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How Neurodivergent Workers Use and Make Sense of Assistive Technologies: Implications for The AMO Model and Digital Masking

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ABSTRACT

This article explores how neurodivergent workers use and make sense of assistive technologies by drawing on 30 semi-structured interviews with these individuals. We contribute to the ability, motivation and opportunity (AMO) model by revealing its underlying neuro-normative assumptions. We show how assistive technologies, such as screen readers, influence the abilities and motivation of neurodivergent workers, making opportunities more attainable and allowing them to consider different career possibilities. We identify three processes through which assistive technologies influence the career development of neurodivergent workers. First, they can reduce cognitive, socioemotional and sensory challenges. Second, they can increase neurodivergent workers' feelings of confidence, autonomy, self-efficacy and agency. Third, they can remove the stigma associated with neurodivergence. Finally, we show that while assistive technologies enable neurodivergent workers to digitally conceal their condition, doing so can also have unintended negative consequences. We call this concept, consisting of hiding one's neurodivergence through assistive technologies, digital masking.

1 | Introduction

Workplace inclusion of neurodivergent individuals is increasingly seen as "the new frontier" in diversity scholarship and practice (Ezerins et al. 2024). The term neurodiversity describes the natural variation in human cognitive functioning and includes both neurotypical and neurodivergent people (Singer 1999). Neurodivergence refers to atypical cognitive profiles or neurological presentations, often associated with conditions such as Autism Spectrum Condition (ASC), Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Dyslexia, Dysgraphia, Dyspraxia, Dyscalculia and Tourette Syndrome. One-fifth of the population is estimated to be neurodivergent (Doyle 2020), yet many face significant employment barriers leading to unemployment, underemployment and fewer career development opportunities

(Hedley et al. 2023). Such barriers can limit career sustainability and restrict long-term career progression for neurodivergent individuals (Felix and Hennekam 2025). In organizational contexts, additional challenges may arise from workplace bias (Szulc and Staniszewska 2025), which can affect hiring decisions, performance evaluations, and career development opportunities (McDowall et al. 2025). Both labour market and organisational barriers often do not stem from neurodivergent conditions, but from environments designed around neurotypical norms, including rigid communication expectations, overstimulating physical spaces, and inflexible work structures, which can systematically exclude or disadvantage neurodivergent workers by limiting accessibility, comfort, and equitable participation (Hennekam et al. 2025).

While research on neuro-inclusive HR practices has expanded (Erbil et al. 2025; Hennekam and Follmer 2024), the intersection of technology, neurodivergence and inclusion remains an emerging field. In 2022, the United Nations positioned access to assistive technologies as a human right, defining them as "an umbrella term for assistive products and their related systems and services" that "enable and promote the inclusion, participation and engagement of persons with disabilities as well as other vulnerable populations" (World Health Organisation and United Nations Children's Fund, 2022). Beyond promoting individual independence and quality of life, digital assistive technologies, such as speech-to-text software or digital organizers are increasingly recognized as tools for operationalizing inclusive organizational practices. When integrated to complement inclusive HR practices, such as flexible work options, assistive technologies can reduce costs, improve efficiency, and enhance worker productivity and inclusion (Walkowiak 2021, 2024). For example, assistive daily routine management apps designed for neurodivergent workers can complement flexible work schedules by enabling task monitoring that can enhance their inclusion, individual productivity and organizational oversight (Walkowiak 2024). It is important to distinguish between workplace accommodations to which neurodivergent employees are entitled when they disclose a neuro-cognitive condition and inclusive organizational practices that might enable anticipatory adjustments. Assistive technologies can be part of both mandatory accommodations and proactive inclusive practices.

Despite the apparent benefits of assistive technologies for organizations and individual workers, there is limited knowledge on the use of assistive technologies among neurodivergent workers and how they make sense of these tools. While scholars point to some positive outcomes such as enhanced recruitment, individual accommodations and better person-job matching (Khan et al. 2025; Tomczak 2022; Walkowiak 2021; Zhou et al. 2025), its drawbacks, such as new algorithmic biases, the digital divide and minimal involvement of neurodivergent user involvement in technology development, are increasingly being recognized (Whittaker et al. 2019; Lukava et al. 2022; Szulc et al. 2023; Walkowiak 2024). Further, while the perspectives of organizational leaders and IT designers on assistive technologies and neurodivergence have received some scholarly attention, we lack a deeper qualitative understanding of how neurodivergent workers themselves engage with these technologies. This engagement involves not only technological or productive functionalities but also the construction of meanings around their own ability, motivation, and opportunities.

