Employees with Asperger Syndrome and their Experiences within the Work Environment

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Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the BA Hons in Psychology at Dublin Business School, School of Arts, Dublin.

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March 2019
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Declaration

‘I declare that this thesis that I have submitted to Dublin Business School for the award of BA (Hons) Psychology is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated, where it is clearly acknowledged by references. Furthermore, this work has not been submitted for any other degree.’

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Acknowledgements

Firstly, I would like to thank all participants who kindly decided to dedicate their time to participate in this study and for their valuable contribution to this research. It would not have been possible without you. I would also like to thank members of the staff at Specialisterne Dublin for their support.

I would like to thank Dr Ronda Barron for the continuous support, guidance and patience, and for being such an inspiring supervisor any student would wish to work with.

Finally, I owe my husband John a debt of gratitude for all his support and encouragement to step outside of my comfort zone, for his patience, making all those cups of tea, cooking the "proper" pasta and doing all the housework while I was studying and without whom, this whole college experience would certainly not have been possible.
Abstract

The aim of this qualitative study was to gather experiences of employees with Asperger Syndrome (AS) in their workplaces. To collect the data, 6 semi-structured interviews were conducted, including 3 face-to-face, 1 by phone and 2 using Skype with audio only. A thematic analysis and data-driven approach were applied to explore the research question. The following 4 main themes with multiple subthemes in each theme were identified: (1) Competence and Work Performance; (2) Self-improvement and Career Progression; (3) Supportive Work Environment; and (4) ASD in the Workplace. Findings indicated that they are highly-competent team players and that ASD is not a barrier to successful careers. They value knowledge-sharing and factual communication but struggle with decoding workplace politics. Furthermore, interviews' style, bright lights and noise are challenging. The role of HR and managers would be to adjust the hiring process and create a supportive work environment.
Introduction

Over 36 million topics related to AS generated by a Google search in 2019 indicate the increasing interest in this subject. As reported by the Department of Health [DOH] (2018), the prevalence of Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in Ireland is 1.5%, however, this figure only refers to the population of children. This report also highlighted that to date, there is no disease register in Ireland to capture all diagnosed individuals. Similarly, as noted by Vogeley, Kirchner, Gawronski, Elst and Dziobek (2013), the literature has been mainly focusing on children and unfortunately, studies on employees with ASD have been sparse. Since no data is currently available on the percentage of Irish adults with ASD, it can only be tentatively estimated in comparison with the international figures. As per Wareham and Sonne (2008), within 1% of the population diagnosed with ASD, only 6% of this population is employed.

Theoretical Frameworks for Neural Basis

Dziobek, Fleck, Rogers, Wolf and Convit (2006) argued that due to a poor understanding of the correlation between amygdala structure and symptoms of autism, the evidence for the amygdala theory of autism was insufficient. However, some suggested that autistic individuals have more neurons in the amygdala and that the sensory overload could be explained by an imbalance between excitatory and inhibitory neurotransmitters (Baron-Cohen, 2008; Baron-Cohen, Ashwin, Ashwin, Tavassoli & Chakrabarti, 2009). Also, as identified by Baron-Cohen (2008), individuals with AS had a greater brain volume, more neurons in hippocampus and amygdala, increased levels of serotonin (5-HT), and were unusually low on inhibitory neurotransmitter GABA (γ-aminobutyric acid). Furthermore, Ridley (2019) noted that Hans Asperger was the first who proposed a correlation between autism and masculine behaviour, however, as indicated by Lai et al. (2011), his small sample consisted of boys only. Despite this major weakness, it was Baron-Cohen who proposed a similar framework called
the Extreme Male Brain (EMB) theory inferring that individuals with ASD have more masculinized brains, with males having the hyper-systemising cognitive style whereas females scoring higher in empathising (Baron-Cohen et al., 2009; Greenberg, Warrier, Allison & Baron-Cohen, 2018). There is also a sensory hyper-sensitivity and a strong preference for single-tasking (Annabi, Sundaresan & Zolyomi, 2017). Despite the undeniable contribution to the research on ASD, Baron-Cohen's theoretical frameworks received extensive criticism. The critique referred to sample sizes and underrepresentation of females leading to the male bias in research (Teatero & Netley, 2013). Also, according to Rogers, Dziobek, Hassenstab, Wolf and Convit (2007), Baron-Cohen overlooked the difference between cognitive and affective empathy i.e. although individuals with ASD may be lacking one type of empathy, the other could be intact. Also, as critiqued by (Ridley, 2019) self-reported measures were used, giving inaccurate results. Baron-Cohen's theoretical frameworks were critiqued for overemphasising biological aspects while ignoring the sociocultural factors which equally contributed to a manifestation of symptoms (Kreiser & White, 2014). Finally, Geary (2018) believed that individuals with ASD are not homogenous, displaying a variety of symptoms, therefore, conclusions made on the basis of systemising or empathising differences only, were oversimplifications.

**Issues with Diagnosis**

Hans Asperger in his paper published in 1944, used the term "autistic" but AS was introduced as a distinct diagnosis only in 1994 (Lyons & Fitzgerald, 2007). Its validity, however, was questioned and since 2013, in the revised Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-V), it was merged under the umbrella term ASD (Skuse, 2018). Symptoms include difficulties in social communication, "inflexible adherence to routines", "hyperreactivity to sensory input" but there is a variety of symptoms with different severity levels (American Psychiatric Association, 2013, p. 32 & p. 50). The rationale behind this
revised diagnostic classification was to improve reliability, however, such diagnoses amalgamation was controversial. As per health and educational specialists, autism and Asperger's were two separate conditions requiring different interventions (Kite, Gullifer & Tyson, 2013). Also, the former is perceived negatively, whereas the latter is often associated with high-achievers. Thus, Kite et al. (2013) expressed their concerns that after the implementation of the revised DSM-V, individuals with milder symptoms may no longer seek a diagnosis so as not to be pigeonholed as autistic. In contrast, Lai, Lombardo, Chakrabarti and Baron-Cohen (2013) believed this amalgamation would help in planning better support for those diagnosed. Interestingly, the time of diagnosis was crucial. As found by Johnson and Joshi (2016), those who were diagnosed in adulthood regretted they did not know the diagnosis earlier in life as they had struggled in previous workplaces not understanding the cause of their difficulties. The regret also referred to their wish of being in a better place career-wise and they felt as if they missed out in life because they were diagnosed too late (Johnson & Joshi, 2016). To some, the late diagnosis brought a sense of relief and explained their employment history. As revealed by Johnson and Joshi (2016), the fear of disclosure, however, is prevalent among this population as they would rather not be perceived as "disabled". Similarly, as found by Hendrickx (2008), they refused any special allowances and were reluctant to reveal diagnosis before an interview not to hinder their chances of securing employment.

