the desired outcome of this intervention was to develop the concept of internal consultants to drive positive change within the academic environment, enabling the inclusion and consideration of Neurodiverse students.

The interviews lasted 30-45 minutes and were kept brief to ensure engagement and connection in a Neuroinclusive approach. The semi-structured interview questions allowed either brief or detailed content from the respondents. All were encouraged to be in contact if they had any further thoughts, views, or elements they wished to include in the week following the interviews. Breaks were offered throughout the interviews, and respondents had the option of completing the interview questions either in person, in a private office environment, via video call using the Microsoft Teams Application, or via email correspondence to the questions.

Following the interviews and data analysis, all respondents were contacted to confirm that the notes and interpretation matched their perspectives as an accurate and true interpretation (King and Hugh-Jones, 2019). This resulted in a final set of considerations that support the recommendations of this research paper.

As Braun and Clarke (2021) explain, there are no established rigid rules about what makes a theme. A theme is related to how it aligns with the research question and the dominating descriptor words from the data obtained during the interviews. These themes then underpin the final results and interpretation for this study.

Findings

To determine the themes for this study, initial identification of the sub-themes was undertaken, which drove the definition of the key themes. Based on the interviews, the key themes that emerged consistently were adjustments, mindset, Internal Consulting Unit, and empathy. Table 1 provides the themes, and sub-themes with positive, negative, and neutral comments collated from the interviews.

Table 1. Themes emerging from interviews (author-created)

Theme	Sub-theme	Positive	Negative	Neutral
Adjustments	Adjustments	I need to have my headset on	I don't need extra time. (Incorrect assumption of adjustment needed).	It would be good, but it isn't the normal
	Adjustments and approachability	Adjustments such as software for exam	The Prof is unapproachable	It would be amazing, but how/who do I ask?
Mindset	Understanding and awareness	I have never had a teacher understand or know anything about this	There is no confidentiality (fear)	It would be nice if the teacher...
	Mindset	How do I respond	There are presumptions of need	I would say, but they will only give me extra

Theme	Sub-theme	Positive	Negative	Neutral
				exam time, and that is not what I need
		I need support to help me communicate with my Prof	I don't want to be judged by others (fear)	How should I react? Is it OK to ...?
	Mindset and understanding	I am open, and I am interested	There is lack of understanding	If they ask me/tell me, I could...
Internal Consulting Unit	Internal Consulting Unit/growth mindset	This is great (the Internal Consulting Unit)	I lose marks because of messy writing, but I have ADHD and am Dyslexic	Nothing will really change
	Internal Consulting Unit	I like having a mentor	I'm afraid to ask the prof	Is it possible that...?
	Internal Consulting Unit mindset and understanding	What, why, and how	What, why, and how	If I'm told to..
	Internal consultant/ mindset and knowledge	I am curious	Only if I have to with formal notice	There's no choice, it's necessary
Empathy	Empathy	I fully support your research project	It's an easy 'cop out'	Do you think it might be possible to help me talk to my teacher?
		This is great that the school cares about us	It's disconnected to reality	There is lack of understanding

Adjustments

Within the Business School, there was the refusal by an early-career, entry-level office manager towards his Neurodivergent team member who had Neurodivergence and hidden disability requirements. The manager declined the opportunity to discuss with the Internal Consulting Unit, stating that he would only ‘do something’ when HR told him he had to. This did not create a very favourable working environment for the team member, but it is a reflection of the norm that we are looking to rectify, where the Internal Consulting Unit Model not only reaches the education environment but also the workforce. It does, however, support the case that there needs to be a long-term engagement of the internal consultant approach to embed changes in mindsets and awareness. If the consultancy unit were an external consultant, the potential to give the sought responses rather than actively engage in positive change would not be as evident.

Despite the office manager’s view, two of the three Neurotypical teachers had no prior knowledge of Neurodivergence and reported a positive impact on their teaching and awareness because of the Internal Consulting Unit approach. As a result of this awareness, they sought an understanding of how or what they could do to support their Neurodivergent students, making the necessary adjustments to support them.

Mindset

The same Neurotypical teachers sought coaching regularly and appreciated having discussions in a safe environment on a one-to-one basis to discuss in-class behaviours, asking if it might be a Neurodiversity, and what they could offer the student. The lead author advised them to ask the student. They did, the student relaxed and advised, then the teacher accepted what would help them. As a result, disruptions were reduced significantly, to being minimal.

All the participating students reported a significant improvement in grades when working with a Neuroinclusive teacher.

Internal Consulting Unit

All Neurodivergent students reacted positively, although two with trepidation, to the Internal Consulting Unit having someone who understood, with lived experience of Neurodivergence. Neurodivergent students were able to openly discuss their issues and sought Neurodivergent focussed ‘translations’ of some coursework that removed a learning barrier.

Neurotypical students reacted positively towards the Internal Consulting Unit and sought guidance on understanding what Neurodivergence is and commented on the Business School being ‘really amazing for doing this to support those who need it’.

