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Motivations, barriers and facilitators for neurodivergent people in entrepreneurship

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1. Introduction

Nowadays, neurodiversity has gained significant traction in workplace discourse and is increasingly prominent in business media, spurred by the endorsement of targeted inclusion initiatives by some famous companies. However, from an academic standpoint, neurodiversity remains inadequately defined, plagued by conflicting and insufficient definitions, overlapping symptomatology, and a lack of clear guidance on practical workplace support (Doyle, 2020). Estimates suggest that up to 17% of the US workforce may be neuroatypical, referring to individuals whose neurological functioning falls at the extreme ends of naturally occurring variation. While neurodivergent individuals have historically faced challenges in employment, there's a growing recognition among scholars and organisations of the importance of including them in the modern workplace, promoting neurodiversity within organisations as a crucial aspect of diversity. Despite this increasing interest, there's been surprisingly little research bridging neurodiversity and organisational diversity. Existing literature is scattered across various academic disciplines, often outside of industrial-organisational psychology, and rarely examines the employment of neuroatypical workers explicitly from a diversity perspective. The assertion is that with the ongoing evolution and increasing specialisation of work, neurodiversity will emerge as a progressively significant facet of organisational diversity. It is likely to significantly impact both the well-being and performance outcomes of individual employees and contribute to organisational success (LeFevre-Levy et al., 2023).

Throughout this thesis, we often refer to people with disabilities (PWDs). This terminology is selected because, within the current societal context, neurodivergent individuals are regarded as falling under the category of people with disabilities, despite assertions from the neurodiversity movement that they represent individual differences rather than impairments. Indeed, it is essential to address a key distinction present in the literature between disability and impairment. The Social Model of Disability delineates "impairment" as the functional limitation within an individual caused by physical, mental, or sensory impairment, while "disability" refers to the loss or restriction of opportunities to engage in normal community life on an equal footing with others due to physical and social barriers (Barnes, 1991). Nevertheless, acknowledging the challenges faced by neurodivergent individuals in conforming to conventional societal norms, we recognize their significant obstacles in our society. Consequently, we incorporate neurodivergent individuals into the broader category of PWDs.

In our modern capitalist societies, companies focus primarily on making profit, which is why companies tend to not integrate very well neurodivergent workers, who are most of the time seen as not productive enough, unable to do demanding work and struggling to work well with and be understood by their neurotypical workers. It is a problem for these people who struggle to find a job and it also has a significant impact on the economy as it results in a lower participation rate in the labour force (Csillag & Al, 2019). It has also been found that in general people with disabilities have lower employment rates than people without disabilities (Mizunoya and Mitra, 2012).

To fix those problems, one of the opportunities that presents itself to neuroatypical people (and disabled people on a broader scale) is self-employment and entrepreneurship (Maritz and Laferriere, 2016). It may be a partial key to increase workforce participation, economic development and social inclusion for disabled people. There is still a significant lack of research on the topic of entrepreneurs with disabilities (EWDs), and some of the reasons for that are the difficulty to get reliable data on the exact number or characteristics of EWDs, and the fact that disability is a heterogeneous social construct, which can vary in type, severity, stability, time of onset, duration, etc (Csillag & Al, 2019). This is one of the reasons why we chose to focus specifically on neurodivergent people and not on all disabilities in this study, to be more specific and get more reliable conclusions. In this study we want to highlight the specific reasons why neurodivergent people decide to get into entrepreneurship, as well as knowing which of their neurodivergent characteristics could facilitate their entrepreneurial journey and match the entrepreneurial mindset, and finding what challenges could they face in entrepreneurship.

The structure of this thesis will be as follows. Firstly, the literature review highlights the meaning of the “neurodiversity” concept and how this movement has emerged globally in recent years. It will also clarify what type of conditions are included in the term “neurodiversity” (autism, ADHD, dys disorders...), explain what these disorders consist of, and do a comparison between the concepts of disability and impairment, as well as between employment and entrepreneurship. Then, the literature review encompasses existing studies examining the positive motivations for self-employment and entrepreneurship over traditional waged employment, as well as the negative discriminations and difficulties in the labour market that prompt individuals to 'opt out' of waged employment. Moreover, it delves into existing studies focusing on the challenges encountered by neurodivergent entrepreneurs due to their specific conditions and how the social environment responds to their condition. Additionally,

it explores how some studies have started to explore the facilitators for neurodivergent people to engage in entrepreneurial activities due to their specific cognitive functioning.

Following the literature review, subsequent chapters will detail the methodology used for collecting information through interviews with twelve neurodivergent entrepreneurs, followed by an analysis and explanation of the findings along with their limitations. Employing the Gioia Methodology, semi-structured interviews were conducted with twelve entrepreneurs meeting specific criteria: individuals who are, were, or intend to be self-employed (either full or part-time) and with a diagnosis of neurodivergence. Various approaches were used to identify entrepreneurs, including contacting entrepreneurial organisations and institutions regrouping neurodivergent people. The aim is to gain insights into the experiences lived by neurodivergent entrepreneurs and therefore try to answer the research question: “*What are the motivations, barriers and facilitators for neurodivergent people in entrepreneurship?*”. This research focuses on collecting qualitative data from French-speaking entrepreneurs in Belgium and France.

2. Literature review

2.1. Important terms and definitions

Neurodiversity

Before trying to answer the research question, it is important to clarify what exactly the neurodiversity movement is, and which neurological conditions are included in this category.

The neurodiversity movement, predominantly led by autistic individuals, asserts that autism is not a disease warranting treatment or cure but rather a unique aspect of human diversity deserving equal respect (Oretga, 2009). In its broadest sense, neurodiversity views atypical neurological development as a normal human difference (Krzeminska et al., 2019; Jaarsma & Welin, 2012). Jaarsma & Welin (2012) claim that the neurodiversity movement encompasses two main aspects: first, that conditions like autism represent natural variations, and second, that individuals with neurodiverse conditions deserve recognition, acceptance, and rights, akin to other aspects of human diversity.

Thomas Armstrong (2010) from the American Institute for Learning and Human Development identifies several key neurodiversities in his book. He highlights seven specific conditions due to their relevance and frequent examination in research. These include Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), dys disorders, mood disorders, anxiety disorders, intellectual disabilities, and schizophrenia.

In this thesis, we will mainly focus on autism, ADHD, and dys disorders because they are the most documented in the literature regarding the links between neurodiversity and entrepreneurship.

Autism spectrum disorder (ASD)

In the literature, ASD is defined as a developmental disorder that characterise individuals exhibiting a unique blend of challenges in social communication, repetitive behaviours, narrow interests, and/or sensory sensitivities that typically manifest early in childhood (Frith et al., 2005; Faja et al., 2017; Campisi et al., 2018; Lord et al., 2020; Hirota et al., 2023).

Purkis & Cook (2023) offer a complete definition of autism in their book. While historically viewed as a deficit, a newer perspective gaining traction is the concept of neurodiversity, which recognizes autistic individuals as 'different, not less' compared to non-autistic individuals. Each autistic person experiences autism uniquely, but common attributes include differences in communication styles between autistic and neurotypical individuals, a logical approach to life, literal interpretation of conversations, social challenges, anxiety, resistance to change, sensory processing issues, hyper-empathy, and difficulties with facial expressions and recognizing faces. Autistic individuals often thrive on routine, may exhibit pathological demand avoidance, and are more likely to be transgender or gender divergent. They often have passionate interests, engage in stimming behaviours, struggle with eye contact, and tend to be honest and perfectionistic. Burnout is common when overloaded, and many autistic people possess a deep understanding of animals and nature. Despite stereotypes, autistic individuals can be highly creative, gifted, and excel in thinking 'outside the box'. Autism is not acquired but innate, and many autistic individuals value themselves as they are. They often find connection and understanding among other autistic or neurodivergent individuals, akin to being amongst peers from the same culture. However, individual differences exist, and while autistic individuals may relate better to one another, it's not a universal rule compared to interactions with neurotypical individuals.

Kapp et al. (2013) also suggest that the neurodiversity movement views autism as an inseparable aspect of identity. The neurodiversity movement emphasises the celebration of autism as a positive identity that does not need a cure. Autistic individuals endorsed a relatively essentialist biological attribution of autism.

Attention-Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)

According to the American Psychiatric Association (APA) in 1994, ADHD is characterised by a persistent pattern of inattention and/or hyperactivity that exceeds what is typically observed in individuals at a similar stage of development. There is a consensus that ADHD is a neurodevelopmental disorder stemming from brain circuitry issues related to inhibition and self-control, resulting in behavioural, cognitive, and affective challenges that manifest early and persist over time. The DSM-IV identifies three subtypes of ADHD: predominantly hyperactive, predominantly inattentive, and mixed symptoms.

Regarding the ADHD, Biederman & Faraone (2005) recognize it as a neurodevelopmental disorder characterised by symptoms of inattention, impulsivity, and hyperactivity. It affects approximately 8–12% of children globally, and while the prevalence tends to decrease with age, a significant proportion of individuals continue to experience impairing symptoms into adulthood. ADHD has been the subject of extensive scientific research, addressing questions related to its validity, causes, and treatment.

While some individuals with ADHD report symptoms persisting from early childhood, significant impairments may not become apparent until adolescence or early adulthood, especially when individuals face increasingly demanding expectations for self-management in schooling, employment, and daily life (Brown, 2009).

The pathophysiology of ADHD is thought to involve dysregulation of frontal-subcortical-cerebellar catecholaminergic circuits. Molecular imaging studies have suggested abnormalities in the dopamine transporter, leading to impaired neurotransmission, as a potential contributor to the disorder (Biederman & Faraone, 2005).

Along similar lines, Brown (2009) argues that ADHD is fundamentally a cognitive disorder, representing a developmental impairment of executive functions (EFs), which constitute the brain's self-management system. While EFs are intricate, their impairment forms a recognizable syndrome in clinical practice, involving chronic difficulties in executing various daily tasks.

In addition, White et al. (2011) emphasise that adults with ADHD exhibit enhanced creativity, not only in laboratory tasks but also in real-world creative achievements.

As we will explore further, Lerner et al. (2018) highlight that ADHD's potentially impact entrepreneurship and its varied effects, sometimes positive and sometimes negative.

Dys disorders

According to Crunelle (2008) dys disorders refer to individuals experiencing genuine neurological dysfunction. The author underlines that if the dysfunction pertains to various aspects, it manifests differently: oral language difficulties are termed receptive and/or expressive dysphasia, while written language challenges are referred to as dyslexia dysorthography. Issues with graphic skills are identified as dysgraphia, and struggles with

learning mathematics are categorised as dyscalculia. Dyspraxia, on the other hand, refers to difficulties with specific skills. These difficulties correspond to specific disorders, of structural origin, characterised by their severity, duration, resistance, and deviant signs, and cannot be explained by sensory, intellectual, motor, or relational deficits. It's not a matter of delay but a disorder, which cannot be caught up. It can, however, be compensated for.