*Traditional Hiring Process*

The current hiring process has flaws which give very limited opportunities for "neurodiverse" candidates to show their true expertise. Due to their poor communication skills, a traditional interview may be unsuitable. However, interviews are not the only available methods of assessment, e.g. a Danish consulting company Specialisterne ("The Specialists") replaced it for the neurodiverse applicants with the so-called "hangouts". This method is an equivalent of an assessment centre and enables practical assessment of candidates' problem-
solving skills by means of the LEGO Mindstorms (Austin & Pisano, 2017). The company expanded internationally, including their Irish branch, hiring candidates in software testing, business analysis or graphic design in companies like SAP, Microsoft or Deloitte. Specialisterne promotes innovation and diversity. They share a common belief that embracing differences and hiring candidates who may be perceived as "outliers" (i.e. they do not fit to the traditional workplace), benefits an organisation (Austin & Pisano, 2017). As discussed by Austin and Sonne (2014), a dandelion was chosen as a metaphor for a neurodiverse workforce. Dandelion is a weed standing out from a well-kept garden. However, it is a very useful vitamin-filled plant and when roasted, it could be brewed as a coffee. Thus, applying this metaphor to neurodiverse employees, they may not necessarily fit into a standard workplace, but it does not mean they lack expertise (Austin & Sonne, 2014).

Challenges in the Workplace

Common difficulties reported by employees with AS were social interactions, inflexibility (dislike of unexpected changes) and sensory overload caused by a noisy overstimulating environment (Parr & Hunter, 2014). Communication difficulties were identified, particularly the "office banter", as workers with AS often struggle with interpreting facial expressions or understanding the sarcastic sense of humour of their colleagues (Vogeley, et al., 2013). Also, work tasks and the job itself were not an issue, it was the communication aspect that was often the major source of distress (Scott, Falkmer, Girdler & Falkmer, 2015). The fact that AS is often stigmatised as a disability results in issues with low self-esteem within this population (Lorenz & Heinitz, 2014). Whereas, Austin and Pisano (2017) proposed replacing stigmatisation with support and viewing these workers as just having a different cognitive style. As found by Krieger, Kinébanian, Prodinger and Heigl (2012), these employees often perceived their own AS as an advantage, not a disability. They had a strong sense of achievement as, despite obstacles related to AS, they had successful careers (Krieger et al.,
Sometimes, however, maintaining employment presents a challenge, as flexibility or being a team player are qualities that are favoured by employers (Parr, Hunter & Ligon, 2013). Whereas neurodiverse employees often struggle within these areas, which, unfortunately, makes maintaining a job difficult, even though they are highly skilled and competent workers who would certainly be assets to any organisation (Scott et al., 2015).

**Employees Characteristics**

Unlike the majority of literature on ASD, Specialisterne focused on advantages of employees with AS and how their talents, if utilised sufficiently, contribute to the success of any company (Wareham & Sonne, 2008). They have an exceptional ability to spot minute details unnoticed by others, particularly useful in quality control (Wareham & Sonne, 2008). Moreover, they are comfortable with performing tasks which their "neurotypical" colleagues would find tedious (Parr et al., 2013). As found by Hedley et al. (2018), neurotypicals admired an outstanding quality of work produced by their neurodiverse colleagues, their dedication and productivity. In comparison to neurotypicals, neurodiverse employees outperformed their colleagues as their accuracy was eight times greater in data entry work and they were 50% more accurate in software testing (Wareham & Sonne, 2008).

There is the misconception about employees on the ASD spectrum that they are not suitable for jobs requiring interactions with members of the public. However, as discussed by Austin and Pisano (2017), SAP reported that one of the neurodiverse colleagues created a useful solution to an issue with which clients had been encountering regularly. Applying this different cognitive style resulted not only in customers’ satisfaction but also in strengthening the company's reputation. Moreover, employees with AS performed flawlessly while providing phone-based customer service as they had scripts and structured answers and more importantly, interactions with customers did not require maintaining an eye contact which they often perceive as intimidating (Johnson & Joshi, 2016; Trevisan, Roberts, Lin & Birmingham, 2017). Managers appreciated an open
communication style (preferred by employees with AS) and noticed that communication overall, improved across the organisation. They also reported that having neurodiverse employees on their team made them better leaders. In addition, some supervisors found this direct communication style refreshing as they felt there was no "hidden agenda" (Hendrickx, 2008, p. 84). However, this bluntness could sometimes be taken by others for arrogance, creating misunderstandings (Hedley et al., 2018). As reported by Cockayne (2016), an upfront email upset neurotypical colleague who read it as offensive. Whereas, Pedersen (2017) noted that due to poor communication skills they can come across as rude, disinterested or not team-oriented. Also, although an eye for detail is an asset, it could also be perceived as being pedantic. Moreover, they could sometimes be easily frustrated when things do not go according to the plan or their performance is affected by distractions caused by sensory overload (Cockayne, 2016; Hedley et al., 2018).

**Adjustments and Physical Conditions**

As discussed earlier, accommodations should really begin at the hiring stage, preferably replacing the traditional interview with more suitable assessment methods. When candidates with AS are offered a position, Austin & Pisano (2017) believed that in order for them to work to the best of their abilities, they only needed minor adjustments in their physical work environment. They could excel in their jobs, provided that an employer is willing to put some adjustments into the working conditions (Scott et al., 2015). Hedley et al. (2018) defined these adjustments as "enablers" as they were helpful in increasing employees' productivity and job satisfaction. Accommodations for staff members should ideally help reducing sensory overload. It would be feasible and inexpensive as all it takes is to ensure that the lighting is adjusted, in some cases, usage of headphones is allowed (alternatively noise-cancelling headphones are provided, if auditory overload is caused by radio in the background), or an employee would be assigned a desk facing the wall to prevent from distraction at work caused
by other people passing by (Austin & Pisano, 2017; Hedley et al., 2018). All of these changes would contribute to more motivated employees and increase their productivity benefitting employers long-term.

