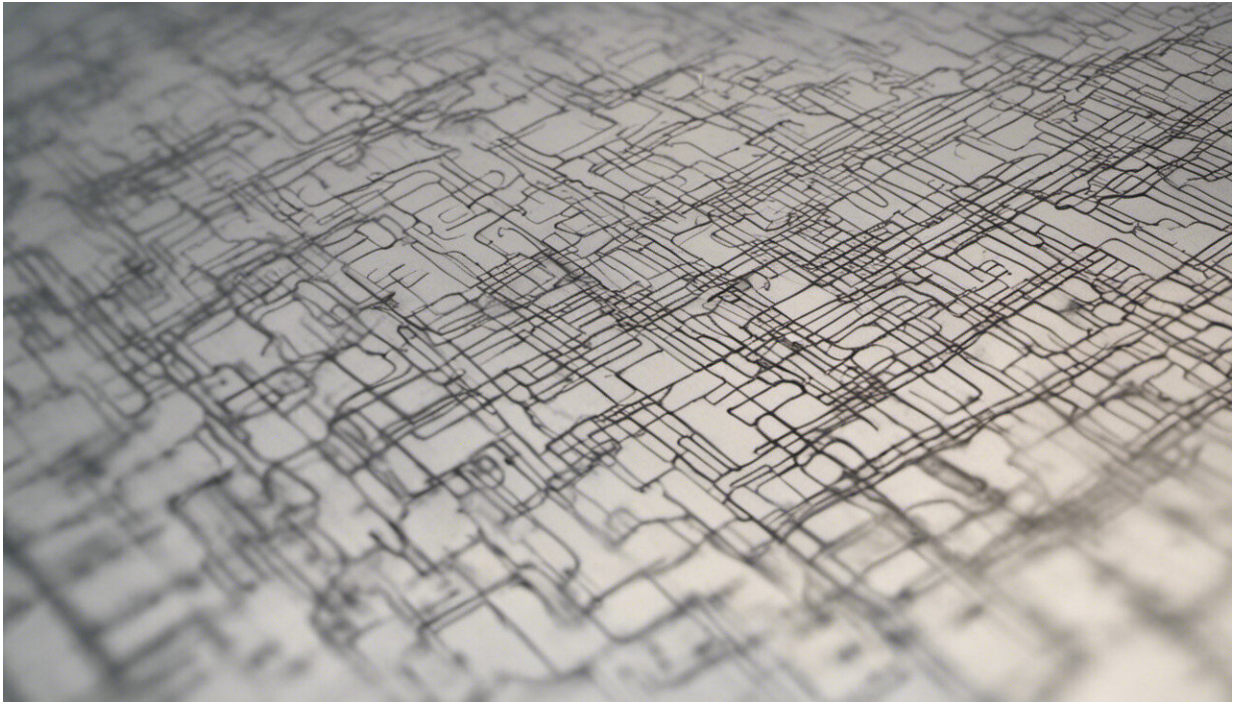


Autistic workers and bosses differ on support

December 17 2015, by Rob Payne, Sciencenetwork Wa



Credit: AI-generated image ([disclaimer](#))

Curtin University researchers are testing a system to enable employers to identify ways to best accommodate workers living with autism spectrum disorders (ASD).

Using the tool employers should be able to better recognise the strengths of employees with ASD, identifying potential difficulties in the workplace and providing strategies to modify the [work environment](#).

The research is designed to improve the working situation for people with ASD after previous research found [workers](#) with ASD had different expectations of support and structure than their managers in workplaces.

Affecting an estimated 115,000 adults in Australia, ASD encompasses developmental disorders generally characterised by difficulties in social interactions and communication and unusual or repetitive behaviour.

These numbers are rising, which makes finding methods to promote clear understanding of ASD workers' needs vital.

In order to better understand the situation, researchers from Curtin and the Autism CRC asked 40 adults with ASD and 35 employers to share their perceptions of workplace dynamics.

Responses showed workers and management shared similar desires to make working relationships work, but very different ideas about how.

For example, while workers with ASD linked confidence to a highly structured work environment, employers were more inclined to have their staff adapt and 'work it out'.

"This suggests that once employers have provided the opportunity to work, it is the employee's responsibility to meet productivity requirements, in order to maintain the job," Curtin University PhD candidate Melissa Scott says.

A key for individuals with ASD was a manager being present to offer necessary workplace support.

However, employers showed a lack of confidence in modifying workplaces to fit ASD workers' needs without the help of disability employment organisations.

"Despite high levels of skills and the desire to work, individuals with ASD continue to remain unemployed or underemployed," Ms Scott says.

"For many individuals with ASD, interaction difficulties have the largest impact on their ability to apply for and maintain stable employment."

This includes 'selling themselves' in the interview stage and navigating the often subtle nuances of communication and social interaction in the workplace.

"In Western countries, the labour force participation rate for adults with ASD is 34 per cent, compared with 54 per cent for all individuals with disabilities and 83 per cent for individuals without disabilities," she says.

In post-study feedback, [individuals](#) with ASD raised issues like workplace bullying, work-related anxiety experiences and disclosure of ASD to employers and fellow colleagues as areas that needed investigating.

More information: Melissa Scott et al. Viewpoints on Factors for Successful Employment for Adults with Autism Spectrum Disorder, *PLOS ONE* (2015). [DOI: 10.1371/journal.pone.0139281](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0139281)

This article first appeared on [ScienceNetwork Western Australia](#) a science news website based at Scitech.

Provided by Science Network WA

Citation: Autistic workers and bosses differ on support (2015, December 17) retrieved 25 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2015-12-autistic-workers-bosses-differ.html>

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