Mazeau's et al. (2021) definition is consistent with Crunelle's. The authors argue that dys disorders are neurological disorders that manifest unexpectedly during a child's development, hence their designation as neurodevelopmental disorders. They posit that for some individuals, dys disorders result from early brain injuries (lesional-dys) with a symptomatology similar to neurodevelopmental dys disorders but with a more pronounced intensity.

Habib (2018) adds a subtlety and emphasise on the interest in viewing dys disorders as a 'constellation'. Often, individuals don't suffer from just one dys disorder, but from a combination of several. The author underscores the importance in seeing this as a schematic representation of all these disorders forming a constellation.

Von Karoly's (2003) research shows a growing perspective that suggests a connection between dyslexia and visual-spatial strengths. According to the author, there is an association between dyslexia and enhanced ability to process visual-spatial information globally or holistically. This challenges the conventional characterization of dyslexia solely as a deficit and suggests the presence of talent in the form of rapid global visual-spatial processing.

Impairment vs Disability

Another aspect that needs to be mentioned is the fact that neurodivergent people can be considered as disabled in our societies for some reasons. Therefore, it also seems crucial to highlight the difference between disabilities and impairments, as there is a big distinction between these two terms. In fact, since the 1960's there have been many attempts to clearly define these concepts, but different models have been created which do not give the same definitions to these terms (Emens & Stein, 2013).

There are two governing disability models that are embraced by states and academics: the medical and the social model (Harpur, 2012).

On one side, the medical model was created by the World Health Organisation (WHO) and define an impairment as, “in the context of health experience, any loss or abnormality of psychological, physiological, or anatomical structure or function”, while they define a disability as “any restriction or lack (resulting from an impairment) of ability to perform an activity in the manner or within the range considered normal for a human being” (Emens & Stein, 2013).

On the other side, some authors working on the social model defined the concept of “impairment” as the functional limitation within the individual caused by physical, mental or sensory impairment, and the concept of “disability” as the loss or limitation of opportunities to take part in the normal life of the community on an equal level with others due to physical and social barriers (Barnes, 1991).

Entrepreneurship vs Employment

There exist different interpretations of entrepreneurship utilised by several theoretical economists. Three recurring themes can be identified in their definitions: 1) the presence of uncertainty and risk, 2) the necessity of complementary managerial skills, and 3) the exercise of creative opportunism. The economists contend that contemporary definitions of entrepreneurship lacking any of these three fundamental aspects are fundamentally incomplete (Long, 1983).

Douglas & Shepard’s study (2000) investigates entrepreneurship as a utility maximising response. According to the authors, in examining the motivations behind choosing entrepreneurship over traditional employment, it is crucial to consider a combination of attitudes towards work, risk, and independence. Positive attitudes in these areas are typically seen in aspiring entrepreneurs, while negative attitudes, particularly towards risk and independence, are rare. The decision to pursue self-employment often hinges on incentive problems within traditional employment.

In their discussion paper Dawson & Henley (2009) highlight that there are Significant differences in motivations among groups. Women, older individuals, and ethnic minorities often cite lifestyle and family reasons, while men are more motivated by financial gain. Educational attainment also influences motivations; more educated individuals view self-employment positively, while the least educated often choose it due to a lack of alternatives or to join family businesses.

Workers within established companies emerge as a significant source of entrepreneurship. In a study involving rapidly growing private companies, Bhidé (1994) discovered that 71% of founders either replicated or modified an idea they came across during previous employment. Similarly, Cooper (1985) noted across various industries that 70% of all founders pursued opportunities closely linked to their prior work experiences. While it's a common reaction to criticise established firms for overlooking these opportunities, this lacks a systematic explanation according to economists. A core premise of Hellman's (2007) paper is that employees transitioning to entrepreneurship can be seen as a natural equilibrium outcome within the innovation process.

According to the empirical analysis of Hamilton (2000), the non-monetary advantages of self-employment are significant. Despite starting with lower initial earnings and experiencing slower earnings growth compared to paid employment, most entrepreneurs choose to enter and continue in business.

2.2. Motivations for neurodivergent people in entrepreneurship

Now that these concepts have been defined, the research question can be tackled by searching what is already known about the problem. We know that people with disabilities (PWDs) are more likely to be self-employed than the general population, but in the other way they are less likely to reach success in their projects and they face many challenges due to their condition (Renko et al., 2016).

First of all, concerning the motivations of EWDs, literature shows that self-employment is attractive for people with disabilities because “it can provide more flexibility than paid employment in terms of workload, work schedule and work location, which can allow for better management of disability and lifestyle” (OECD, 2014).

As already mentioned, PWDs have a bigger chance to endure discrimination in the field of work, and this is another reason why they are often inclined to start entrepreneurial activities. This choice gives to many of them the opportunity to enter the labour market and with it, improved income and living standard (OECD, 2014).

To specifically address our research question, we found that the motivation of neurodivergent individuals stems mainly from employment challenges. Employment presents various challenges for neurodivergent individuals, and this could be a contributing factor to their preference for pursuing an entrepreneurial path instead.

According to Krzeminska et al. (2019), challenges begin even in the hiring process, that may define talent too narrowly, particularly relying on job interviews that may be biased against those with atypical interaction styles.

In his article, Kim (1996) posits that disabled employees exhibit lower promotion rates compared to nondisabled employees. While there is progress in the employment of people with disabilities, the study emphasises that more attention and comprehensive policies are needed for hiring, training, placement, and advancement processes.

Specific employment challenges for people with ASD

The employment challenges faced by autistic adults, despite their willingness and ability, stem from various barriers, including a lack of exposure to work experience and workplace training opportunities (Flower et al., 2019).

According to Patton (2019), despite being highly intelligent and capable, many individuals with ASD, even those with milder forms or higher functioning types, experience high rates of unemployment, with many of those employed being underemployed.

The challenges encountered by ASD workers are attributed to stigmas and discrimination surrounding mental health, attribution theory, and the gap between behaviours common to neurodiverse individuals and prevailing theories in organisational behaviour. The modern workplace needs to foster true inclusion, which requires creating a sense of belonging, valuing uniqueness, and embracing differences within the organisation (Patton, 2019).

Baldwin et al. (2014) add specifically that boredom and repetitive work were significant challenges, especially when individuals were not able to use their skills and knowledge to their full potential.

The challenges also lie in regard to management. Richards (2012) argues that subtle, covert, and non-negotiable forms of management control contribute to the exclusion process. Still according to Richards (2012), a deficient conflict dynamic arises between individuals with Asperger syndrome and their employers. The author adds that an absence of a healthy conflict dynamic was noted as a factor in the exclusion process.

Specific employment challenges for people with ADHD

Various studies (Florey & Harrison; Freedman & Keller; Hall & Hall; Stone & Colella, in Patton, 2009) have proposed and demonstrated the existence of social and psychological barriers in the workplace that adversely affect disabled workers. Also, Murphy and Barkley (1996) emphasise that ADHD adults were more likely to experience frequent changes in employment.

Patton (2009) contends that ADHD is among the most prevalent mental disorders in adults, prompting interest in its impact on work. Besides concerns about employee performance and well-being, there are legal obligations for organisations and HR professionals to address ADHD in the workplace. Adults with ADHD often change jobs frequently, exhibit high rates of absenteeism, and are prone to workplace accidents. Impulsivity and difficulty in considering consequences contribute to job turnover and can lead to issues like workplace theft. The interpersonal challenges associated with ADHD, such as a quick temper and inappropriate behaviour, can lead to conflicts with colleagues and supervisors, resulting in workplace discord. Research consistently shows that interpersonal conflict negatively affects individuals and organisations. Adults with ADHD also tend to have lower occupational status, likely due to educational challenges and lower completion rates in college. Unfortunately, low-status occupations are where individuals with ADHD struggle the most and perform poorly.

With all these challenges for ADHD individuals in the workplace, Antshel (2018) maintains that individuals with ADHD symptoms may turn to entrepreneurship due to a lack of alternative options rather than a natural inclination.

Specific employment challenges for people with dys disorders

Taylor et al. (2003) posits that adults with dyslexia are less likely to be involved in professions such as science/computing, management, and finance, which heavily rely on written work, numerical and symbolic processing, and often entail short deadlines.

Instead, individuals with dyslexia are more likely to be engaged in people-oriented professions such as nursing, sales, or construction. The case study of a teacher with dyslexia highlights the preference for a people-oriented profession that utilises visuospatial and artistic talents while minimising written content (Taylor et al., 2003).

Motivation for independence and self-determination

Doyle (2002) and Harpur et al., (2020) state that the pursuit of independence and self-determination emerges as a significant motivation driving disabled individuals towards entrepreneurship. This theme reflects a desire to transcend societal perceptions of dependency and establish a sense of control over one's economic and personal trajectory. Disabled entrepreneurs often seek autonomy in decision-making, enabling them to align their business ventures with their unique strengths and passions.

This motivation aligns closely with the principles of the social model of disability, which emphasizes the role of societal barriers in constraining disabled individuals' opportunities. Entrepreneurship empowers them to challenge these barriers, demonstrating their capability to contribute actively to the economy and society (Hapur et al., 2020).

Motivation for flexibility and work-life balance

In their 2020 study, Harpur and Blanck highlight the significant motivation for flexibility and work-life balance among disabled entrepreneurs. They argue that the desire for a more adaptable schedule and the ability to better manage personal and professional responsibilities drive many individuals to pursue entrepreneurship.

In their study about self-employed individuals with psychiatric disabilities, Ostraw et al. (2018) argue that this flexibility allows entrepreneurs to tailor their work environments to their specific needs, fostering a better balance between work and life. Such autonomy is especially appealing to those seeking to escape the rigid structures of traditional employment, thereby enhancing overall job satisfaction and well-being.

Personal fulfilment and passion

As per Purkis & Cook (2023), a significant number of autistic and neurodivergent individuals opt for self-employment. Autistic individuals excel in the necessary research and evaluation for

their entrepreneurial endeavours. Additionally, it provides them with a platform to display their creativity, especially in fields where uniqueness is valued, like in art, design, and fashion industries.

The preference for entrepreneurship among individuals with ADHD-like behaviour may be linked to their tendency to take risks (Verheul et al., 2015). Wiklund et al. (2018) argue that entrepreneurship is proposed as an alternative career path that could benefit individuals with mental disorders, providing them with opportunities to earn a living, reduce suffering, and lead fulfilling lives.

2.3. Barriers for neurodivergent people in entrepreneurship:

Nowadays, there is already some literature talking about the barriers encountered by entrepreneurs with disabilities.

Firstly, one of these barriers is directly related to disabilities themselves, which cause for example fatigue and make it difficult for EWDs to work constantly and put the effort required to reach success (Jammaers & Zanoni, 2020).