**Leadership Styles**

The importance of leadership style should not be underestimated when it comes to motivating and work performance of neurodiverse employees. As explained by Parr et al. (2013), leaders can be perceived as both, role models, leading employees by example, as well as supporting them. Parr et al. (2013) noted, that the transformational leadership style includes treating employees individually by considering their needs. As hypothesised by Parr et al. (2013), there is a relationship between the transformational leadership style and either an increase or decrease of anxiety levels in employees with AS. Managers sometimes use emotion-laden communication methods, with an intention to increase intrinsic motivation and engagement in their subordinates. However, findings by Parr et al. (2013) clearly indicated that this leadership style, while effective when managing neurotypicals, was less suitable for neurodiverse employees, as it only exacerbated their anxiety. Transformational leaders often use abstract concepts while communicating their ideas to employees. These abstract concepts, however, could only create misunderstandings as neurodiverse employees interpret metaphors in abstract concepts literally (Parr et al., 2013). They also prefer a straightforward communication, being given clear instructions on what is expected of them and having a reasonably consistent and predictable work schedule. Any unplanned unexpected changes create anxiety, as they do not find them as challenging as their neurotypical colleagues do (Parr et al., 2013). The transformational leadership style was critiqued by Randel et al. (2018) as they argued it did not promote inclusiveness. By inclusiveness, Scott at al. (2015) meant that an employer appreciated employees' contribution into a decision-making process. As a result, employees felt valued, their opinion mattered, and their efforts were recognised. This further
contributes to a noticeable increase in employees' intrinsic motivation leading to tangible benefits to the whole organisation such as profits, as highly-motivated workers would be more engaged and productive. Neurodiverse employees particularly value honesty and strong moral compass in others. As mentioned before, leaders serve as role models, thus, if employees see their leaders are honest, fair, transparent, show integrity, and share similar moral values, they would feel much more comfortable in a workplace. This comfort results in reduced anxiety (Parr et al., 2013). Therefore, employees with AS would benefit more from the empowering leadership, which requires leaders to be role models and that they are ready to specify goals and expectations communicating them clearly to employees. Similarly, as suggested by Randel et al. (2018), another leadership style, known as authentic, also promotes values of inclusiveness and ethical conduct of leader. Thus, the most suitable and recommended leadership style for employees with AS should incorporate strong moral values, and leaders being fair, trustworthy, respectful and considerate. Correspondingly, findings by Scott et al. (2015), also indicated that an ideal manager should be approachable and an advocate of an inclusive culture. Finally, as discussed by Randel et al. (2018), the inclusive leadership style was probably the most suitable for employees with AS. This type of leadership promotes a sense of belongingness while respecting unique skills and differences of employees, resulting in better overall performance and minimising turnover rates.

Supportive Culture

The main strength of the study conducted by Scott et al. (2015) was the fact that participants were both, employees and employers, which allowed gaining a wider perspective and not just a one-sided viewpoint. Although Scott et al. (2015) found that both groups, employees and employers equally reported the importance of sufficient support within the workplace, they differed in understanding what such support would involve. Therefore, these findings revealed differences in the way employees and employers understood adjustments and
support needed in the workplace. Scott et al. (2015) interpreted these differences as a result of miscommunication between them. Both groups also agreed upon the importance of productivity but, again, their interpretation of this concept differed. While employees expressed their need for clarity in what was expected of them as well as recognition for their work, employers expected dedication to work and efficiency i.e. completion of tasks and dealing with workload within the tight deadlines without the need of working overtime. Employers believed that it was enough for them to give employees opportunities, whereas the rest was entirely up to employees, i.e. to ensure that they met the required key performance indicators (KPIs) (Scott et al., 2015). This research clearly revealed completely different understandings of supportive work culture. Correspondingly, as per studies conducted by both, Parr et al. (2013) and Randel et al. (2018), Scott et al. (2015) also found that employees with AS were seeking a supportive and structured workplace. Moreover, an individualised consideration like tailoring the workplace to individual employee's needs, embracing the diversity and assigning duties that match their predispositions, were equally important (Parr et al., 2013).

The primary goal of this qualitative research is to gather personal experiences of employees with AS, aiming to explore their perceptions of workplaces and the challenges they face at work. Apart from examining obstacles to and within the employment, it would also examine what motivated them, their social interactions with colleagues or possible benefits of hiring. Finally, areas for potential improvement could also be identified. Furthermore, findings may possibly identify needs for reasonable adjustments, if required, at workplaces for these employees or suggest including modifications in the hiring process to enable neurodiverse candidates to secure employment. There is a gap in research on adult population, thus the current qualitative study will hopefully be a valuable contribution to the existing literature on the topic and the future research, particularly within the Irish context. As confirmed by Hendrickx (2008), the stigma associated with ASD is alive and well, including prejudice,
misunderstandings and insufficient education on the topic within the general public. Therefore, conducting this research study might be worthwhile, also because of its potential applied value.
Methodology

Participants

Six participants living and working in Ireland, who identified themselves as having Asperger’s participated in this study. The inclusion criterion was age over 18 and the sample consisted of four females and two males, ranged in age from 27 to 50 (mean = 39.67 years, SD = 8.16). Half of the sample have expertise in computer science, the others work in the procurement, pharmaceutical and hospital industries. Using a snowball sampling, three participants were invited to the study by email and the remaining three responded to the advertisement shared by one of them on a closed online support group.

Design

Key areas of interest revolved around their job interviews' experiences, team interactions, physical environment or motivation at work and semi-structured interviews were conducted with ten open-ended questions to guide further discussion (see Appendix 4). This method gives flexibility, allows for a natural conversation flow with a researcher open to anything that might come up in responses. It is also less intimidating to participants, enabling them to answer spontaneously whereas a researcher can gather more in-depth data (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014; Trevisan et al., 2017). Initially, email interview method was considered as it is less tiring for participants (Benford & Standen, 2011). Moreover, written responses are more suitable for individuals who struggle with social interactions (Griffith, Totsika, Nash & Hastings, 2012).

Materials

The Information Sheet was created in Google Forms with a link redirecting to the Consent Form (see Appendix 1). Individuals who wished to participate were asked to type their email addresses and tick the “yes” box to confirm their consent (see Appendix 2). To record
interviews, the Dictaphone Philips Voice Tracer model # LFH0652, the iPad Pro’s iRecorder application and Sony Xperia mobile phone were used. Whereas, Dell Acer OptiPlex 755 desktop computer was used for Skype interviews.

Procedure

The link to the Information Sheet and Consent Form was included both into invitation emails and the advertisement (see Appendix 3). Interviews lasted between 35 - 90 minutes and took place at the DBS’s Research Laboratory. Three of them were face-to-face, one by phone and the other two via Skype with the camera off. Prior to the commencement of each interview, the purpose of the study was re-stated to participants, they were reminded that interviews would be audio-recorded and asked if they had any queries. Interviews began with warm-up questions, whereas the final question gave participants the opportunity to add anything they wished (see Appendix 4). Recordings were then saved onto a password-protected computer and each interview was transcribed verbatim into a Word document. Participants were anonymised by replacing their names with letters A – F. To protect their identity further, workplaces’ names were transcribed as "identifiers”.