In this study, we draw on the Ability-Motivation-Opportunity (AMO) model as it offers a well-established lens for understanding how individual outcomes emerge at the intersection of individual abilities, personal motivation, and contextual opportunities (Bos-Nehles et al. 2023). While the AMO model has traditionally been applied within positivist paradigms to quantify employee performance as a function of these three variables (Pak et al. 2019), we adopt a constructivist approach that views ability, motivation, and opportunity as socially constructed and contextually situated experiences rather than fixed attributes. For neurodivergent workers, these dimensions may take on radically different meanings (see Szulc et al. 2021), especially when assistive technologies disrupt neuro-normative assumptions about competence, autonomy, or opportunity

(Spoor and Walkowiak 2024). Yet, little is known how neurodivergent workers themselves make sense of these experiences. To address this gap, we formulate the following research question: *How do neurodivergent workers use assistive technologies to construct meanings of ability, motivation, and opportunity around their careers?* We draw on 30 semi-structured interviews with neurodivergent workers in France.

Engaging with this question allows us to advance theory by re-examining the AMO model through the lived experiences of neurodivergent workers, thereby extending its application beyond neurotypical-centered assumptions. We demonstrate how assistive technologies act as meaning-making devices that reshape experiences of ability, motivation, and opportunity, while introducing the notion of attainability of opportunities to capture whether such opportunities can be genuinely accessed and realized. In doing so, we position the AMO model as a dynamic, socially constructed framework that evolves through workers' interactions with technologies and contexts, responding to recent critiques and nuancing prior claims regarding the uniformly positive effects of AMO-enhancing practices.

1.1 | Literature Review and Theoretical Underpinnings

To understand how neurodivergent workers use assistive technologies to construct meanings of ability, motivation, and opportunity around their careers, we draw on the AMO model (Bailey 1993) as well as the literature on assistive technologies. Below we first review the existing literature on the AMO model in relation to neurodivergent workers, identify conceptual gaps, and argue for a qualitative unpacking of AMO's components. We then present an overview of the literature on assistive technologies and their role in supporting neurodivergent workers.

1.2 | AMO Perspectives on the Employment of Neurodivergent Individuals

The AMO model holds that employee performance depends on three conditions operating together: job-relevant skills and knowledge (ability), willingness and effort to perform (motivation), and the organisational conditions that allow people to apply their skills and participate (opportunity) (Zahoor et al. 2024). This model is widely applied to workplace inclusion because it identifies barriers and organisational levers to address the needs of marginalised or vulnerable workers (Pak et al. 2019). In addition, it provides a practical, evidence-informed basis for tailoring policies to diverse talent, including neurodivergent workers, by explicitly linking individual capabilities with system-level work design and Human Resource Management (HRM) routines (Bos-Nehles et al. 2023).

Indeed, recent conceptual work shows the relevance of the AMO model for understanding neuro-inclusion at work. Szulc et al. (2021) proposed a multilevel model that integrates individual abilities and motivations with HR practices, reframing cognitive diversity as a strategic asset rather than a deficit. This model was adapted to remote work context (Szulc 2022), specifying relevant organisational practices to accommodate neurodivergent workers working from home. Building on this,

Spoor and Walkowiak (2024) operationalised the AMO model by mapping various digital technologies, especially AI tools, onto each dimension. Taken together, this literature offers a theoretically coherent and practically actionable basis for neuro-inclusive talent management.

Notwithstanding these advances, these contributions remain predominantly conceptual and rely on general assumptions about neurodivergent needs and preferences (Szulc et al. 2021; Szulc 2022; Spoor and Walkowiak 2024). These authors call for empirical studies to examine how ability, motivation, and opportunity are actually experienced and negotiated in everyday work, and to establish the conditions under which AMO-informed, technological-enabled interventions are effective. Moreover, given the heterogeneity within neurodivergent populations (Doyle 2020) and the situated nature of workplace interaction (Szulc et al. 2021: 867), analyses of AMO require a context-sensitive approach. Especially the "opportunity" component remains a black box and is often treated as a uniformly enabling resource that is equally accessible to all workers in that neurodivergent workers can freely take advantage of such opportunities whenever they are provided (Lai et al. 2025). In this framing, abilities and motivation are viewed as antecedents to performance whose effects are moderated by opportunities provided at the organisational level (Boxall and Purcell 2003).

Pointing to the often-unacknowledged neuro-normative assumptions underlying the AMO model, the availability of an opportunity does not guarantee that it can be fully utilised, particularly when organisational designs and norms are shaped by neurotypical assumptions. For example, leadership training may be available to all employees, yet its delivery in large, socially demanding settings may make it overwhelming for autistic workers (Spain et al. 2018) or inaccessible to dyslexic workers if it relies heavily on rapid reading and timed written tasks (Nalavany et al. 2018). Further, the ability to request adjustments or support is often contingent on disclosure, while many neurodivergent workers choose not to disclose their condition due to stigma or fear of discrimination (Santuzzi and Keating 2023). Stigma, refer to a "mark" that links a person to undesirable characteristics (Link and Phelan 2001, p. 364), has been associated with a range of stigma identity management strategies and the disclosure decision (Santuzzi and Keating 2023). We introduce the concept of attainability, which refers to how achievable or accessible these opportunities are in practice and conceptualise this as a key enabling condition that can either hinder or support positive career-related outcomes, even for highly skilled and motivated workers.