Specifically autistic individuals, the first challenge we can identify lies in the very beginning of the entrepreneurial path. Indeed, as explained by Purkis & Cook (2023), autistic individuals tend to be afraid of embarking on something new and far prefer to see life as predictable.

For ADHD people, Wiklund et al. (2017) highlight that inattention is negatively associated with entrepreneurship, possibly due to its link with urgency, which hinders entrepreneurial preferences.

In relation to individuals with dys disorders, as previously noted, Taylor et al. (2003) contend that they are less inclined to pursue careers in fields such as science/computing, management, and finance. These sectors often require strong written communication skills, numerical and symbolic processing abilities, and frequently involve tight deadlines—qualities crucial in the initial stages of entrepreneurship. Consequently, individuals with dys disorders may encounter challenges with specific tasks and may need to depend on a robust support network.

In general terms, entrepreneurship activities can also be seen as too risky, and even more so for people having disabilities, as it leads to a loss of regular benefit income. They also have bigger chances to be less competitive on the market if they have increased labour costs due the help needed to undertake certain tasks (OECD, 2014).

In the following part, the characteristic barriers and supporting factors are identified, which exist on a variety of levels, namely, personal and social factors. The levels are interconnected, e.g. a segregated education system (social level) could be responsible for the skill or competence shortage of the EWD (personal level). Moreover, some of the factors may have two sides: on the one hand, knowledge or self-confidence, etc., gained during the education period could support entrepreneurship, while on the other, bad experiences and discriminative school practices could become serious barriers (Sara Csillag et al., 2019).

2.4. Facilitators for neurodivergent people in entrepreneurship:

As discussed previously, neurodivergent individuals may choose entrepreneurship for a variety of reasons. Now, our attention shifts to examining the facilitators that make entrepreneurship a more accessible and favourable choice for neurodivergent individuals.

Bagheri and Abbariki (2017) discovered that disabled entrepreneurs exhibit distinct personal and functional entrepreneurial skills. Personal skills encompass attitudinal competencies, entrepreneurial self-efficacy, and self-efficacy in entrepreneurial learning. Functional competencies, on the other hand, entail entrepreneurial capabilities, commitment, and social competencies. Therefore, it seems that these competencies can be seen as an advantage and a facilitating factor in their entrepreneurial projects.

Firstly, neurodivergent individuals demonstrate aptitude for leadership roles, thus enhancing the feasibility of initiating an entrepreneurial venture. In a study led by Robertson et al. (2021), it is shown that cognitive attributes associated with neurodiversity can lead to task-oriented leadership behaviours, impacting both leaders and followers. The model also incorporates enabling conditions that facilitate the recognition of neurodiverse individuals as effective leaders. The authors also highlight that neurodiversity as a cognitive capability can reshape

perceptions of disability in organisations and enrich leadership conceptualizations and practices.

Facilitators for people with ASD

In research, facilitators for autistic individuals in entrepreneurship have not been investigated. We thus recognize the importance of such research. However, Purkis & Cook (2023) provide some insights into characteristics of autistic individuals that could be considered facilitators for those deciding to pursue an entrepreneurial career. Indeed, the authors explain in their book "Planning your career through intense interests" that autistic individuals have a very logical way of looking at things, which could be a facilitator given the rigour required for self-employment (Berglund et al., 2018). The authors suggest a link between passions and work, and how these can determine the careers of individuals on the autism spectrum. Additionally, they are often highly talented in their areas of passion. The authors emphasise that despite stereotypes, autistic individuals are very creative and think "outside the box," which could also be an asset for embarking on an entrepreneurial career.

According to Purkis & Cook (2023), many autistic individuals and neurodivergent individuals turn to self-employment. Autistic individuals thrive in the required research and assessment for their entrepreneurial success. It is also an opportunity to showcase their creativity to the world, particularly in areas where appearing different is an asset, such as in the art, design, and fashion sectors.

Facilitators for people with ADHD

According to Canits et al. (2019), the challenges associated with ADHD in employment can be advantageous for entrepreneurship. In the same vein, Lerner et al. (2019) assert that even a condition traditionally considered pathological, such as ADHD, can serve as a potential wellspring for entrepreneurial action. Moore et al. (2021) also highlight that there exist meaningful connections between neurodiversity from ADHD and various aspects of an entrepreneurial mindset.

Traits such as independence, less structured routines, increased room for creativity, multitasking abilities, and thriving in fast-paced environments are all positive aspects that individuals may not typically find in traditional employment settings (Canits et al., 2019).

The positive connection between clinical ADHD and both entrepreneurial intentions and actions has consistently emerged in the body of research. (Verheul et al., 2016; Lerner et al., 2019). While traditionally pathologized, recent studies have suggested a positive relationship between ADHD and creativity, entrepreneurial orientation, and new venture initiation (Lerner, 2018).

Entrepreneurs with ADHD tend to exhibit a more intuitive cognitive style, higher levels of entrepreneurial alertness, and greater reliance on the resource-induced coping heuristic (Moore et al., 2021).

White et al. (2006) explains that individuals with ADHD outperform non-ADHD individuals in divergent thinking tasks but perform worse in convergent thinking tasks and a semantic inhibitory control task. This study suggests that the relationship between ADHD and creative ability is partially mediated by differences in inhibition.

White et al. (2011) investigate the relationship of ADHD and entrepreneurship in an ulterior study. In this study, ADHD participants showed a higher preference for the Ideator style, associated with idea generation, while non-ADHD participants had higher preferences for the Clarifier and Developer styles, related to problem clarification and idea development. ADHD is linked to higher levels of originality, not just fluency, in verbal measures of divergent thinking. ADHD-related cognitive characteristics, such as variable attention and abnormal processing of irrelevant information, may contribute to divergent thinking and unconventional idea generation.

Another specificity of people with ADHD is hyperactivity. Hyperactivity shows a positive association with entrepreneurship, particularly through traits like sensation seeking (Verheul et al., 2016; Wiklund et al., 2017). Hyperactivity symptoms, rather than inattentive symptoms, play a more significant role in the reported associations between ADHD and aspects of entrepreneurship (Antshel, 2018).

Wiklund et al. (2016) add that concepts directly related to ADHD, particularly impulsivity, play a significant role in driving entrepreneurial action and its consequences. This behavioural logic, driven by an internal sense of what is appropriate to do, aligns with the nature of entrepreneurial action under uncertainty. For individuals with ADHD, impulsivity facilitates an ongoing

process of experimentation, leading to outcomes on both positive and negative ends. Impulsivity, often viewed with negative connotations, is suggested to be more prevalent among entrepreneurs than the general population. Typically considered a trait with negative connotations, impulsivity may have advantages in the entrepreneurial context. Its dimensions can influence the recognition, exploitation, and persistence with entrepreneurial opportunities in complex ways, leading to varied impacts on entrepreneurial action (Wiklund et al., 2018).

Facilitators for people with dys disorders

The literature has also explored the correlation between individuals with dys disorders and entrepreneurship. Von Karolyi et al. (2003) underscore that dyslexia is not only linked to deficits but also to talents. Logan's (2009) findings suggest that dyslexic entrepreneurs may excel in delegation, possibly as a compensatory strategy, leading to faster company growth. The ability to delegate is crucial for business success, and dyslexics' expertise in this area could provide them with a competitive advantage. Dyslexic individuals in the study demonstrated strong oral communication skills, another essential attribute for entrepreneurs to rally resources and build successful companies.

Key findings of Logan's et al. (2012) study show that self-employment allows individuals with dyslexia to leverage their strengths and delegate tasks that pose difficulties, such as administrative work. Additionally, dyslexic entrepreneurs often rely on intuitive decision-making and creative problem-solving, viewing challenges from unique perspectives. This creativity, linked to right-brain skills, gives them an edge in business. The study concludes that the combination of these skills and the ability to think differently positions dyslexic entrepreneurs for success, advocating for a neurodiversity perspective that celebrates these attributes.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research approach

After conducting a literature review summarizing existing research findings on the subject, a qualitative study was undertaken to compare the real-life situations of entrepreneurs. This study involved a sample of 12 respondents. Given that the required information concerned individuals' entrepreneurial experiences, as well as their experiences with neurodivergence, qualitative data analysis was employed. The use of a qualitative research method for this study is justified by the need to deeply understand the experiences and perspectives of this population. This method captures the complexity of personal narratives and explores factors that quantitative approaches cannot fully apprehend. By collecting detailed data through interviews and observations, it allows for the development of theories grounded in the lived realities of neurodivergent individuals, thus providing relevant recommendations to improve policies supporting inclusive entrepreneurship.

The objective of this analysis was to identify similarities among entrepreneurs with different types of neurodivergence in their entrepreneurial endeavours. Additionally, the study aimed to gain an overall understanding of the respondents' journey characteristics. Personal information regarding their experiences with neurodivergence and its impact on their professional life was gathered.

Primary data collection was chosen due to the lack of pertinent data on the subject currently. Consequently, data had to be obtained directly from the entrepreneurs themselves. Data collection occurred primarily through interviews, a widely utilized method in primary data collection research. Interviews were conducted individually and remotely via Teams or Google Meet, except for one conducted with an autistic entrepreneur and his mother because she insisted to be present due to her implication in the procedures of her son.

The decision to conduct semi-structured interviews was made to ensure the collection of necessary data based on the literature review, while allowing flexibility to explore additional insights. This approach enabled entrepreneurs to freely provide information beyond the scope of the prepared questions, accommodating variations in understanding and interpretation. The interviewer could adjust questions based on respondents' reactions, promoting more genuine

and spontaneous responses. Further details, including the interview guide, can be found in Appendix 1.

3.2. Data collection

Since the subjects of the study were neurodivergent entrepreneurs, they needed to be located and interviewed.

The interviewees were identified through two main channels: word-of-mouth referrals and targeted recruitment posts on Facebook groups. The word-of-mouth referrals included connections from a friend working in a business incubator and acquaintances of neurodivergent entrepreneurs. Recruitment messages were posted on various Facebook groups, focusing both on entrepreneurship and on communities for neurodivergent individuals. Moreover, in one instance, an individual was directly contacted after his entrepreneurial journey, as an autistic person, was highlighted in the media. This approach ensured the inclusion of participants with publicly recognized experiences, thereby enriching the study with varied and significant perspectives.

As I am a student at UCLouvain, the logical choice was to search for participants primarily in Belgium, specifically in the French speaking part of the country. However, due to various circumstances and the fact that the questions (or answers already gathered) were not country-specific, the search for candidates was extended to France. All interviews were conducted in French, with all respondents being French speakers, and the sentences used in the report analyses were translated in English.