Ethics

This study received approval from DBS’s Ethics Board. Any potential ethical issues and risk of harm to participants were carefully considered by the researcher, including giving participants a choice of participation in the study via Skype/phone to minimise potential discomfort caused by maintaining eye contact during interviews (Trevisan et al., 2017). Also, as clearly stated on the Information Sheet, participation in this study was voluntary, anonymous and confidential and before each interview, participants were reminded of their right to withdraw from the study at any time (Psychological Society of Ireland [PSI], 2011). They could also discontinue interview should any question upset them, and the Information Sheet included contact details for support organisations (see Appendix 1).
Data Analysis

To explore the research question, a thematic analysis was conducted, following the steps as specified by Braun and Clarke (2006), as a guideline. This required a thorough familiarisation with all interviews, creation of initial codes and candidate themes, followed by refining and renaming them to identify final themes to report, including relevant quotes to support them. This flexible type of analysis identifies themes in collected data and aims to give an in-depth data description, while each theme, according to Braun and Clarke (2006), should capture and highlight patterns in responses linking to a research question. To enable patterns identification, an inductive (data-driven) and idiographic (individual-focused) approach were applied, emphasising the unique subjective experience (phenomenological method) without fitting them into previously established theories (Griffith et al., 2012; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). Familiarisation with responses did not end at the transcribing stage, as the researcher listened to recordings and re-read transcripts multiple times to completely immerse into the data (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). Data was organised into meaningful categories both by hand-written coding on printed copies of interviews extracts and then in NVivo 12. This ensured that no valuable aspect of data was omitted, and this accuracy paid off at subsequent phases when codes gradually developed into candidate themes, followed by a repeated re-arranging and renaming them in NVivo 12 and drawing tentative mind maps manually before final themes identification.
Results

A preliminary concept map was created, and it included candidate themes developed after coding interviews extracts, showing the initial thought process and the general direction of the analysis (Figure 1: Preliminary Model). At this stage, some themes and subthemes were dropped and although interesting, they were either not distinct enough or not relevant to the research question. They could, however, be potentially explored in future research.

Figure 1. Showing Concept Map of Preliminary Model, including seven candidate themes and sub-themes.
As the analysis progressed, the preliminary model evolved into the mind map with refined themes (Figure 2: Initial Mind Map).

![Figure 2](image_url)

*Figure 2: Showing Initial Mind Map, including seven refined themes and sub-themes.*
Further refinement resulted in re-naming or merging some themes and subthemes, and the following final four themes with subthemes were identified: *(Figure 3: Final Thematic Map).*

*Figure 3. Showing Final Thematic Map, including four final themes and sub-themes.*
Theme 1: Competence and Work Performance

This theme illustrates that neurodiverse employees feel confident about their skills. They identified themselves as highly-competent workers with an impeccable reputation and this confidence clearly showed in their responses.

*Compared to my previous job, (in) this job I know they think I am doing a good job (...) so, when I tell him (the manager) that I have Asperger’s, it is kind of like: 'That’s great, well, we hear you are doing a great job'.* (Participant B)

Also, some admitted they took on the workload which normally would require additional resources. As reported by one participant, they believed they were more efficient than their neurotypical colleagues. There was also a sense of achievement expressed by several participants, as they met the KPIs and felt proud of having successful careers despite their diagnoses.

*I was achieving, and I was more than achieving my workload, whatever targets they set, I’ve done that (...) when I left the other job, they needed two people to do the job that I’ve been doing.* (Participant D)

They are often highly-qualified and their strong sense of self-awareness about their advantages combined with a can-do attitude results in greater productivity.

Subtheme A: Being Productive

Productivity was mentioned frequently indicating that it means a lot to them. Not only they preferred to be productive but also reported their actual productivity. As per one of the participants, their problem-solving skills contributed to greater efficiency at work.

*(...) my brain is always trying to think of things logically, you know, and always trying to do it the most effective and efficient way, it also means that I get tasks done faster than other people.* (Participant C)
I do like a hands-on, productive environment because it’s just it means that you’re constantly doing something instead of sitting there waiting for something to happen. (Participant E)

There was a strong willingness to be given sufficient workload and some confessed how satisfying and motivating it was to work within a productive environment. It is also evident that they prefer to be occupied throughout their workday and use the time spent at work effectively as passive waiting for the tasks to be assigned, frustrated them.

Subtheme B: Showing Initiative

Some confessed they created their own work and responses revealed that apart from being highly productive, employees with ASD showed a lot of initiative at work, e.g. creating files which were useful for the whole team. Interestingly, they were remarkably observant to quickly identify what was needed and then took full responsibility for tasks completion.

I was thinking: 'We don't have team stats', so I started to create an Excel sheet, calculated team stats (...) I even wrote a handbook for beginners, when they are starting, with the training guide for the first five to six weeks because we never got anything like this. (Participant A)

Furthermore, they often performed tasks they were naturally good at, and, as a bonus, they also enjoyed performing them, saving their colleagues from engaging in tasks they probably found tedious. As a result, the resources were utilised adequately.

(...) and I actually enjoy that stuff, people are quite happy to let me do that. So, you almost create a job description for yourself (...) I’m fulfilling their need (and) they don’t have to do it. (Participant D)

Their ability to recognise what was necessary benefited the whole team. It means tasks were completed and anything overlooked by others was promptly identified and effectively resolved.
They often applied problem-solving strategies, in this case, the solution was just to execute what was required.

**Subtheme C: Challenge and Learning**

Challenge and a quest for learning were mentioned frequently, particularly in the context of seeking challenge at work or not feeling challenged enough. There was a strong desire to work within an inspiring environment which gives sufficient opportunities to apply the skills they already had. Also, responses clearly indicated that to some, it was extremely motivating to learn at work every day.

*I want the challenge every day, I want the challenge every minute (...) I’ll do it,
I’m able to work on some complex, whatever, but the thing is, where I’m now
(…) there’s no challenge because I can do everything.* (Participant F)

Moreover, to maximise quiet periods at work, self-training by means of work-related tutorials was applied by one of the participants rather than visiting entertainment sites on the internet and feeling unproductive.

*But just sitting down all the time and I feel worthless when I go home, and I
don’t done anything (...) it is really terrible. I started learning, I was going
through a lot of online trainings.* (Participant A)

Therefore, responses clearly indicated that to some, it was essential to be given sufficient challenges, opportunities to continuously up-skill and trusting in their abilities to complete more complex tasks.

**Theme 2: Self-improvement and Career Progression**

This theme illustrates a strong willingness shared by participants to better themselves both on career and personal levels. Most of them mentioned how challenging it was at times for them to be in a workforce, however, they did not intend to use their diagnoses as excuses.
In fact, they admitted how hard they have been working on themselves to combat obstacles caused by some of the symptoms.

So, what I did was, I started identifying those symptoms one at a time and I tackled them. (...) by necessity, the situation forced me to overcome those symptoms as well, which was a good thing. (Participant E)

Typical areas of difficulties like communication or single-tasking preference were addressed by making an extra effort i.e. learning social skills or doing their best to switch between tasks. One of the participants recognised the importance of communication within a team and they reported assigning a certain amount of the time during the workday to socialise with work colleagues. The other wished to apply their learned social skills while participating in regular team meetings.