Further, previous research overlooks how ability, motivation and opportunities are socially constructed, mediated by individual context, and shaped by workplace practices that may inadvertently exclude. As Cohen et al. (2004) argue, addressing such blind spots requires moving beyond binary and universalist models towards approaches that situate experiences in their social contexts. The dominance of quantitative, survey-based measures may constrain our ability to capture these nuanced dynamics (Marin-Garcia and Martinez Tomas 2016). By centering our approach on the lived experiences of neurodivergent workers, we explore how its core dimensions are experienced in practice. Assistive technologies offer a critical lens for exploring this, as they shape how workers enact and make sense of their abilities, motivations, and opportunities.

The next section reviews evidence on these technologies and their implications for workplace neuro-inclusion.

1.3 | Assistive Technologies

Assistive technologies refer to tools that expand individuals' functional capabilities and enable full participation at work (World Health Organisation 2022). They include software (e.g., screen readers, speech-to-text and text-to-speech, live captioning and transcription), hardware (e.g., noise-cancelling headsets, height-adjustable desks), and configuration features embedded in mainstream technologies (e.g., dark mode, adjustable contrast and line spacing, notification batching, focus modes). While designed and often adopted to reduce disability-related barriers, the development of assistive technologies often leads to innovations that benefit the general population. Assistive technologies can improve access to information, enhance communication and collaboration across various styles of interaction and languages, reduce cognitive load and error rates via automation and personalization, and support health and safety by mitigating mental strain (Spoor and Walkowiak 2024).

Assistive technologies can foster neuro-inclusive workplaces by transforming organizational environments to accommodate diverse sensory, attentional, and communication profiles among neurodivergent workers (Doyle 2020). Sensory-modulation features reduce sensory overload; executive-function supports aid planning and time management; and asynchronous and multimodal face-to-face and online communication possibilities can provide greater flexibility for workplace interactions (Tomczak 2022). When assistive technologies are implemented as standard options integrated into workstation configurations, rather than as disability accommodations, they complement inclusive organizational practices, by fostering both inclusion and productivity gains (Walkowiak 2024).

It is important to clarify that we examine assistive technologies broadly, encompassing both traditional assistive technologies and general technologies that neurodivergent workers identify as serving assistive functions in their work contexts. This broader conceptualization reflects the reality that neurodivergent workers, who adapt mainstream technologies for assistive purposes, extending the support ecosystem beyond traditionally designated as assistive technologies.

The literature on assistive technologies' role in supporting neurodivergent workers leads to contradictory evidence about their impact, making definitive conclusions difficult to establish. The digital transformation driving assistive technology development creates both enabling and disabling processes for neurodivergent workers (Walkowiak 2024), with coexisting positive and negative impacts at work. On the disabling side, research identifies multiple forms of algorithmic biases that can reinforce discriminatory practices: design bias from homogeneous development teams lacking neurodivergent perspectives (Lukava et al. 2022), who found neurodivergent users experience sensory overload with VR/AR technology; data bias where training datasets poorly represent neurodivergent individuals (Whittaker et al. 2019) and can lead to systematic exclusion in recruitment systems; implementation bias when technologies are deployed in ways that disadvantage neurodivergent users (Szulc et al. 2023). These biases represent new forms of

exclusion in digital environments that can spread rapidly through automated systems (Walkowiak 2024). Additional disabling effects include access barriers where limited affordability of assistive technologies (Mishra et al. 2024) create digital divides, preventing workers from developing necessary digital skills, resulting in what Goggin et al. (2003) termed "digital disabilities". Implementation context failures are another identified risk, as the digital work environment can exacerbate neurodivergent challenges, such as when remote work configurations disrupt established communication and routines (Szulc et al. 2023). Conversely, enabling processes are equally well-documented: assistive technologies improve organizational inclusiveness in recruitment, training, and workspace customization, contributing to enhanced confidence, motivation, and performance (Spoor and Walkowiak 2024; Tomczak 2022); provide individual accommodations for specific challenges like dyslexia and dysgraphia through reading and writing supports (Almgren Bäck et al. 2024) and executive function assistance through task management tools (Tomczak 2022); and at the macro level, improve labor market matching through technological platforms (Broecke 2023). This diverse evidence across different neurodivergent conditions, technology types, and organizational settings makes it difficult to draw any generalizable principles about the role of assistive technologies for neuro-inclusion at work.