The interview guide was designed to gather information about individuals' personal lives and backgrounds, as well as their professional journeys, to understand the role their neurodivergence played throughout. The questions aimed to collect factual data and gain insights into the individuals' thoughts, perspectives, and feelings about their situations. The guide explored the participants' personal lives, focusing on their neurodivergence from childhood to adulthood, how these impacted their lives practically, and their perceptions of themselves.

Sample questions included: “At what age have you been diagnosed? And how?” ; “Could you describe how the evolution and intensity of your symptoms have been through your life?” ; “Could you describe how your neurodivergence has influenced your personal life in any aspect before and after the diagnosis?”.

Additionally, the guide collected information about the participants' educational and professional experiences before delving into their entrepreneurial endeavours. It then focused on what being an entrepreneur means for their situation and the associated aspects. This was a first step in understanding why they chose self-employment and its impact on their lives, supported by literature indicating that neurodivergent individuals might face barriers in traditional employment, steering them towards self-employment.

Questions included: “(What) did you study? Why did you do these studies?” ; “Did you have educational challenges?” ; “How has your neurodivergence influenced your education?” ; “Why did you make these career choices?” ; “How has your neurodivergence influenced your professional life?” ; “What are the challenges that you faced in traditional workplaces?” ; “Did you experience boredom and repetitive work in a traditional workplace?” ; “Did you have issues with the type of management in a traditional workplace?” ; “Did you have conflicts with colleagues and superiors in the traditional workplace?” ; “Did you have difficulties with hiring processes?”.

The third sub-question of this study addressed the barriers to entrepreneurship, discussed through questions about business creation, obstacles, challenges, support received, and the success of the venture. This part of the questionnaire aimed to understand how starting a self-employment journey as a person with a disability affects their life and whether it is a viable solution. This complements earlier questions that focused on how individuals reached the decision to pursue self-employment due to their disability and professional experiences.

The interviews highlighted various advantages and reasons for entrepreneurship for neurodivergent people, suggesting an alternative to traditional employment and self-employment.

3.3. Data sample

The aim was to interview individuals with different types of neurodivergence, but focusing on Autism, ADHD and dys disorders as we mainly found scientific literature about these three types. We wanted to gather different perspectives and potentially a broad range of disability-specific abilities or strategies for self-employment.

As we specified earlier, the neurodivergent entrepreneurs were primarily found through word-of-mouth with friends, directly referred by another interviewee or by posting announcements on social media groups. These groups were related to entrepreneurship, neurodivergence or specifically to autism, ADHD or dys disorders, and were always French-speaking groups. Also, three of the interviewees were found in an Incubator named WeAreFounders in Brussels. All interviews were conducted in March, April and May 2024, lasting from 40 to 130 minutes.

The entrepreneurs were either from Brussels, the Walloon region or France. They range in age from 23 to over 32 years old and were all diagnosed at different stages of their lives. Some were diagnosed in their childhood and others were only diagnosed recently during their adulthood, living their entire life feeling that they were different but not able to put their finger on their difference.

Among the participants, four people have two neurodivergent conditions, three people have three conditions, while the remaining participants have only one each. The group is diverse in terms of gender, comprising seven women and five men. Only two interviewees are married and have children; the others in the sample are legally single and childless. The entrepreneurial activities represented within the group are highly varied. The table below offers a visual overview and comparison of the main data of the interviewees:

Pseudonym	Age and gender	Familial status	Type of neurodivergence	Type of business
Anaïs	31 Female	Married and two children	ADHD Dysorthographia	Tech Start-up for kitchen assistance

Cédric	23 Male	Single and no child	ADHD High potential	Search engine for events Start-up in an incubator
Samuel	30 Male	Single and no child	Autism	Itinerant creperie
Marine	27 Female	Single and no child	Dyspraxia ADHD High potential	Market gardener
Maxence	28 Female	Single and no child	ADHD High potential	UX Design Start-Up in an incubator
François	32 Male	Single and no child	Autism Dyslexia	IT Start-up with a focus on the inclusion of neurodivergent people
Marie	30 Female	Single and no child	Autism OCD Borderline disorder	Production and sale of cookies as a self-employed
Nathan	27 Male	Single and no child	ADHD	Carpenter contractor
Lucie	24 Female	Married and two children	Autism	Musical instrument repairer
Julien	29 Male	Single and no child	ADHD	AI-powered study assistance start-up in an incubator

Manon	28 Female	Single and no child	ADHD Dyslexia Dyspraxia	Psycho- cartomanist as a self-employed
Emma	31 Female	Single and no child	ADHD	Ready-to-wear clothing shop

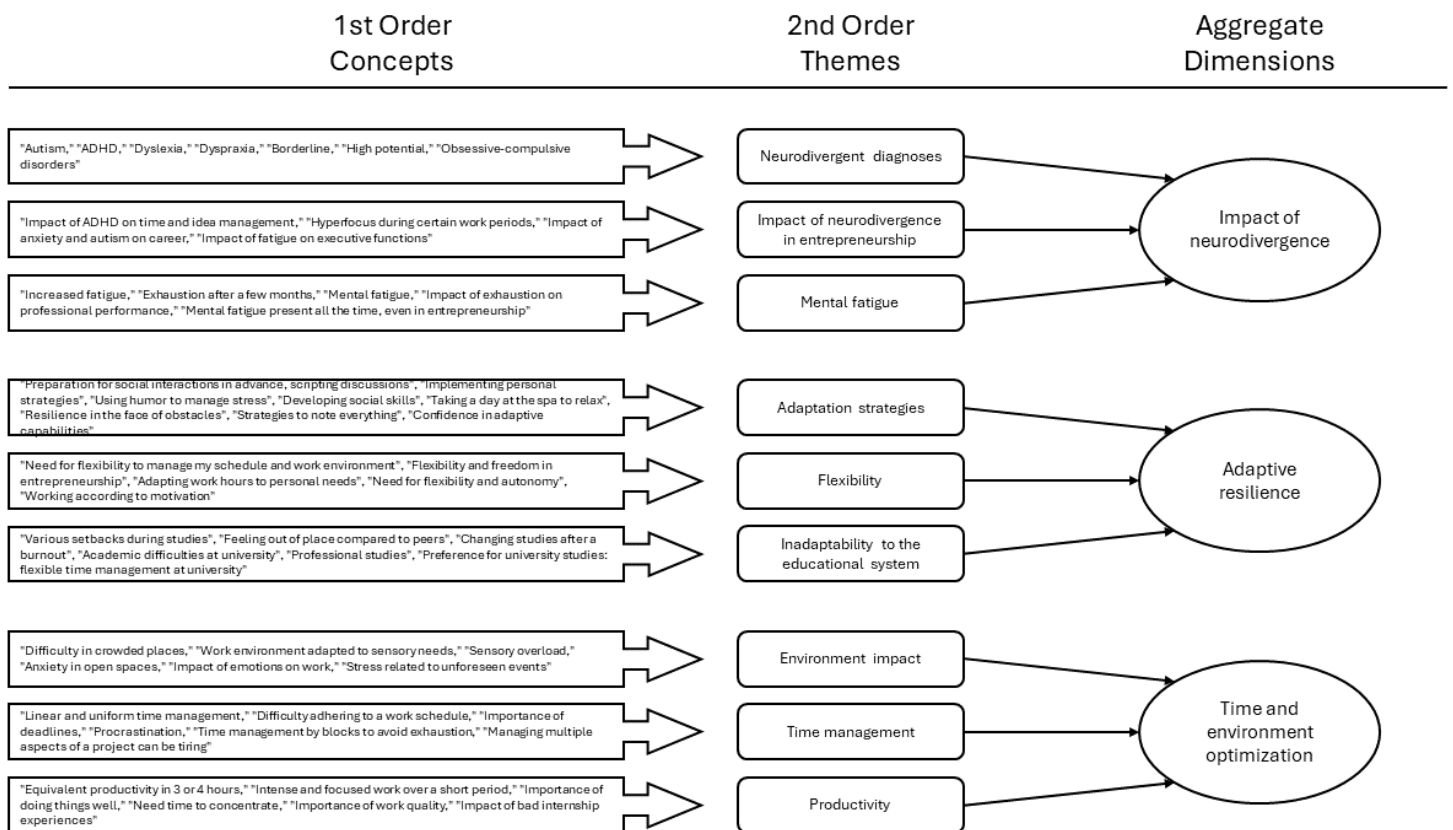
3.4. Data analysis:

The interviews were recorded for transcription. They were then analysed using the Gioia methodology. In their 2023 article, Magnani and Gioia highlight the advantages of this method. They state that the Gioia methodology is a qualitative research approach aimed at developing grounded theories that adhere to high standards of rigour. This methodology takes a comprehensive view of concept development, addressing the challenge of creating new concepts inductively. In contrast to unstructured case studies that lack systematic data coding and analysis, the Gioia methodology introduces greater rigour through a methodical research process. This process involves three key stages: 1) formulating analytic codes and categories, which are organised into a data structure comprising 1st-order (informant-based) codes and 2nd-order (theory-based) themes and dimensions; 2) constructing a grounded theoretical model by continuously comparing data over time and among different informants; and 3) conveying the study's results through a thorough, data-rich narrative, which generally incorporates 2nd-order themes and dimensions, and frequently cites 1st-order quotations from informants (Magnani & Gioia, 2023).

The Gioia method is particularly suitable for this research on the motivations, barriers, and facilitators for neurodivergent individuals in entrepreneurship due to its ability to provide a deep and nuanced understanding of the participants' subjective experiences. As a rigorous qualitative method, it allows for capturing the richness and complexity of individual perceptions through a systematic process of coding and categorizing data. The Gioia method, by structuring data into first-order concepts, second-order themes, and overarching dimensions, facilitates a thorough and analytical exploration of the phenomena under study. This approach is especially useful for identifying underlying dynamics and relationships between different factors influencing entrepreneurship among neurodivergent individuals. Additionally, it enables the

development of a robust theoretical framework that faithfully reflects the lived realities of individuals while providing significant insights for practitioners and policymakers seeking to promote inclusion and support for neurodivergent entrepreneurs.

As you can see below, we have thus developed the data structure of the interviews as well as the subsequent grounded theoretical model.