That’s where I learned then, step by step, to focus on socializing skills. (...) It is just about 10 – 15 % of my day that I only use for socialising then I know, at least 5 minutes per day to talk with everyone, so everyone is happy. And then, ‘leave me alone’. (Participant A)

It was found they were highly self-aware, recognised their weaknesses and stepped outside their comfort zones to tackle these limitations. As if overcoming difficulties was another problem to be solved, they tended to apply their problem-solving approach also in this case.

Subtheme A: Barrier - Interview Style

Despite continuous self-improvement, the first obstacle to successful employment occurred at the recruitment stage. One participant confessed that they found the note-taking person on the interview panel distracting and anxiety-provoking.

Like if I did a one-on-one interview that was taped and then they took notes afterwards, (it) would be easier than one person taking notes on the side... they are not asking any questions. (Participant B)
Many participants critiqued the way job interviews were designed and some even believed that they were inappropriate for candidates with ASD. Whereas others questioned the clarity of the competency-based interviews. The main areas of difficulties included literal interpretation of interview questions or audio distractions (background noise).

Subtheme B: Barrier - Decoding Workplace Politics

This subtheme addresses issues mentioned quite frequently by participants in relation to their inability to play workplace politics or understanding team dynamics. As confessed by some, it was mentally-taxing to them to decode these, almost as if it was a foreign language they could not comprehend. At the same time, this inability to either play or understand others playing politics was, as shown in responses, a massive barrier to promotion or maintaining employment.

*I am usually the first one losing (in) this kind of games. I don’t have the, kind of, skill set, or tool set for playing these games (...) it takes, at least 50% of my energy per day to just understand the social structure within this team.*

( Participant A)

Decoding team dynamics was closely related to difficulties in reading social cues, knowing when to join in conversations and responding adequately. Therefore, responses showed that manoeuvring within the neurotypical world of social interactions was challenging and frustrating at times.

Subtheme C: Environmental Barriers

Two core difficulties in the physical work environment appeared in most responses: the brightness of fluorescent lights and the noise, both being major sources of discomfort.

* (...) I had to turn off the lights in my office because I couldn’t function, it was too bright for me.* ( Participant D)
Yeah, the only issue I have is bright light that's really, really difficult.

(Participant A)

Another source of distress was noise and two participants reported that they would rather not go on their lunch breaks to avoid this overstimulating environment. They found it difficult to filter out the noise and their way of dealing with it was to either taking breaks when it was quiet or finding an alternative place to go to. Participants often tried to apply their problem-solving skills, so, they either tried to switch these lights off whenever they could. Whereas the most popular solution to office noise was to use headphones or earplugs as sometimes it was the only way to work efficiently.

Theme 3: Supportive Work Environment

In spite of some participants having a history of dealing with unsupportive former bosses, overall, they reported working currently in a reasonably supportive environment. Although some encountered bosses who were unwilling to make adjustments, even after a diagnosis disclosure, one participant’s current manager understood the sensory overload difficulties allowing this employee to have a short break outside every time they felt overwhelmed.

(...) my boss is really considerate, and, like, he tries to understand me and so, me and him, have, it’s kind of like (...) we have a bond where we work well together. (Participant F)

Many enjoyed the fact that there was no micromanagement and they were given some degree of independence in their work. Others mentioned how much it meant to them for their manager to be open to inventive ideas and consider their suggestions. There was also no miscommunication as they often suggested having brief meetings with their managers to clarify any issues and receive feedback. Interestingly, they preferred their managers to be upfront.
(...) in other jobs, I’d feel anxious all the time that I am doing something wrong or that I, you know, there’s an issue with something but they are being polite about it and they are not telling me. (Participant C)

To neurodiverse employees, managers' ability to listen, their honesty and openness to innovative ideas, combined with a willingness to assist with any work-related issues were essential.

Subtheme A: Factual Communication Style

Apart from directness, they prioritise factual communication and prefer to keep the small talk to an absolute minimum, focusing on discussing work-related matters when consulting their work.

(...) Just being really uncomplicated getting (a) quick question to a colleague, without any personal ego issues in the middle. (Participant A)

As per responses, communication, ideally, should be direct and work-focused with professional interactions among team members indicating that these employees struggle with the unnecessary, in their opinion, conversation fillers. The fact that they wish to focus on work-related discussions explains why they are often very productive and have a strong work ethic, as discussed earlier.

Subtheme B: Knowledge Sharing

Knowledge sharing between different departments was equally important, but from one participant's point of view, unfortunately, a silo mentality was prevalent. It is also evident that asking work-related questions means a lot to them, as discussed by several participants. However, as observed by one of them, this may not always be welcomed by their colleagues as these questions were often highly-detailed.

(...) they let me sit in on other department’s meetings, but it was still in the technical department and, so then I could ask questions and then I knew that
the part that I was doing was helping develop the frontend for this person’s backend. You know, and it was just very enjoyable. (Participant C)

In their responses, participants expressed the importance of knowledge sharing within a team. Although working from home was distraction-free, one participant admitted they genuinely enjoyed being in the office as it gave them an opportunity to exchange ideas with others.

Subtheme C: Recognition for Work

Seeking recognition was a recurrent pattern identified in many responses. Most participants reported that their managers recognised their good work, by, for example acknowledging their organisational skills or initiative. However, some confessed that they did not always feel their effort was appreciated.

My boss (...) she won’t necessarily tell you, you were brilliant, but you’d very soon know if there was a problem. (Participant D)

I constantly look for validation of people, say: “Thanks very much for that” (...). (Participant F)

One of the participants admitted that difficulties in decoding social cues could have resulted in them overlooking the appreciation expressed by their superiors. In some cases, participants either decided to move jobs when they felt underappreciated or their work was only recognised when they returned to the previous workplace. The need for recognition was evident in responses; this was expressed mainly as a wish to be appreciated for their contribution to work and receiving acknowledgement and support from the manager after tasks completion.

Theme 4: ASD in Workplace

This theme represents how participants recognised ASD's symptoms in people they worked with. Interestingly, they nearly downplayed the severity of their own symptoms, while, they could easily spot issues others had. It was as if they have that ease of almost diagnosing others.
I am convinced my manager possibly, well, my old manager, possibly would have had Asperger's herself. (Participant B)

(...) there was one girl and I am absolutely certain she has Asperger's as well; she is not aware of this and she is particularly very rude. (Participant A)

One participant described their experience of being diagnosed with Asperger's prior to the amalgamation of diagnoses into the ASD and that they went through the phase of denial and did not want to be classified as autistic, which they perceived as much more severe than Asperger's. Others confessed that they felt they had it easier in comparison to others, their symptoms were milder and potentially because they were more self-aware. They often responded they were doing fine, were good in hiding their symptoms and did not really need any special adaptations but acknowledged others who, in their opinion, needed more assistance.

