**Leveraging the Unique Abilities of Individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder in the Workforce**

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**Abstract**

This research aims to explore the unique cognitive abilities of individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and how these abilities can be better utilized in the Workforce. Despite having unique skills and abilities, individuals with ASD often face challenges finding suitable employment due to a lack of understanding and accommodation in traditional workplaces.

The problem is crucial as it affects many individuals and contributes to social and economic disparities. It involves understanding complex human behaviours and societal structures, which can be improved by understanding the problem in detail. The research will be conducted using qualitative methods, specifically semi-structured interviews with adults with ASD who have experience in the Workforce.

The expected findings include a deeper understanding of the unique cognitive abilities of individuals with ASD and their challenges in the Workforce, which can inform interventions and policies to improve employment outcomes for this population.

**Introduction**

The proposed research aims to enhance understanding of the unique cognitive abilities of individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and to explore how these abilities can be better utilized in the Workforce. This research seeks to contribute to developing more inclusive and accommodating workplaces that recognize and leverage the unique abilities of individuals with ASD.

***The specific objectives of the research are:***

1. To identify and characterize the unique cognitive abilities of individuals with ASD. This will involve exploring abilities such as superior pattern recognition, attention to detail, and memory recall, which have been highlighted in previous research.
2. To understand the experiences of adults with ASD in the Workforce. This will involve exploring how individuals with ASD utilize their unique abilities in their work and the challenges they face in traditional employment settings.
3. To identify the barriers to employment for individuals with ASD. This will explore social and communication difficulties, lack of understanding and accommodation in the workplace, and stigma and discrimination.
4. To provide recommendations for interventions and policies to improve employment outcomes for individuals with ASD. This will involve synthesizing the research findings to suggest practical ways to overcome the identified barriers and better utilize the unique abilities of individuals with ASD in the Workforce.

**Literature Review**

The unique cognitive abilities of individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) have been a research focus for several years. Baron-Cohen et al. (2009) identified abilities such as superior pattern recognition, attention to detail, and memory recall in individuals with ASD. Similarly, Happé & Frith (2006) highlighted the detail-focused cognitive style of individuals with ASD, suggesting that these abilities could be precious in specific employment contexts.

However, despite these unique abilities, individuals with ASD often face challenges finding suitable employment. Shattuck et al. (2012) found high rates of underemployment and unemployment among individuals with ASD, suggesting that traditional workplaces may not adequately recognize or utilize these individuals' unique abilities.

Further, Scott et al. (2018) identified barriers to employment for individuals with ASD, including social and communication difficulties, lack of understanding and accommodation in the workplace, and stigma and discrimination. These barriers can prevent individuals with ASD from fully utilizing their unique abilities in the Workforce and achieving their full potential.

Despite these challenges, research suggests that with the proper support and accommodations, individuals with ASD can thrive in the Workforce. Nicholas et al. (2018) suggested that tailored employment support and workplace accommodations can improve employment outcomes for individuals with ASD. This includes recognizing and leveraging the unique abilities of individuals with ASD and providing support to overcome the identified barriers.

The findings of this literature review suggest a need for further research to understand the unique cognitive abilities of individuals with ASD and how these abilities can be better utilized in the Workforce. This research could inform the development of interventions and policies to improve employment outcomes for individuals with ASD.

**Methodology**

The research problem is the underutilization of the unique cognitive abilities of individuals with ASD in the Workforce. The research questions to be explored include:

* What are the unique cognitive abilities of individuals with ASD?
* How can these abilities be better utilized in the Workforce?
* What are the barriers to employment for individuals with ASD, and how can these barriers be overcome?

***Research Method***

The proposed study will employ a qualitative research design, specifically using semi-structured interviews, to explore the unique cognitive abilities of individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and their experiences in the Workforce.

***Procedure***

Participants will be recruited through ASD support groups and organizations. Once participants have been recruited and have given their informed consent, individual semi-structured interviews will be conducted. These interviews will be conducted either in person or via video call, depending on the preference and comfort level of the participant.

