Immersive Behavioural Assessments for Autistic Job Seekers: A Protocol of a Participatory Approach to Autism-Inclusive Hiring Practices

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INTRODUCTION & AIM

Autistic adults continue to experience disproportionately low employment rates, largely due to hiring processes that prioritize social communication and normative interaction styles over job-relevant competencies. Traditional structured interviews often disadvantage autistic candidates by amplifying anxiety and masking pressures. Emerging behavioural assessments such as immersive, game-based, or group simulations offer potential for fairer evaluation but remain underexamined in terms of accessibility, validity, and inclusion.

This study aims to investigate how immersive behavioural assessments can be adapted to promote equity and inclusion for autistic job seekers. It examines participants' experiences, fairness perceptions, and task performance across two immersive virtual hiring formats and co-develops evidence-based recommendations for inclusive assessment practices.

METHOD

Guided by a participatory framework and Human-Centred Design Thinking (HCDT), this mixed-methods study will engage a Community Partnership Team (CPT) consisting of 5-6 autistic job seekers and hiring professionals. Two immersive virtual assessments will be conducted with participants, including autistic participants, non-autistic participants, and hiring professionals: a structured panel interview using Arthur One and a team-based escape-room task using AlignVR's Team Qualifier. Quantitative measures will include the Multiple Soft Skills Assessment Tool (MSSAT) and the Selection Procedural Justice Scale (SPJS) for fairness perceptions. Qualitative data will be derived from post-simulation reflections, open-ended surveys, and CPT workshop transcripts. Data integration will use descriptive statistics and reflexive thematic analysis to triangulate findings across stakeholder groups.
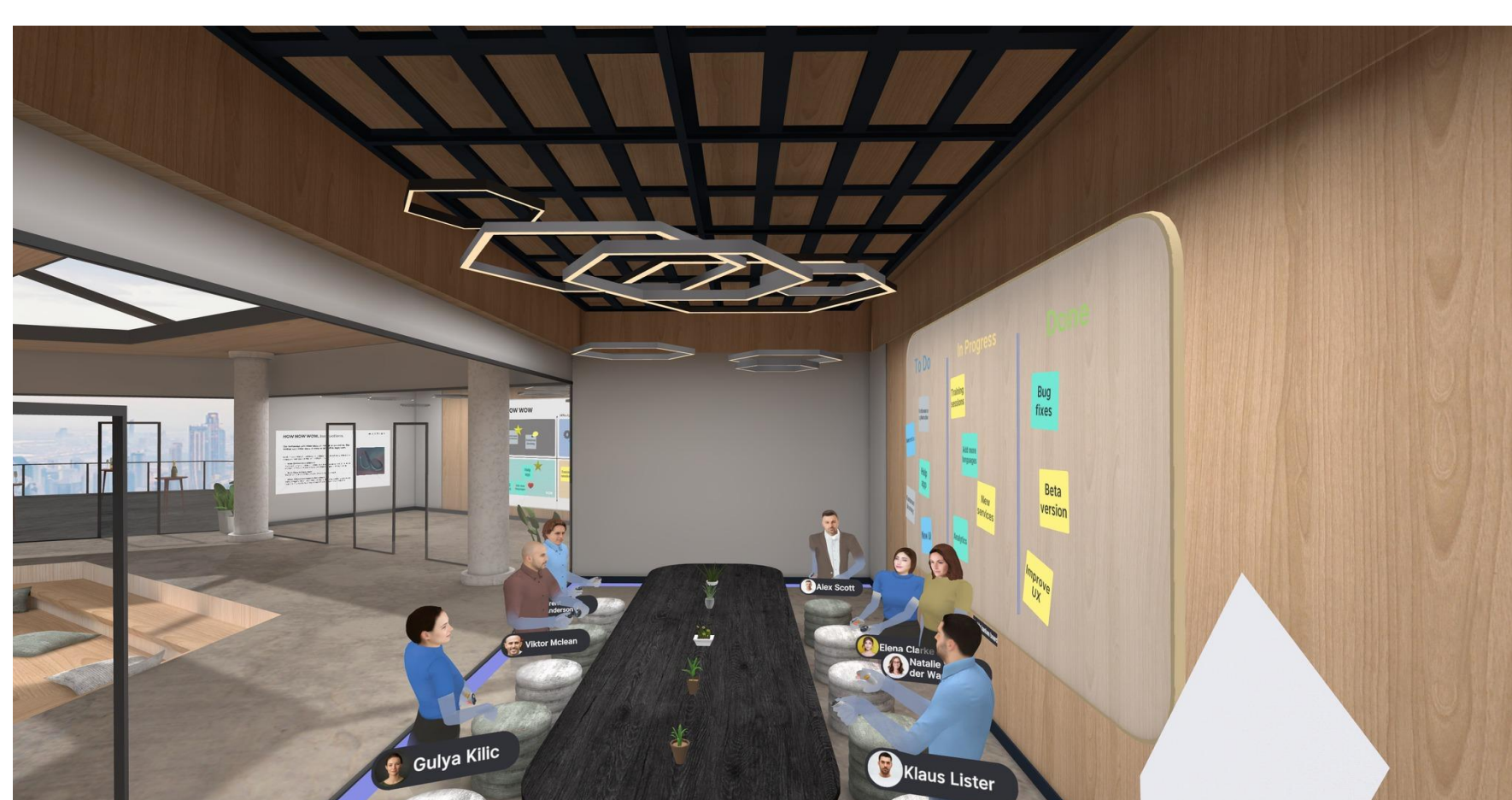
RESULTS & DISCUSSION

Expected Results:
Findings are expected to reveal whether immersive behavioural assessments provide more equitable opportunities for autistic candidates to demonstrate soft skills and whether perceived fairness and accessibility differ across interview formats.

By combining immersive virtual technologies with participatory design, this study will generate co-designed best-practice recommendations and policy guidance for inclusive hiring. The outcomes aim to inform modernization of recruitment standards under Canada's Public Service Employment Act, advancing equitable employment pathways for neurodivergent job seekers.

Funding/ REFERENCES

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