(...) I find ways to cope with it anyway, so, but the thing is, it’s barely noticeable nowadays because (...) the situation forced me to overcome those symptoms as well, which was a good thing. (...) So, these days it’s barely noticeable (..).

( Participant E)

Their responses suggest that they are observant, empathetic and value their self-sufficiency, whereas self-awareness makes them more mindful of others around them and some made a clear distinction between autism and Asperger's.

Subtheme A: Understanding Neurotypicals Unawareness

Neurodiverse employees do not necessarily expect others to understand their difficulties. They often acknowledged the fact that their neurotypical colleagues may not have sufficient knowledge of ASD. Some also understood that others' reactions to their struggles came from not understanding the condition rather than from malice.
I can’t really expect everyone (by me just saying) I am just saying: ‘I’m autistic’ or ‘I have Asperger’s, by the way’ that they’ll understand what it means.

(Participant A)

Like, they are not being mean, they just don’t understand the actual stress level it (causes). (Participant B)

They also acknowledged differences in reasoning between themselves and their neurotypical colleagues and believed that to be better understood and to minimise miscommunication, it was also their responsibility to educate others on Asperger's.

Subtheme B: Supported Employment

Some shared their positive experiences of availing supported employment while job searching. One participant, for example, highly recommended contacting Specialisterne for anyone on the spectrum who struggled with securing employment, while the other was in the middle of the recruitment process with a perspective of getting a job offer.

And, then, there is an agency called Specialisterne they are helping me to get a job at the minute. (Participant C)

So, with Specialisterne, they were sort of, they were unbelievably helpful (...) I had been searching for work for three years, so, I think that anyone who is searching for work and who has been long-term unemployed but who actually is definitely looking, like, who is eager to get work, I’d say Specialisterne are definitely the first, like, I’d definitely put them as the first port of call (...).

(Participant E)

However, one participant was hesitant and a bit sceptical about receiving assistance from Specialisterne. They expressed their concerns about the salary levels and that if they ever moved jobs, such work experience on their CV would need to be explained to their subsequent employer. As a result, it could be stigmatising and enforces the diagnosis disclosure prior to an
interview. Responses show that it was a choice and conscious decision of each and every individual on the spectrum whether to secure employment with the assistance of Specialisterne or seek jobs independently.
Discussion

The purpose of this research was to gather individual experiences of employees with AS to explore how they perceived their work environments. It considered identifying areas of difficulties, possible adjustments and advantages of employing them. Findings revealed that these employees have a can-do-attitude and identified themselves as highly-competent. They are productive, proactive, eager to learn and work hard on themselves to combat obstacles caused by symptoms. However, common barriers to their self-improvement and career-progression were interviews' style, overstimulating physical environment or detachment from workplace politics. Their managers were generally supportive; however, several participants were seeking more recognition. Communication with their teams was factual and professional and they believed in the importance of knowledge sharing. While sometimes downplaying their own symptoms, they easily spotted indications of ASD in others. They valued their self-sufficiency by not expecting any major adaptations and they also understood others may not always understand their difficulties. Finally, the pros and cons of the supported employment were reported by some.

Participants identified themselves as productive, and this corresponds with what Wareham and Sonne (2008) reported that neurodiverse employees often outperformed their colleagues. On the basis of the current study's findings, it could be proposed that their strong problem-solving skills possibly contributed to increased productivity. Despite concerns raised by Scott et al. (2015) in relation to efficiency levels, they could not be entirely supported as current findings revealed these employees were highly efficient, meeting the required KPIs. However, their strong sense of competence and work ethic could sometimes create frictions within the team as these could be perceived by others as overconfidence. As a result, their
productivity, self-improvement or initiative could be entirely misunderstood by their colleagues, same as their factual communication style, as discussed by Hedley et al. (2018), can be taken for arrogance. Furthermore, the current findings showed that they often initiated meetings with their managers and appreciated honest feedback. This indicates they possess communication skills and by expecting directness from others and being upfront themselves, they intended to prevent or minimise miscommunication and this clarity improved communication within the team overall, as reported by Wareham & Sonne (2008). On the basis of the current findings, it could be interpreted that they are empathetic team players who consider the whole team's healthy dynamics.

According to the theoretical framework proposed by Baron-Cohen et al. (2009), strong empathising skills were females' domain. However, responses gathered in the current qualitative study showed that, regardless of gender, respondents understood their colleagues' perspective and recognised that others perceive things differently even if it sometimes means being misunderstood. This shows their ability to empathise, willingness to communicate while embracing differences and more importantly, that those empathising skills are neither neurotypical nor gender-specific. Thus, either cognitive or affective empathy is present in individuals with ASD which is in line with what Rogers et al. (2007) suggested. Although it was argued by Parr et al. (2013) that employees with ASD were not team players, findings of the current research show otherwise. Their preference for information-sharing indicates the ability to professionally co-operate with team members. Whereas, their willingness to ask questions, apart from referring to continuous self-improvement, could also be interpreted as their way of communication with their teams.

Interestingly, since findings clearly showed they worked hard to improve their social skills, any struggles with communication were minimised by efforts made on their part. This is in contrast with previous research by Parr and Hunter (2014) mentioning difficulties in social
interactions. However, despite their self-practised communication skills, several participants in the current study admitted having difficulties in interpreting social cues or team dynamics, which is in line with findings by Vogeley, et al. (2013). In addition, as reported by some participants, difficulties in understanding or engaging in workplace politics was mentally exhausting. It implies that it could have a negative impact on their work performance, hindering both their personal and career development, similarly to major sources of distress and distraction within the physical work environment.

Findings revealed that fluorescent lights and noisy surroundings, particularly canteens, were problematic, as discussed in previous literature by Parr and Hunter (2014) and Hedley et al. (2018). Despite using self-help strategies like avoiding peak times in canteen or switching these lights off, it could be concluded that such overstimulating physical environment is a serious barrier to their well-being and consequently, could lead to job dissatisfaction or seeking supported employment. Interestingly though, despite the above-mentioned barriers, most participants felt their symptoms were milder in comparison to the others on the spectrum. This is in line with Kite et al. (2013) and could be interpreted as their wish to distance themselves from the label of autism due to existing prejudices and not to be pigeonholed as "disabled". As in the dilemma expressed by one participant whether to avail services offered by Specialisterne since it could potentially be stigmatising for subsequent jobs. Likewise, as per Hendrickx (2008), there is a fear of diagnosis disclosure at the interview stage. Participants in the current study critiqued interviews style stating that job interviews were not particularly ASD-friendly, similarly to what was noted by Austin and Pisano (2017). Also, several participants expressed their preference for a manager to be open to new ideas and wished to be recognised for their work, which refers to the concept of inclusive culture discussed by Scott et al. (2015). Others shared their positive experiences with Specialisterne and it was evident in some responses that seeking assistance can sometimes end in finding a supportive work environment and greater
job satisfaction. This corresponds with the approach presented by Austin and Pisano (2017) but the current findings, by including a critique, offer a more balanced outlook on this type of employment. Despite the phenomenal support offered by Specialisterne, perhaps it is not suitable for everyone with ASD and depends upon them being ready to disclose their diagnoses. Although such a diagnosis could be stigmatising and damaging to self-esteem, as found by Lorenz and Heinitz (2014), according to the current study's findings, no issues with self-confidence were identified, as participants knew their value as workers. It could be deduced that they feel competent and that having Asperger's is not necessarily an obstacle to a successful career. It was confirmed even further as participants were proud of their work-related achievements in spite of diagnoses, similarly to findings by Krieger et al. (2012).