***Data Analysis***

The interviews will be transcribed and analyzed using thematic analysis, a method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns within data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This method allows for a rich and detailed exploration of the data, providing insights into the unique cognitive abilities of individuals with ASD and the challenges they face in the Workforce.

***Rationale for Qualitative Inquiry***

The rationale for using qualitative inquiry for this study is that it allows for a deep, nuanced understanding of the experiences and perspectives of individuals with ASD. Qualitative methods, such as semi-structured interviews, provide rich, detailed data that can capture the complexity of individuals' experiences in the Workforce. This approach is particularly suited to the research questions, which seek to understand the unique cognitive abilities of individuals with ASD and how these abilities can be better utilized in the Workforce, as well as the barriers they face in finding suitable employment (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

**Summary & Conclusion**

The proposed study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the unique cognitive abilities of individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and their experiences in the Workforce. Through semi-structured interviews with adults with ASD, the study will explore their unique abilities, their experiences in the Workforce, and the barriers they have faced in finding suitable employment.

While the exact results of the study cannot be predicted at this stage, it is expected that the study will reveal a deeper understanding of the unique cognitive abilities of individuals with ASD and the challenges they face in the Workforce. These findings could potentially inform the development of interventions and policies to improve employment outcomes for individuals with ASD.

The potential implications of the study are significant. By highlighting the unique abilities of individuals with ASD and the barriers they face in the Workforce, the study could contribute to a shift in societal attitudes and workplace practices, leading to greater inclusion and better employment outcomes for individuals with ASD. Furthermore, the findings could inform the development of tailored employment support and workplace accommodations for individuals with ASD, thereby leveraging their unique abilities and improving their quality of life.

**References**

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**Appendix**

**Table 1**

*Literature Review Table*

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Author(s) | Year | Title | Key Findings |
| Baron-Cohen et al. | 2009 | Talent in autism: hyper-systemizing, hyper-attention to detail and sensory hypersensitivity | Identified unique cognitive abilities in individuals with ASD, such as superior pattern recognition, attention to detail, and memory recall. |
| Happé & Frith | 2006 | The weak coherence account: detail-focused cognitive style in autism spectrum disorders | Highlighted the detail-focused cognitive style of individuals with ASD. |
| Shattuck et al. | 2012 | Postsecondary education and employment among youth with an autism spectrum disorder | Found high rates of underemployment and unemployment among individuals with ASD. |
| Scott et al. | 2018 | Factors impacting employment for people with autism spectrum disorder: A scoping review | Identified barriers to employment for individuals with ASD, including social and communication difficulties, lack of understanding and accommodation in the workplace, and stigma and discrimination. |
| Nicholas et al. | 2018 | Research needs and priorities for transition and employment in autism: Considerations reflected in a “Special Interest Group” at the International Meeting for Autism Research | Suggested that tailored employment support and workplace accommodations can improve employment outcomes for individuals with ASD. |

***Data Collection Tools***

The main data collection tool for this study will be a semi-structured interview guide. The guide will include open-ended questions that allow participants to share their experiences and perspectives in their own words. The guide will be flexible, allowing for follow-up questions and prompts to explore topics in more depth as they arise during the interview.

***Interview Questions***

1. Can you describe your unique abilities or strengths?
2. How have these abilities or strengths helped you in your work?
3. What challenges have you faced in the Workforce?
4. How have you overcome these challenges?
5. What types of support or accommodations have been most helpful to you in the Workforce?
6. What changes would you like to see in the workplace to better support individuals with ASD?

***Participants***

The participants for this study will be adults with ASD who have experience in the Workforce. The exact number of participants will be determined based on the principles of qualitative research, which prioritize depth and richness of data over sample size.

**Figure 1**

*Gantt Chart and Schedule*

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Task** | **Month 1** | **Month 2** | **Month 3** | **Month 4** | **Month 5** | **Month 6** |
| Literature Review |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Develop Interview Guide |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Recruit Participants |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Conduct Interviews |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Transcribe Interviews |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Analyze Data |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Write Up Findings |  |  |  |  |  |  |