Empathy

One Neurotypical student in a class that had the Neurodivergent Professor commented that a classmate was ‘crazy’. The student was referring to another student who had been diagnosed with ADHD. The Professor addressed this and turned it into a learning experience for the Neurotypical student, to view the Neurodivergent student as someone with enormous capacity and energy that he was trying to focus. Indeed, having understood that adjectives such as ‘crazy’ cause negative emotions, the Neurotypical student apologised both to the Neurodivergent student and Professor and asked what words he could use instead. This generated a positive change in focus for the student.

One reported that many years previously, in high school, she had a teacher allow her to wear a headset so she could have music on while she did the exam, with her phone on a table away from the student in the middle of the room. This small adjustment allowed the student to deliver their best by focusing in the way they needed to.

One teacher, when returning an exam paper to a student, discreetly asked, ‘How can I help you to achieve your full potential, because I am sure you can achieve a better grade than this?’. It was a 41% exam result. The student, who is part of this research group, replied ‘I am dyslexic, and have dyspraxia, ADHD and dysorthographia’, to which the teacher replied ‘wow, you are amazing, to have even achieved that with such immense challenges, I am sorry I didn’t know beforehand.’ The teacher then asked why the student wasn’t on the approved adjustments list at the school, to which he replied that ‘they will just give me extra time and I don’t need extra time in the exam’. Upon discussing with the senior administrative role person, it was learned that there are AI systems that the student would have authorised use of for his future exams. In the final exam of that semester, the same student achieved over 70%, stating to the teacher on receiving his exam paper results, ‘because you helped me understand the course better, believed in me and made me feel good’. We postulate that this will have a further positive impact on employability for the student and develop their leadership skills, evidencing that mentorship is not for the workplace alone (Baruch, 2022).

One notable finding was that the formal arrangements offered to assist students reflected the horizontal fixed mindset of diagnosis equalling a textbook solution, rather than a vertical growth mindset, which would have determined with the student what potential solutions or implementations would best assist the student. That was reflected in the views of the majority of students in this study. They had opted not to be included in the formal adjustments list because they assumed that would give them only extra exam time, which was not what they said they needed. When the students were involved in the discussion of their needs without fear of reprisal, their confidence increased, and their grades improved.

Discussion

The perspective of this research was to examine whether an internal consulting approach could act as a driver of Neuroinclusion and deliver a potential functional relationship between academia and industry. Based on the perception of a disjointed relationship with academic studies being perceived as a ‘necessary evil’ (Arora, 2004; Martin, 2002) rather than a valuable interlink with industry, is reflected in Figure 1.

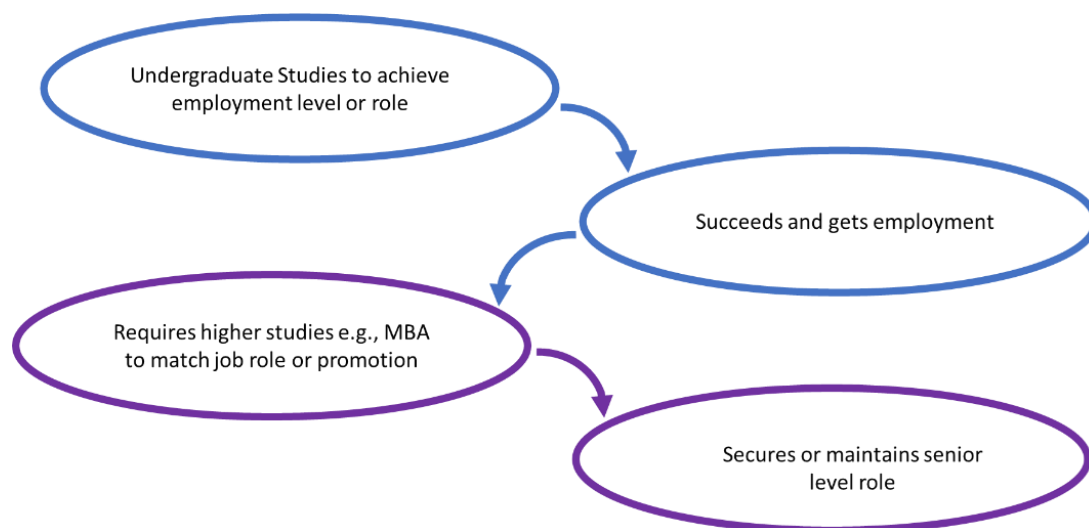


Figure 1. The role of Academia with Practice in relation to qualification studies (author created)

The perspective of Figure 1 reflects how academic qualifications are required in order to obtain a certain job level and, at a later career stage, a return to academia as an obligation in order to maintain or secure a senior-level role.

It is proposed that Figure 2 may be the beginning of breaking the academia/industry divide by changing the perception of academia as being detached from the work environment by creating this collaborative Internal Consulting Unit. This tri-party collaboration allows opening up

discussions and changing mindsets between academics and practitioners through the key objective of having a focus on enabling Neurodiverse academic students to attain their full potential. By attaining full potential, the classroom would be engaging a high-performance work setting, creating a sustainable relationship and work environment based on awareness and adapting mindsets (Weina and Yanling, 2022).