One of the advantages of this qualitative study was the fact that it focused on the adult population, which, to this day, is still under-researched. As discussed by Vogeley et al. (2013), previous research focused mainly on children or their parents, with a particular emphasis on autistic boys. Whereas, in the current study, 66.7% of the sample were females which adds another advantage. Moreover, the study was conducted in the Republic of Ireland and due to insufficient literature currently available, these findings could be a good starting point to more future research, particularly within the Irish context. Also, the collected data was rich in content, as a qualitative method allowed to capture the perspective of participants and using semi-structured interviews gave more flexibility and resembled more natural conversations (Vogeley et al., 2013; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). It is, however, important to note the following limitations: a snowball sampling is prone to a sampling bias, 50% of the sample was recruited from one online support group and also half of this sample consisted of participants working in the computer science industry. These limit the findings to a particular population and group of employees. Also, all participants thoroughly researched the topic ASD and this extensive knowledge could have influenced some of their responses. It could be also be
questioned whether the gender or age of the researcher had an influence on interactions with participants during interviews, i.e. female participants might have responded differently if a researcher was male (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). Therefore, findings should be interpreted with caution as responses illustrate the self-perceived beliefs of participants. Perhaps the study should have been conducted as mixed method research, quantitative and qualitative, as it would allow capturing a more varied sample.

It might also be worth considering conducting future research by gathering written responses to interview questions, as suggested by Benford and Standen (2011), this method would be less energy-draining for individuals with ASD and more appropriate for potential participants who find social interactions with strangers more difficult (Griffith et al., 2012). As discussed earlier, due to a gap in the literature, future research should also include studying adult females on the spectrum as girls with ASD grow up and become women but the ASD does not go away with age. In addition, similarly to the study by Hedley et al. (2018), future research may benefit from including perceptions of neurotypical colleagues, using interviews or open-ended questionnaires. This would enable to gather their honest viewpoints on neurodiversity and ASD in the workplace and to balance currently available findings by having both sides of the story. Consequently, findings from such studies would contribute to design proper workshops on raising the awareness on ASD in workplaces as responses could guide which areas should be expanded. Raising awareness among neurotypical co-workers by organising brief workshops on ASD may prevent miscommunication within the team, whereas, for neurodiverse employees, it could minimise their fear of diagnosis disclosure. Also, educating others on ASD not only reduces misunderstandings but makes it easier to address difficulties related to overstimulating surroundings (noise, bright lights) or communication. When other team members have more awareness, they could respond appropriately if their neurodiverse colleagues misread social cues or informal office chats (Vogeley, et al., 2013).
Furthermore, awareness results in a better understanding of the true intentions of employees with ASD and that their factual communication style is not intended to cause upset but rather to be specific and get the job done efficiently. This gives an opportunity to improve atmosphere within a team and create a more supportive work culture, thus, knowledge and understanding enable to clarify issues without conflict escalations, reducing staff turnover (Randel et al., 2018).

Findings of the current study revealed that although neurodiverse employees struggle with decoding social interactions they still make an effort to improve their communication skills. Whereas, their neurotypical colleagues may find it difficult to decode the communication style of individuals with ASD and perhaps, participation in workshops on ASD would be a reasonable solution to this. Thus, efforts to understand one another should ideally be made on both sides and such workshops would promote inclusiveness and could also reduce the stigma by clearly explaining diagnoses spectrum and highlighting that symptoms' severity varies.

Education and further research could contribute to stigma reduction which also brings the issue of re-considering separation of Asperger's from autism, as discussed by Kite et al. (2013). Unfortunately, merged diagnoses only increase prejudices making employees reluctant to either seek or disclose diagnosis due to autism's negative connotations. The current study's findings, apparently, reveal that neurodiverse employees value their independence and neither wish to over-rely on support services nor be classified as "disabled".

There are some practical implications and applications of this study and one is to highlight the important role of the HR, enabling neurodiverse candidates to show their true abilities. Thus, perhaps, the interview style should be revisited and slightly modified to accommodate them. It could be done by putting more emphasis on assessing practical skills and using more knowledge-based questions, possibly, turning the traditional interviews into assessments, as applied by Specialisterne (Austin & Pisano, 2017). Additionally, as suggested
by one of the participants, interviews could be audio-recorded which reduces distraction caused by a note-taking person on the interview panel. It has another practical advantage as the recording captures the whole interview, it could be paused at any time and re-listened carefully afterwards. It is, therefore, a more accurate way of candidates' assessment. Whereas, a suggestion to managers would be to utilise these employees' evident strong problem-solving skills as findings revealed they applied them effectively in numerous work domains. Also, current findings suggest that to motivate and retain the neurodiverse workforce, managers should clearly and regularly communicate their appreciation for employees' outstanding performance and cultivate an inclusive culture, as concluded by Scott et al. (2015). Furthermore, it can be deduced from current findings that it is essential to create an inspiring and innovation-promoting atmosphere for these employees to thrive, with plenty of room for learning so that they can perform to the best of their abilities and feel challenged. However, to achieve all of these, some minor adjustments in the physical environment should be considered as they could make a difference to their wellbeing, reducing stress and distraction caused by the sensory overstimulating surroundings. Their comfort at work translates into a better performance which in turn, benefits the organisation. Perhaps, the visually and auditory overstimulating work environment is not appropriate to all neurodiverse workers and to maximise their potential, their work stations' locations or alternative options to noisy canteens should be considered. However, these suggestions mean that it would often be necessary for employees to disclose their diagnoses as otherwise their requests for these reasonable adjustments may not be accommodated. As noted by Scott et al. (2015), it is a matter of creating a sufficiently supportive environment and for work relationships to be based on mutual trust where employees feel comfortable to reveal diagnoses to their managers who are approachable and non-judgemental.
On the basis of the current findings, it could be concluded that Asperger's diagnosis was irrelevant to a successful career and neurodiverse employees are highly confident about their work skills, identified themselves as self-sufficient, ambitious and productive. However, at times, unintentionally, as reported by Hedley et al. (2018), they might be perceived by their colleagues as overconfident or arrogant. Thus, this highlights the importance of organising brief workshops to educate everyone in the workforce on ASD to clarify these misconceptions and prevent unnecessary tensions within teams caused by misunderstandings. It is also evident from responses that employees with ASD did not use their diagnoses as excuse but rather pursued self-development, stepping out of their comfort zones to improve their communication skills. This research study revealed, however, that unfortunately, the fear of stigma still remains as some participants often clearly distinguished differences between Asperger's and autism or were reluctant to disclose their diagnoses in a workplace to protect themselves. They often did not wish to receive any special treatment because of ASD or be perceived as less able and this could be partially caused by the diagnoses' amalgamation since the 2013 (Kite et al., 2013).