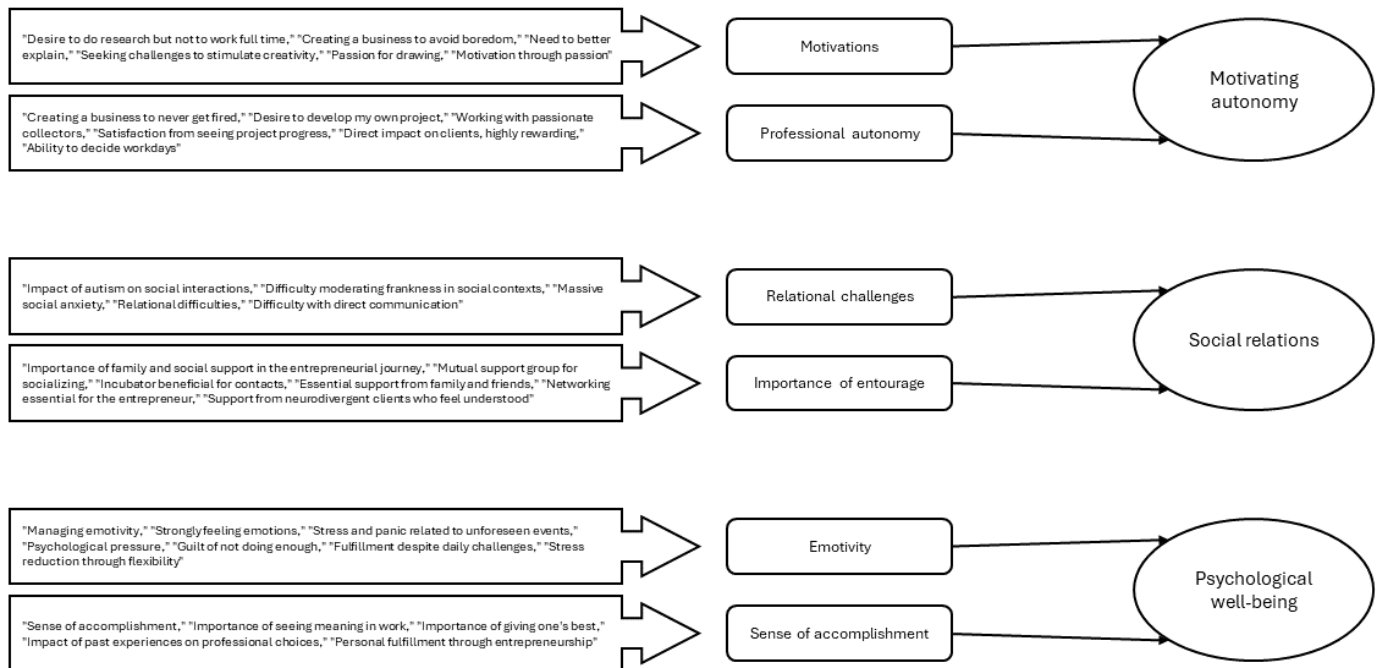


Figure 1: Data structure

In order to construct Figure 1, we extracted words or short phrases according to the progression of each interview to establish the base for the first-order concepts. We then grouped them across all interviews to create a theoretical base of concepts, which are our second-order concepts. After this, we were able to combine them to create our aggregate dimensions, which are: 'Impact of Neurodivergence'; 'Adaptive Resilience'; 'Time and Environment Organization'; 'Motivating Autonomy'; 'Social Relations'; and 'Psychological Well-being.'

We then developed the grounded theoretical model by rearranging the order of the aggregate dimensions to provide a more meaningful representation of the dynamic relationships between the dimensions.

MOTIVATIONS, BARRIERS AND FACILITATORS FOR NEURODIVERGENT PEOPLE IN ENTREPRENEURSHIP

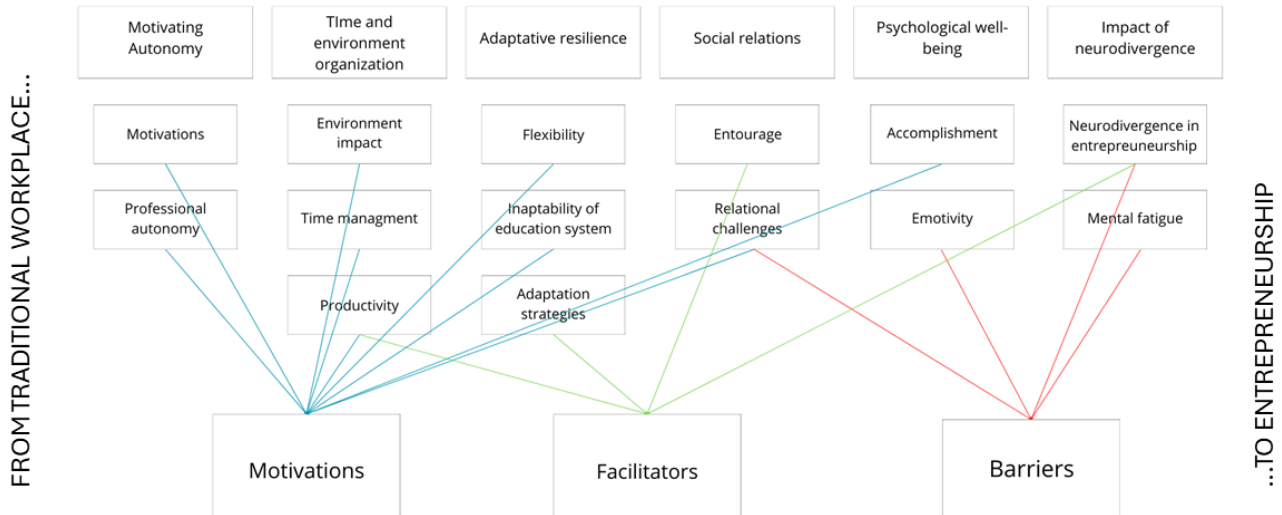


Figure 2: Grounded theoretical model

We deemed it appropriate to link the aggregate dimensions and second-order concepts with the motivations, facilitators, and barriers faced by neurodivergent individuals who embark on entrepreneurship, which is the subject of this thesis.

4. Findings

Following the structure of the grounded theoretical model, this section will present the findings from the data collected through the twelve interviews with neurodivergent entrepreneurs. The first part of the findings will discuss the reasons for choosing to become an entrepreneur as a neurodivergent individual, the second part will highlight the characteristics that these people possess and which facilitate their journey in entrepreneurship compared to neurotypical people, and the third one will reveal the barriers and challenges faced by these entrepreneurs.

4.1. Motivations for neurodivergent people to engage in entrepreneurship

In this section, we will discuss the motivations that may drive neurodivergent individuals to pursue entrepreneurship instead of salaried employment, based on the responses of the twelve entrepreneurs interviewed.

4.1.1. Motivating autonomy

Motivation:

The analysis of interviews with twelve neurodivergent entrepreneurs reveals that challenges and constraints in traditional employment often motivate them to pursue entrepreneurship. Their passion, need for stimulation, and desire to avoid boredom also play significant roles. Neurodivergent individuals have cognitive functions that differ from neurotypical people, and these differences often drive them towards entrepreneurship, allowing them to manage and express their unique cognitive traits more freely. However, these characteristics vary across different types of neurodivergence.

For example, entrepreneurs with attention deficit disorders often perceive themselves as highly creative and find entrepreneurship a suitable outlet for this creativity. Anaïs, a UX Designer with ADHD and dysorthographia, explains: *"To me, true creativity is not artistic subtlety. It's about solving problems and finding solutions, which is what entrepreneurship allows, unlike traditional employment where one often feels stuck."*

The majority of interviewees express that entrepreneurship provides greater freedom and opportunities to manifest their creativity. This constant flow of ideas and interests is more manageable in an entrepreneurial setting, whether for individuals with autism or ADHD.

Samuel, an Asperger's autistic mobile crêpe maker, states, *"I am a creative person, always teeming with ideas. Entrepreneurship allows me to express myself almost freely, unlike in school."*

For Cédric, the primary reason to become an entrepreneur is his constant need for exploration and discovery, driven by extreme curiosity. The impact of risk varies among neurodivergent entrepreneurs. For some, like Cédric, Maxence, Marine, and Nathan (all with ADHD), risk acts as a motivator and source of stimulation, driving them to overcome challenges. Cédric and François view risk as essential to their success and growth. In contrast, Samuel and Marie (both autistic) exhibit a greater aversion to risk, necessitating safety measures and cautious decision-making. Ultimately, risk is seen either as a growth motivator or a challenge to be managed, depending on individual experiences and traits.

In conclusion, neurodivergent entrepreneurs are often driven by a need for flexibility, intellectual stimulation, effective communication, creative challenges, and intrinsic passion. These motivations lead them to entrepreneurship, enabling them to create work environments that cater to their unique needs and strengths.

Professional autonomy:

Motivations are deeply rooted in the desire for professional autonomy, allowing them to create work environments tailored to their unique needs and preferences. This autonomy fosters a sense of control and fulfilment in their professional lives.

Cédric underscores his drive for job security and control over his employment. By starting his own business, he mitigates the uncertainties and potential dismissals inherent in traditional employment, securing his professional stability and independence.

The shared sentiment of wanting to *"develop my own project"* expressed by Maxence, Lucie, Marie, Julien, and Manon, reflects a collective aspiration to bring their unique visions to life. This motivation stems from a desire to take charge of their professional destinies, allowing them to pursue projects they are passionate about and have full control over their development and outcomes.

François highlights the importance of collaborating with like-minded individuals who share his interests. This motivation for autonomy is not just about working independently but also about

creating a professional network that enhances his work experience through shared enthusiasm and expertise.

Julien, Anaïs, and Marie, emphasise the intrinsic reward of witnessing the tangible results of their efforts. This sense of accomplishment drives them to maintain their autonomy, as it allows them to directly influence and observe the evolution of their ventures.

Finally, the universal desire among all the interviewed entrepreneurs to "*decide my own schedule*" highlights the fundamental need for flexible scheduling. This flexibility is a cornerstone of professional autonomy, enabling them to manage their time according to their personal needs and preferences, thereby enhancing their work-life balance and overall job satisfaction.

4.1.2. Time and environment organization

Environment impact:

Traditional workplaces, often bustling with people, can be stressful, pushing them to seek solitude and control over their work environment, which entrepreneurship offers. For Samuel, Marie, and François, who all identify as autistic, the overwhelming nature of crowded workplaces is a significant factor.

Moreover, Samuel, François, Marine, and Lucie emphasise the necessity of a work environment adapted to their sensory needs. Conventional jobs often lack the necessary sensory accommodations, leading to discomfort and decreased productivity. Entrepreneurship allows these individuals to tailor their workspaces to their specific sensory preferences, ensuring a more comfortable and efficient working atmosphere.

The impact of emotions on work performance is another critical factor. Marie, Anaïs, Maxence, Lucie, and Marine note how their emotional states significantly affect their productivity. In traditional roles, managing these emotions in a high-pressure, inflexible environment is challenging. Entrepreneurship offers the flexibility to work according to their emotional well-being, enhancing productivity and job satisfaction.

Finally, the stress associated with unpredictability in traditional work environments is a concern for Marie and Samuel. The sudden changes and unexpected demands in conventional jobs can be particularly stressful. By becoming entrepreneurs, they gain control over their schedules and

workloads, minimising unexpected stressors and creating a more predictable and manageable work life.