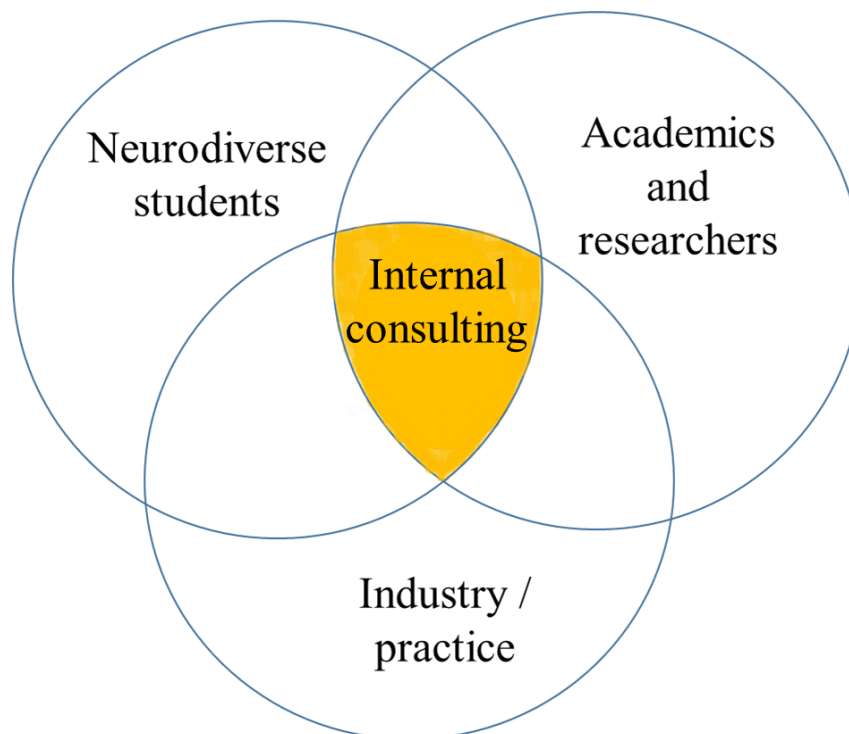


Figure 2. Proposed Internal Consulting Unit Model: The internal consultant is proposed as key in bridging the gap between industry and academia (author-created)

The findings of this research present a new perspective of the student and teacher within academia working together in the context of internal consulting, enabling the other to understand what the Neurodiverse student has to focus on to achieve their best with their studies, which increases the chances of good quality employment and success in life. This interlink represents an internal consulting context, resulting in a direct impact on industry, offering a perspective on bridging the divide between academia and industry. As a direct result of this Internal Consulting Unit approach, academia develops strong Neurodiverse graduates who enter the workforce with a conscious awareness of the difference empathy can have on achieving improved performance applicable to the workplace. This proposed Internal Consulting Unit Model, as a tri-party, presents shared overlaps (Figure 2) that identifies how the proposed approach integrates an internal consulting context that can bridge the practitioner/industry/academic divide, by giving attention to academic advice to future managers and future policymakers which was deemed necessary by Pollitt (2006).

An empathetic and open mind presents as an essential requirement without requiring a huge amount of effort to empower Neurodiverse students. To take an empathetic approach within academia, particularly Business Schools, does require a shifting of mindsets; to ensure alignment with the focus on wellbeing. Buchanan and Greig (2021) state that in shifting mindsets, the “skills need to be complemented with conditions that provide opportunities for people to experience well-being” (p.10), and therein lies the role of the “Internal Consulting” approach (Lacey and Tomkins, 2007, p.14) which has implications for curriculum development.

Conclusion

This case study was exploratory in identifying a gap in the academia-industry relationship that can bring both together with a focus on enabling Neurodiverse students through implementing an Internal Consulting Unit Model within the Business School/academic environment. We conclude that the Internal Consulting Unit can offer a positive relationship opportunity between industry and academia through supporting and developing Neurodiverse students within academia. This Internal Consulting Unit offers a link between teachers and Neurodiverse students in an empowering context, whilst developing a positive experience through a vertical growth mindset between industry and academia.

This changing of the perspective towards Neurodiverse students and the relevance of this study shows that it is not a short-term need. The long-term approach of an Internal Consulting Unit Model offers the support, skillset, empowerment, and development of stronger leaders for the future. To conclude, this work shows that academia can work with industry and vice versa, not just for research data or qualifications, but for strengthening the workplaces of tomorrow, creating a necessary bond.

Limitations and suggestions for future research

This research realises a number of limitations:

The limitation of focusing on one bachelor programme, solely on one campus, makes generalisability risky. On the other hand, it is difficult to see why other circumstances will differ too much from the present one. Nonetheless, studies in multiple settings will provide evidence of the generalisability and feasibility of the intervention and the findings.

Data was undertaken where Neurodiversity awareness is at an early stage in a society where Neurodiversity still holds negative connotations when compared to other countries.

This research offered areas for future research in examining new entry awareness to more experienced awareness. For example, the more experienced UK awareness compared to the new entry awareness of France.

Further, future research is also needed to examine the impact external consulting specialists are having on enabling Neuroinclusion within the workplace, with a further aspect on comparative analysis of students entering the workforce.

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