Referring to the previous literature by Parr and Hunter (2014) and Vogeley, et al. (2013) and the current study's findings, it can be suggested that they are highly resilient problem-solvers who achieve in spite of various obstacles encountered, whether within the physical work environment, at the hiring stage or on interpersonal level. They were also advocates of direct but professional work interactions with colleagues, similarly to what was found by Hendrickx (2008), with an intention to minimise miscommunication. In addition, the current study also revealed that they found it difficult to understand and engage in workplace politics and the necessity of the office small talk was an unfamiliar territory as they would rather get to the point and focus on discussing work. Furthermore, they valued co-operation by sharing knowledge and consulting work among colleagues, indicating they are capable of being
effective team-players. As reported in previous studies by Scott et al. (2015), they genuinely appreciated approachable and upfront managers who recognised their work. Therefore, the role of both, the manager and the HR should not be underestimated, with the former creating an inspiring supportive work environment to motivate employees and the latter re-designing job interviews to give these candidates more opportunities to secure a fulfilling employment.
References


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Kreiser, N. L., & White, S. W. (2014). ASD in females: are we overstating the gender difference in diagnosis? *Clinical child and family psychology review, 17*(1), 67-84. Retrieved February 18th, 2019 from ResearchGate


Appendices

Appendix 1

Information Sheet

My name is Anna Julian and I am conducting a research study that is aiming to explore experiences of employees with Asperger Syndrome in a workplace. This research is being conducted as part of my BA (Hons) in Psychology at Dublin Business School (DBS). It has received approval from the Ethics Board at DBS.

You are invited to participate in this research study that will form the basis for an undergraduate thesis and will be submitted for examination. Participation is completely voluntary so you are not obliged to take part.

Please read the following information before deciding whether or not to participate.

What does participation involve?
Participation involves taking part in an interview conducted by the Researcher either in person or alternatively via Skype. It will take approximately 30 minutes, will be audio-recorded and will include questions on individual experiences within a workplace environment.

Rights to withdraw
Participants have the right to withdraw from the study at any time during the interview for whatever reason. However, once the undergraduate thesis has been submitted, withdrawal is no longer possible.

Confidentiality
Participation is anonymous and confidential. Although some direct quotes from interviews might be included, the data will be anonymised and published without names or any personal details. All information collected during an interview as part of the study will be stored securely on a password-protected computer and in a locked cabinet. The data destruction will be carried out in line with the DBS Data Protection Policy.

Are there any benefits from participation?
While there will be no direct benefit from participation, studies like this could make an important contribution to a better understanding of how employees with Asperger Syndrome feel in their workplaces. This study could also enhance the benefits of hiring individuals with Asperger Syndrome by highlighting their strengths and aptitudes and potentially contribute to future research in this topic.

Contact Details
Should you require any further information about the research, please contact:

Researcher: Anna Julian
Supervisor: Dr Ronda Baren

Thank you for reading this Information Sheet. If any of the questions do raise difficult feelings for you, contact information for support services is included in Section 3.

Consent Form

If you are interested in taking part in this study please follow the link below.

https://geo.sfu.ca/ims/HY94Kx77g7x/NQ2

Support Services

Asper:
Email: info@asperireland.ie
Facebook: www.facebook.com/AspergerSyndromeIre/
Twitter: https://twitter.com/Asper_reland
Call us: 01 787 00 27 / 01 787 09 29

AspArt:
https://www.aspera.ie/contact-us/
Our office hours run from Monday to Friday, 9:00am to 5:00pm.
We will respond to your query within five working days.
Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/asperireland
Twitter: https://twitter.com/Asperireland

AWARE:
https://www.aspera.ie/support/
Email: support@aspera.ie
Email at any time. You can expect a response within 24 hours.

Pieta House:
Find your nearest Pieta House: https://www.pieta.ie/contact-us

Appendix 2
Consent Form

The purpose of this research study is to explore individual experiences of employees with Asperger Syndrome in a work environment. I understand that this research will form the basis for an undergraduate thesis and will be submitted for examination.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and I am free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason. I also understand that all the information I provide will be confidential and my name will be anonymous throughout.

I agree to have the interview audio-recorded.

* Required

Email address *

Your email

I agree to participate in this study. *

☐ Yes

☐ No

Submit
Appendix 3

Research study participants needed

My name is Anna Julian and I am conducting a research study that is aiming to explore experiences of employees with Asperger Syndrome in a workplace. This research is being conducted as part of my BA (Hons) in Psychology in Dublin Business School (DBS) and it has received approval from the Ethics Board at DBS.

You are invited to participate in this research study that will form the basis for an undergraduate thesis and will be submitted for examination. Participation is completely voluntary so you are not obliged to take part.

If you are interested in taking part in this study please follow the link below for more information:

https://goo.gl/forms/1d88q8aN57jNmf93

or contact at:

Please feel free to share this link with your friends, it would be very much appreciated.

Thank you.
Anna Julian

Appendix 4
Interview Questions

1) Could you tell me a bit about yourself?
   - Please tell me about your hobbies.
   - How do you spend your leisure time?

2) Could you tell me a bit about your job interview experiences?

3) Could describe your current workplace?
   - How many hours per day do you work?
   - Could you describe your working conditions?

4) Could you also describe your experiences in interactions with your work colleagues?
   - Do you work independently or in a team?
   - Which is your preferred type of work and could you explain a little bit more?
   - How do you spend your lunch breaks?

5) What has your experience been of your diagnosis been known in your workplace?

6) Would you mind describing how do you feel in your work environment?
   - What do you enjoy the most in your workplace?
   - What do you enjoy the least in your workplace?

7) What motivates you at work?

8) Is there any aspect of your work environment that you feel needs improvement?

9) Could you describe your ideal job?
   - What kind of work tasks do you enjoy performing the most?

10) Is there anything you would like to add?