Time management:

A common frustration among these interviewees is the "linear and uniform management of time" in traditional jobs. These jobs typically demand a steady, consistent work pace and strict adherence to schedules, incompatible with the natural rhythms and productivity cycles of neurodivergent individuals. This uniform approach does not allow for the flexibility they need to perform at their best, pushing them towards entrepreneurship, where they can set their own schedules and work in ways that suit them better.

Many interviewees express difficulty in adhering to fixed work schedules. Neurodivergent individuals often experience fluctuating energy levels and varying periods of focus, making it challenging to conform to traditional work hours. This difficulty leads to stress and decreased productivity, motivating them to seek the freedom that entrepreneurship provides. As entrepreneurs, they can tailor their working hours to match their personal productivity peaks, enhancing their efficiency and well-being.

Entrepreneurs like Nathan, Julien, Emma, Manon, Cédric, and Anaïs advocate to take breaks when needed and work intensively during their most productive periods. The ability to manage time flexibly is a key driver for their move away from traditional employment, where such flexibility is often not possible.

While inherently demanding, the autonomy of entrepreneurship allows them to control and prioritise tasks according to their capacities and timelines. This contrasts with the often overwhelming and rigid multitasking requirements of salaried positions, where they have little control over their workload and schedule.

Productivity:

Julien and Cédric emphasise the "*importance of deadlines*" illustrating how having clear and meaningful deadlines can significantly boost their productivity. In traditional employment, rigid and arbitrary deadlines often feel uninspiring or stressful. By becoming entrepreneurs, they can set their own deadlines that are both motivating and realistic, aligning better with their personal work rhythms and driving them to achieve their goals more effectively.

Anais, Julien, Nathan and Cédric (all with ADHD) discuss their preference for "*intense, focused work over a short period*". This work style, involving periods of deep focus and high productivity followed by breaks, often conflicts with the continuous, steady work pace expected in traditional roles. Entrepreneurship enables them to organise their work according to these natural bursts of productivity, leading to higher quality output and reduced burnout.

François, Samuel, Lucie and Marie (who are on the autism spectrum) stress the "*importance of doing things well*" reflecting their commitment to thoroughness and excellence. In conventional jobs, the emphasis on speed and efficiency can compromise quality, causing frustration for those who value meticulousness. As entrepreneurs, they can prioritise quality over quantity, ensuring their work meets their high standards.

The ability to set their own deadlines, work intensively during peak productivity periods, and focus on quality and thoroughness drives them towards entrepreneurship. This autonomy allows them to create work environments and schedules that cater to their unique needs.

4.1.3. Adaptive resilience

Flexibility:

Flexibility serves as a significant source of motivation for many neurodivergent entrepreneurs. Anaïs, Samuel, Maxence, and Marine find flexibility indispensable for their job satisfaction and efficiency. Cédric values flexibility but also acknowledges the need for organisation to ensure progress in his projects. Marie, while preferring a rigid structure, finds the autonomy of entrepreneurship motivating. François views flexibility as a temporary means to manage anxiety in unsuitable work environments, whereas Nathan considers it essential for managing his fluctuating energy levels.

François explains, "*I feel like I need flexibility because I don't have an adapted work environment. Flexibility allows me to protect myself by avoiding the problem. For example, if I'm given the option to work remotely when I'm too fatigued by an unsuitable work environment, I use that flexibility to rest. But this isn't the best solution.*"

Nathan shares a similar sentiment: "*Flexibility is essential for me. My energy levels vary greatly throughout the day, so fixed hours are exhausting. Flexibility allows me to work when I'm most productive and take breaks when I need them, which isn't possible in traditional employment.*"

Inadaptability to educational system:

Many interviewees experienced various setbacks during their studies indicating a series of difficulties throughout their academic journeys. These challenges, ranging from poor grades to conflicts with the structure and expectations of traditional education, often leave them feeling alienated and unsupported.

A common sentiment among these entrepreneurs is the "*feeling of being out of sync with peers*". This feeling stems from differences in learning styles, social interactions, and cognitive processes. Traditional educational and employment systems often fail to recognize and accommodate these differences, leaving neurodivergent individuals feeling misunderstood and undervalued. Almost all interviewees, except for Julien, reported "*academic difficulties at university*". These difficulties include managing course loads, meeting academic expectations, and coping with the rigid structures of higher education.

Julien and Manon both expressed a preference for university studies because it allows them to have a flexible time management. The flexible time management offered by some university programs can be a significant advantage for neurodivergent students, allowing them to work at their own pace and according to their own schedules. This flexibility is often absent in traditional salaried roles, where strict schedules and uniform expectations can be challenging. The ability to manage their own time and workload in entrepreneurship mirrors the flexibility they appreciated during their university studies, providing a compelling motivation to pursue self-employment.

4.1.4. Social relations

Relational challenges:

For our participants, traditional work environments, with their constant social norms and expectations, can be particularly challenging and exhausting, leading to misunderstandings and discomfort. Entrepreneurship offers an attractive alternative, enabling them to reduce stress-inducing social interactions and create a more conducive work environment for their social comfort and productivity.

Another common challenge is the difficulty in moderating directness according to social contexts. Neurodivergent interviewees often struggle to adapt their communication style to different social settings, resulting in conflicts and misunderstandings in traditional workplaces.

Many interviewees mention "*difficulties in relationships*" and "*challenges with direct communication*". These difficulties can hinder their ability to build and maintain professional relationships, crucial for career advancement in salaried positions.

The issue of "*questioning authority and problems with hierarchy*" is common among the interviewees. Neurodivergent individuals often have a strong sense of justice and may challenge authority when they perceive it as unfair or illogical, leading to conflicts with supervisors. Entrepreneurship provides the autonomy to make their own decisions and avoid the frustrations associated with traditional hierarchical structures.

4.1.5. Psychological well-being

Accomplishment:

Authenticity and the ability to challenge norms play crucial roles for neurodivergent entrepreneurs, allowing them to navigate entrepreneurial environments with greater freedom and creativity. Traits like Cedric's straightforward honesty and Maxence's liberated interactions create spaces where they can thrive. Similarly, Samuel and Marine use their unique perspectives to foster positive connections and innovate in their respective fields.

The "*sense of accomplishment*" is a significant motivator for many neurodivergent individuals in our interviews. Traditional employment often fails to provide this due to its rigid structures and lack of recognition for unique contributions. In contrast, entrepreneurship allows them to set their own goals and see the direct impact of their efforts, leading to a stronger sense of achievement and satisfaction.

The need for "*meaningful work*", highlighted by many, underscores the importance of engaging in projects that align with their values and passions. Entrepreneurship offers the freedom to choose work that is meaningful to them, enhancing their motivation and commitment.

Finally, the personal fulfilment through entrepreneurship that was expressed reflects the overall growth and satisfaction that many interviewees find in this path. Pursuing their passions,

working on meaningful projects, and creating a balanced, supportive work environment contribute to higher levels of personal satisfaction and well-being.

4.2. Facilitators for neurodivergent people in entrepreneurship

In the following sections, we will assess the different factors that act as facilitators for people we interviewed.

4.2.1. Time and environment organisation

Productivity:

These individuals often exhibit work patterns that diverge from traditional norms but prove highly effective in the context of entrepreneurship, where flexibility and intense focus can lead to remarkable achievements.

Nathan, Emma, Cédric and Julien discuss their preference for intense work concentrated in a short amount of time. This method of working involves dedicating short, intensive bursts of energy to tasks, leading to high productivity during these periods. This approach aligns well with the entrepreneurial environment, where the ability to focus deeply on critical tasks can drive significant progress. The flexibility to work intensely when they are most productive and take breaks when needed helps them maintain high performance and avoid the fatigue that can come from prolonged periods of sustained effort.

The unique productivity patterns of neurodivergent entrepreneurs, characterised by achieving high output in short, intense bursts of work, act as powerful facilitators in their entrepreneurial endeavours. These traits provide them with the flexibility, efficiency, and creative capacity needed to thrive in the dynamic and demanding world of entrepreneurship.

4.2.2. Adaptive resilience

Adaptation strategies:

Samuel, François, and Marie, all of whom are autistic, emphasise the importance of preparing social interactions in advance, scripting discussions, and writing down what to say. This preparation helps them manage social interactions more comfortably, reducing anxiety and

increasing their confidence in networking, pitching ideas, and negotiating with clients and partners.

The implementation of personal strategies is a common theme among these entrepreneurs. These strategies include time management techniques, organisational tools, and specific routines that help them stay focused and productive.

Cédric highlights the "*use of humour to manage stress*", showcasing a powerful coping mechanism. Humour helps alleviate stress and create a positive work environment, benefiting not only himself but also fostering a more relaxed and enjoyable atmosphere for his team and clients, enhancing relationships and workplace culture.

Furthermore, developing social skills is essential for many neurodivergent entrepreneurs in our interviews, as effective communication and networking are vital in business. By consciously improving their social skills, they enhance their ability to connect with others, build partnerships, and navigate the social aspects of entrepreneurship more smoothly.

Manon's invention of solutions for specific problems demonstrates a key entrepreneurial skill: innovation. Her ability to devise unique solutions allows her to overcome obstacles that might stymie others. This inventive mindset is a significant asset in entrepreneurship, where creative problem-solving is often required. Also, Manon's "*strategies for meticulous note-taking*" highlight the importance of organisation and memory aids. She ensures that important information is recorded and easily accessible, reducing the risk of oversight and enhancing her ability to manage complex tasks.

Finally, Nathan and Marie's confidence in their adaptive abilities underscores a fundamental strength. Believing in their ability to adapt allows neurodivergent entrepreneurs to face new situations with confidence and flexibility. This self-assurance is crucial in a rapidly changing business environment, where the ability to pivot and adjust strategies is often necessary for success.

4.2.3. Social relations

Entourage:

The importance of family, social support, professional networks, and understanding clients is paramount, as these elements provide the foundation and encouragement needed to overcome challenges and achieve success in their ventures.

Firstly, a recurring theme among these entrepreneurs is the "*importance of family and social support in their entrepreneurial journey*." Having a robust support system comprising family and friends offers emotional stability, encouragement, and practical assistance. This support helps alleviate the stress and isolation often associated with entrepreneurship, making it easier to navigate the highs and lows of running a business. In particular, Nathan emphasises that the "*support from family and friends is essential*" for his entrepreneurial journey.

Building on the theme of support, Julien and Cédric highlight the benefits of being part of a beneficial incubator for networking. Incubators provide not only resources and mentorship but also valuable networking opportunities that can lead to business partnerships, funding, and market insights.

Additionally, Manon finds significant support from her neurodivergent clients who feel understood. Catering to clients who share similar experiences creates a loyal customer base that feels appreciated and understood. This mutual understanding not only builds strong business relationships but also provides Manon with a sense of purpose and connection, reinforcing her commitment to her work.

Furthermore, the crucial family support is reiterated by several entrepreneurs, highlighting that family members often play a direct role in their business activities. Whether through financial investment, strategic advice, or emotional encouragement, the involvement of family members can significantly boost an entrepreneur's confidence and capacity to succeed.

4.2.4. Impact of neurodivergence

Neurodivergence in entrepreneurship:

Curiosity and creativity emerge as crucial facilitators for neurodivergent entrepreneurs. The flexibility of entrepreneurship provides them with the freedom to express their creativity more freely than traditional employment would allow. Entrepreneurs like Anaïs, Samuel, Maxence, Marine, Marie, François, and Nathan emphasise the importance of creativity in problem-solving, innovation, and the development of unique ideas. Cedric and Maxence particularly

value collaboration with other creatives, enriching their entrepreneurial processes. Thus, curiosity and creativity empower these entrepreneurs to explore, innovate, and adapt, enhancing their success and satisfaction in their ventures.

Furthermore, the interviews reveal that their unique cognitive perspectives often lead to creative solutions and innovative approaches. Marie's ability to find creative solutions at work exemplifies how neurodivergent individuals can overcome challenges in unique ways, providing them with a competitive edge. The shared desire to "*express creativity in entrepreneurship*" highlights their intrinsic motivation and satisfaction, driving them to turn innovative ideas into reality. This creative freedom fuels their passion and engagement, resulting in the development of distinctive products and services.

Moreover, cognitive abilities such as determination, risk-taking, and adaptability play a major role. Anaïs and Samuel highlight their willingness to take risks and their persistence, while Cédric and Maxence value their curiosity and adaptability. Marine and Marie underscore the significance of creativity and precision, and François and Nathan emphasise their energy and unconventional thinking. These cognitive strengths enable neurodivergent entrepreneurs to navigate the complexities of entrepreneurship, overcome challenges, and fully leverage their unique abilities to succeed.

Additionally, individual traits like passion, hyperactivity, intuition, and perseverance serve as vital facilitators. These characteristics help neurodivergent entrepreneurs effectively manage their ventures and capitalise on their strengths. Anaïs and Samuel use their low aversion to risk and perseverance to seize lucrative opportunities. Cédric and Maxence leverage their curiosity and adaptability, while Marine utilises her hyperactivity to juggle multiple tasks efficiently. Marie and François focus on precision, analysis, and functional creativity. These individual traits allow neurodivergent entrepreneurs to thrive and achieve success in their projects.

Moreover, their inclination towards technical problem-solving is another significant facilitator. Their ability to address complex challenges with precision and creativity leads to cutting-edge solutions and advancements in various fields. Their propensity for "eccentric ideas" often results in breakthroughs and novel approaches, disrupting traditional thinking and introducing fresh perspectives.

4.3. Barriers faced by neurodivergent people in entrepreneurship

Neurodivergent people face challenges in entrepreneurship, often linked to their neurodivergence, and complicate the process of establishing and running a business. We will discuss the challenges found amongst our interviewees in the following sections.

4.3.1. Impact of neurodivergence

Neurodivergence in entrepreneurship:

Firstly, administrative tasks and time management frequently pose substantial barriers. Anaïs and Marie have developed personalised systems to manage their time and tasks, demonstrating a proactive approach to these challenges. However, Cédric and Maxence struggle with procrastination and maintaining focus, often requiring external motivation to stay on track. Meanwhile, Samuel and Marine prioritise quality over speed, using flexibility to balance work and rest, but still find it challenging to manage their schedules effectively. François and Nathan benefit from the flexibility of entrepreneurship, which helps them better manage their energy and stress levels. Thus, while these tasks pose significant challenges, neurodivergent entrepreneurs often find creative and personalised ways to address them.

Managing financial records presents a significant challenge. The "*difficulty in managing financial statements*", cited by many entrepreneurs, requires a high level of attention to detail and consistent effort, particularly challenging for those with conditions like ADHD or dyslexia. The complexity of bookkeeping can become overwhelming, leading to errors and financial mismanagement that threaten the viability of the business.

Another obstacle highlighted by François and Samuel is the "*administrative burden related to disability support*", such as navigating the processes of MDPH and RQTH (in France). The bureaucratic hurdles to obtain disability recognition and support can be time-consuming and stressful. This additional layer of bureaucracy detracts from the time and energy needed to focus on business operations, posing a significant barrier to success.

Financial pressure is another considerable barrier. "*Heavy debt to start the business*", mentioned by Anaïs and Lucie, underscores the substantial financial investment required to launch a business. The stress of debt can be a heavy burden, and managing this financial risk can be particularly challenging for neurodivergent individuals.

Moreover, the difficulties in handling administrative procedures represent a pervasive challenge faced by all interviewed entrepreneurs. The administrative tasks involved in running a business—such as filing taxes, complying with regulations, and managing paperwork—require sustained attention and organisational skills. For neurodivergent individuals, these tasks can be particularly daunting and time-consuming, leading to delays, non-compliance, and potential legal issues.

Mental fatigue:

The findings from the interviews with neurodivergent entrepreneurs reveal significant barriers related to administrative tasks, time management, and mental fatigue, all of which complicate their entrepreneurial journeys. These challenges, often exacerbated by their neurodivergent conditions, underscore the need for tailored support systems to help them succeed.

Indeed, the interviews with neurodivergent entrepreneurs reveal that mental fatigue is a significant barrier in their entrepreneurial journeys. This constant state of fatigue affects their ability to maintain consistent performance and manage the demanding aspects of running a business. The insights provided by these entrepreneurs underscore how mental fatigue acts as a persistent and formidable obstacle.

Furthermore, mental fatigue emerges as a pervasive obstacle. Neurodivergent individuals often experience increased susceptibility to fatigue, which hinders their productivity and efficiency. Anaïs's experience of "*burnout after a few months*" illustrates the cyclical nature of this challenge, where initial enthusiasm wanes under the relentless demands of running a business, leading to extended breaks or reduced workloads. This mental exhaustion profoundly impacts their professional performance, affecting cognitive functions such as decision-making, problem-solving, and creative thinking.

The fact that mental fatigue is a constant companion for these entrepreneurs highlights the ongoing struggle they face. Even with the autonomy and flexibility offered by entrepreneurship, mental fatigue remains a persistent barrier. This ongoing exhaustion can dampen their sense of accomplishment and satisfaction, making it difficult to fully enjoy the benefits of self-employment.

4.3.2. Psychological well-being

Emotivity:

After the interviews, we highlight that one major barrier is managing emotional intensity. Neurodivergent entrepreneurs often experience emotions more intensely than their neurotypical counterparts, making emotional regulation a critical yet difficult task. This heightened emotional response can lead to challenges in maintaining composure and decision-making under pressure.

The experience of feeling emotions strongly adds another layer of complexity. For these entrepreneurs, positive and negative emotions are amplified, leading to emotional highs and lows that can disrupt their focus and productivity. This intense emotional experience makes it difficult to maintain a steady and balanced approach to business operations, affecting their ability to sustain long-term efforts and resilience.

Moreover, the stress and panic related to unexpected events present significant challenges. Marie, Manon, and Emma highlight the difficulty of dealing with unpredictability in entrepreneurship. The associated stress and panic can lead to hasty decisions, avoidance of risk-taking, or burnout, all of which hinder business growth and stability. The psychological pressure felt by these entrepreneurs is another significant barrier. The constant pressure to succeed, make the right decisions, and manage every aspect of their business can be mentally taxing, exacerbating existing emotional challenges and leading to increased anxiety.

Furthermore, feelings of guilt and inadequacy are common among neurodivergent entrepreneurs. Maxence, Lucie, and Julien discuss the guilt of not doing enough, reflecting the high standards they set for themselves. This guilt can undermine their confidence and motivation, making it harder to persevere through challenging times. However, despite these barriers, many neurodivergent entrepreneurs express a sense of fulfilment despite daily challenges. This suggests that while their heightened emotional sensitivity presents significant challenges, it also contributes to a deeper sense of fulfilment and purpose in their entrepreneurial endeavours. The ability to navigate and overcome these emotional challenges can lead to personal growth and a strong sense of achievement.

4.3.3. Social relations

Relational challenges:

Social relations can also be barriers, even if our interviewees try their best to overcome these challenges. Anaïs and Marie, for instance, actively work on improving their emotional regulation and social interactions. They recognize the importance of managing their emotions to maintain professional relationships and enhance their entrepreneurial efforts.

Similarly, Cédric and Maxence prioritise honesty and direct communication, understanding that clarity is essential in business. However, they also acknowledge the need to manage personal boundaries and navigate the complexities of technical communication, which can sometimes lead to misunderstandings.

Furthermore, Samuel and Marine demonstrate significant progress in their social interactions and find ways to handle emotional overload. By adopting techniques to manage their emotions, they can maintain focus and productivity in their entrepreneurial endeavours.

François and Nathan have developed methods to manage social anxiety, favouring collaborative interactions in their businesses. They find that working closely with others helps to mitigate anxiety and fosters a supportive work environment.

In essence, while social interactions and emotional regulation present considerable challenges for neurodivergent entrepreneurs, they often find creative and personal ways to address these issues.

5. Discussion

The research question of this thesis explores the motivations, barriers, and facilitators for neurodivergent individuals who venture into entrepreneurship.

Regarding motivations, our findings align with existing literature. The notion of flexibility, as discussed by the OECD (2014), is a significant driver for Entrepreneurs with Disabilities (EWDs) to pursue entrepreneurship. Several interviewees cited this as a primary reason for leaving traditional employment.

In our sample, we did not specifically observe discrimination experienced by participants, except for one individual with a pronounced Asperger's syndrome. This finding contrasts with existing literature, which suggests that discrimination is a key factor motivating EWDs to become entrepreneurs (OECD, 2014). It is conceivable that this discrepancy arises because neurodivergence is not always immediately visible and manifests more prominently in interpersonal interactions over time. Many participants reported that their differences were not initially apparent to others, which led to feelings of illegitimacy and increased guilt for not conforming to societal norms.

However, certain motivations for entrepreneurship were indeed linked to challenges experienced in traditional work environments, as expected from the extensive literature on this topic (Taylor, 2003; Patton, 2009; Richards, 2012; Baldwin et al., 2014; OECD, 2014; Antshel, 2018; Flower et al., 2019; Patton, 2019). For our interviewees, the challenges in traditional employment that spurred them into entrepreneurship included boredom with routine tasks and issues with hierarchical structures. Several participants highlighted the need to 'mask' their true selves and the inability to be authentic as significant deterrents in traditional employment. Many also expressed discomfort with rigid work environments.

Thus, the primary motivations for our interviewees were linked to a need for independence. These findings are consistent with the works of Doyle (2002) and Harpur (2020), which noted that EWDs are driven towards entrepreneurship to achieve autonomy. Our interviews revealed a strong need for flexibility, particularly regarding time management, to harness their fluctuating energy levels as they see fit. Many also mentioned the importance of flexibility in establishing a self-imposed work-life balance. These results are consistent with the studies of

Ostraw (2018) and Harpur & Blanck (2020), which indicated that a primary motivation for EWDs is the ability to manage their own balance.

The second major motivation identified in these interviews is the need to express creativity freely. This motivation was not only evident among individuals with ADHD, as might be expected (Patton, 2009), but also among those with ASD. These individuals reported feeling overwhelmed with creative ideas and constrained in their daily lives. Entrepreneurship provides them with a platform to fully unleash their creativity.

The first barrier investigated in the literature review was related to fatigue (Jammaers & Zanoni, 2020). In this study, our focus on neurodivergent individuals highlighted mental and psychological fatigue as a significant challenge, as reported by most interviewees. Many participants engage in self-medication, both legal and illegal (e.g., Ritalin, cannabis, psycho-stimulants, benzodiazepines), to manage this fatigue.

Some participants also reported physical fatigue, stemming from their inability to set limits for themselves. Driven by passion and a sense of responsibility, they often work relentlessly, entering hyper-focus states. Eventually, they are forced to stop abruptly when their bodies can no longer keep up.

For two participants with ASD, risk-taking emerged as a substantial barrier, consistent with existing literature (Purkis & Cook, 2023). Their fear of new experiences and aversion to uncertainty hinder their entrepreneurial efforts, contrasting sharply with the tendencies observed in individuals with ADHD and dys disorders, who often embrace novelty and risk.

Another barrier related to entrepreneurship and neurodivergence reported by all participants is the difficulty with administrative tasks. Most interviewees rely on assistance for these tasks, which they often find overwhelming and insurmountable.

While freedom and flexibility are important for them, most participants also highlighted the challenge of time management. This includes both meeting deadlines, as anticipated by Wiklund et al. (2017), and finding a balance between professional and personal life.

Regarding self-confidence, it did not appear to be a significant barrier to entrepreneurship for our participants. We did not specifically find a connection between self-confidence and entrepreneurial pursuits among the neurodivergent individuals in our study.

In summary, the barriers faced by neurodivergent entrepreneurs are multifaceted, involving mental and physical fatigue, challenges with risk-taking, and difficulties in administrative tasks and time management.

Facilitators for individuals with ASD have not been extensively investigated in the literature. This highlights the importance of qualitative studies to gather data that can inform future quantitative research and the potential generalisation of facilitators in entrepreneurship for individuals with ASD.

Purkis & Cook (2023) proposed some hypotheses, which are supported by our findings. Interviewees with ASD reported that one of their main facilitators is their intense passion and curiosity for specific subjects. These traits lead to specialisation and mastery in their areas of interest, which is a significant strength in their entrepreneurial endeavours.

Another facilitator reported by individuals with ASD is their analytical and precise thinking, which significantly enhances the quality of their work. Additionally, while they generally have an aversion to risk and novelty, which are inherent in the entrepreneurial world, they navigate these challenges with caution. This careful risk-taking approach helps them avoid problems that might arise from more impulsive decisions.

As posited by Verheul et al. (2016) and Wiklund et al. (2017), the hyperactivity associated with ADHD has been identified as a facilitator for the interviewees. They reported that the hyperactivity linked to their condition actually helps them multitask, thereby increasing overall efficiency.

Both individuals with ASD and those with ADHD reported experiencing periods of "hyperfocus." This state allows them to be deeply proactive in a task they are passionate about, significantly boosting their productivity.

Furthermore, the ability to generate new ideas and higher-than-average creativity is also a major facilitator for interviewees with ADHD and dys disorders. These findings are consistent with the literature (White et al., 2011; Logan et al., 2012). Participants also mentioned their need to question, and overturn established norms in favour of innovative and more logical ideas for them.

All participants expressed a strong need for authenticity, which drives them to accept and embrace their neurodivergence.

Overall, the findings of this thesis are largely consistent with existing literature. However, we observe that some aspects are not sufficiently highlighted by current research, indicating a need for further investigation into the links between entrepreneurship and neurodivergence.

6. Limitations and recommendations for future research

The first limitation of this study is that it focused exclusively on three types of neurodivergence: autism, ADHD, and dys disorders. Indeed, the existing literature on the relationship between neurodivergence and entrepreneurship predominantly addresses these three conditions. However, what about mood disorders or schizophrenia in the context of entrepreneurship? It is conceivable that correlations with these conditions might differ significantly from those associated with autism, ADHD, and dys disorders. Future research could explore the connections between entrepreneurship and other neurodivergent conditions such as schizophrenia. Additionally, the study did not explore the potential intersectionality between neurodivergence and other identity factors such as gender, race, and socioeconomic status, which could provide a more nuanced understanding of the entrepreneurial experiences of neurodivergent individuals.

Additionally, within the literature on dys disorders and their connection to entrepreneurship, the focus is primarily on dyslexia, rather than other dys conditions like dyscalculia or dyspraxia. It might be worthwhile to investigate the broader category of dys disorders in relation to the motivations, barriers, and facilitators of entrepreneurship. This limited scope may overlook unique challenges and advantages faced by individuals with different dys conditions, leading to an incomplete understanding of the broader impact of dys disorders on entrepreneurial activities.

We also made the choice to combine self-employment and entrepreneurship despite some subtle distinctions between them. We determined that the differences between these two concepts were not central to the thesis and that distinguishing them explicitly was not necessarily pertinent. However, this decision could obscure the specific motivations and barriers unique to each group. Future research should consider examining self-employment and entrepreneurship separately to provide clearer insights into the experiences of neurodivergent individuals in each context.

Regarding data collection, participants were recruited using a snowball sampling method. Interview participants were selected through word of mouth and social media, which limits the randomization of the sample. This raises the question of whether the similarities in interview responses might be attributed to participants sharing the same economic class or cultural

background. Additionally, as this study is qualitative, the results may not be generalizable to a larger population. Future research could employ quantitative methods to more broadly investigate the links between entrepreneurship and neurodivergence. The reliance on self-reported data also introduces the potential for bias, as participants may present themselves in a more favourable light or may not accurately recall their experiences.

One significant limitation of this study lies in the complexity and potential inaccuracies of diagnosing neurodivergent conditions. The process of obtaining a diagnosis can be fraught with challenges, and there is a possibility of misdiagnosis. For instance, one interviewee mentioned that her obsessive-compulsive behaviours might have been mistaken for autistic rituals. Additionally, the criteria required for a diagnosis are not always clear-cut—should it be conducted by a psychiatrist, or is a general medical practitioner's assessment sufficient? These ambiguities can affect the reliability and validity of identifying neurodivergent individuals, which in turn impacts the generalizability of the findings.

The interview process, being a human exercise, involved many factors beyond objective control. For example, there were occasional challenges in properly framing the interviews, especially when interacting with neurodivergent individuals. This sometimes led to significant digressions in responses, complicating and reducing the precision of data analysis compared to a non-human factor. Additionally, interviewer bias may have influenced the way questions were asked and interpreted, potentially shaping the responses in subtle ways that reflect the interviewer's preconceptions or expectations.

Furthermore, most participants did not have a single neurodivergent condition but multiple ones. Consequently, the analysis of the data may be biased by the presence of comorbidities. This comorbidity makes it difficult to isolate the effects of individual conditions on entrepreneurial outcomes. Future research should aim to recruit participants with more homogenous neurodivergent profiles or employ methods to statistically control for the influence of comorbidities.

The current study encompasses a wide range of business activities, from individuals selling homemade cookies to those launching start-ups. This diversity, while providing a broad perspective, may also obscure specific factors that influence entrepreneurial success among neurodivergent individuals. Different types of businesses may present unique challenges and

opportunities, which are not fully captured when considering such a heterogeneous sample. For future research, it would be valuable to isolate different types of businesses to examine whether and how the nature of the business impacts the experiences and outcomes of neurodivergent entrepreneurs. This more granular approach could reveal sector-specific insights and lead to more tailored support strategies for neurodivergent entrepreneurs.

Moreover, the study was limited to a specific cultural and geographical context, which may not reflect the experiences of neurodivergent entrepreneurs in other regions or cultures. The entrepreneurial environment, support systems, and societal attitudes towards neurodivergence can vary significantly across different settings, affecting the generalizability of the findings. Comparative studies across diverse cultural and geographical contexts could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the interplay between neurodivergence and entrepreneurship.

Finally, this research did not delve deeply into the potential impact of external factors such as economic conditions, policy frameworks, and availability of support services on the entrepreneurial endeavours of neurodivergent individuals. These factors can play a crucial role in shaping the opportunities and challenges faced by neurodivergent entrepreneurs and should be considered in future investigations to develop more targeted and effective interventions.

7. Conclusion

In recent times, neurodiversity has gained significant attention in workplace discussions. Despite this progress, the academic understanding of neurodiversity remains lacking, characterised by conflicting and insufficient definitions, overlapping symptomatology, and a lack of clear guidance on practical workplace support (Doyle, 2020).

In this study, we interviewed 12 individuals and analysed their responses using the Gioia methodology.

Our findings indicate that neurodivergent individuals are motivated to pursue entrepreneurship due to a need for flexibility, creativity, passion, professional autonomy, and the ability to organise their time and environment. They seek to create projects that reflect their unique characteristics and accommodate their neurodivergence, manage social relationships on their terms, and achieve personal fulfilment and accomplishment.

Facilitators for neurodivergent entrepreneurs include productivity linked to their neurological functioning, adaptive strategies they have developed, support from their social networks, and traits such as creativity, impulsivity, passion, innovation, and curiosity. However, they also face barriers such as time management challenges, procrastination, administrative difficulties, constant mental fatigue, heightened emotions, and social relationship difficulties.

Overall, the findings of this thesis are largely consistent with existing literature. However, we observe that some aspects are not sufficiently highlighted by current research, indicating a need for further investigation into the links between entrepreneurship and neurodivergence.

In conclusion, this thesis underscores the unique motivations, facilitators, and barriers faced by neurodivergent individuals in entrepreneurship. The findings highlight the importance of targeted support and interventions to foster an inclusive environment that leverages the strengths of neurodivergent entrepreneurs. Further research is necessary to deepen our understanding and develop comprehensive strategies to support neurodivergent individuals in their entrepreneurial endeavours, ultimately contributing to a more diverse and innovative business landscape.

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Abstract :

This qualitative study aims to comprehensively explore the motivations, barriers, and facilitators that influence neurodivergent people's engagement in entrepreneurship. By examining existing literature, this review synthesizes and summarizes the current knowledge on the factors that drive or hinder neurodivergent individuals from pursuing entrepreneurial ventures. The review encompasses a wide range of sources, including scholarly articles, books, reports and other relevant publications. The findings of this qualitative study will provide a foundation for future research.

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