The current literature predominantly examines how technologies assist managers, carers, and technology designers in enhancing both inclusion and productivity of neurodivergent workers, relying on perspectives of neurodiversity initiative leaders (Walkowiak 2021), carers of neurodivergent individuals (Tomczak 2022), and tech designers (Whittaker et al. 2019). This research aims to explain how various technologies can reconfigure organizational design to support neuro-friendly workplaces, whether by neutralizing human biases during recruitment and screening, providing accommodations for mental and physical well-being, or diversifying modes of interaction and training (Walkowiak 2024). However, the lived experiences of neurodivergent workers themselves as actual users of assistive technologies in workplace settings remain underexplored. While recent research has examined how asynchronous digital communication can support neurodivergent individuals in research settings (Craddock 2025) and how to design assistive technologies with neurodivergent users (Kalantari et al. 2025), we lack insight into how neurodivergent workers themselves identify and navigate these potentially contradictory processes and construct meanings around their technology use. Our focus here is not on how these technologies support specific inclusive organizational practices, but instead on understanding how neurodivergent workers themselves use and experience these technologies to construct meanings around ability, motivation, and opportunity. Understanding these subjective meaning-making processes among neurodivergent workers is necessary for understanding the impact of assistive technologies on their career development and advancing research on workplace neuro-inclusion.

2 | Methodology

The data is part of a larger project focusing on the processes of the transition to work and how neurodivergent individuals navigate the workplace, which included questions about assistive technology use. Our inductive approach revealed a striking prevalence and diversity in the use of assistive technologies among interviewees, an often-overlooked tool that could potentially enhance equality. Consequently, we examined assistive technologies in more depth in subsequent interviews, focusing on their role in neurodivergent individuals' workplace experiences. Rather than specifying particular assistive technologies during interviews, we allowed interviewees to freely speak about their technology use, enabling us to understand usage beyond formal workplace accommodations, including their personal adaptations and appropriation of these technologies and their perceived outcomes. We adopted an interpretative lens to understand how neurodivergent workers make meaning of their experiences.

2.1 | Context and Sample

The sample consisted of 30 neurodivergent individuals residing in France, where neuro-cognitive conditions fall under the disability umbrella, granting neurodivergent individuals specific rights such as workplace accommodations. Assistive technologies can be reasonable accommodations to which neurodivergent employees are entitled, although they can also be tools that organizations provide as part of their inclusive practices or can be used and paid for by individuals themselves. To request accommodations, neurodivergent workers must declare their condition and obtain the "Recognition of the Quality of Disabled Worker" status. Snowball sampling was used to recruit interviewees through online forums and professional networks. The only selection criterion was to be officially diagnosed with a neuro-cognitive condition, excluding individuals who self-identify as neurodivergent. Interviewees worked in various sectors, 57% were male and had an average age of 36.5 years. 40% reported multiple diagnoses. The demographic characteristics of the sample are provided in Table 1.

2.2 | Data Collection

We conducted 30 in-depth semi-structured interviews, after which saturation was reached. Interviews were conducted in French and translated into English by the first and second authors, both fluent in both languages. The interview guide, developed from identified literature gaps and refined in collaboration with neurodivergent individuals, explored the participants' educational and workplace journeys, while remaining open to emergent topics. Specific questions addressed assistive technology use and organizational approach to neurodiversity: "How does your organization perceive and deal with neurodiversity?" and "Do you use assistive technology? Why or why not? Is it helpful/unhelpful?". The AMO model emerged during analysis rather than structuring initial questions.

2.3 | Procedures

Ethics approval was obtained before starting the study. Interviewees were informed about the study's goal and signed informed consent forms. Aligned with neuro-inclusive and participatory research principles essential for trust and research

TABLE 1 | Demographic information of the sample.

Interviewee	Age	Gender	Condition(s)	Function
1	56	Female	Dyslexia and dysgraphia	Administrative worker
2	25	Female	ADHD and ASC	Physiotherapist
3	22	Male	ADHD	Truck driver
4	39	Male	ASC	Data analyst
5	47	Male	ASC and dyslexia	Shop keeper
6	42	Female	ADHD	Financial analyst
7	52	Female	ADHD	Entrepreneur
8	40	Male	ASC	Web developer
9	33	Male	Dysgraphia, dyscalculia and dyslexia	Customer service representative
10	37	Female	ASC	Accountant
11	41	Female	Dyslexia, dysgraphia and ADHD	Communication assistant
12	28	Female	ADHD	Seller
13	54	Female	ADD and dyspraxia	Veterinary assistant
14	29	Male	Dysgraphia	Nurse
15	21	Male	Dyscalculia and ADHD	App developer
16	20	Female	Dyslexia and dyspraxia	Designer
17	24	Male	ASC	Dog walker
18	36	Female	Dyslexia, dysgraphia, dyscalculia and ADD	Waitress
19	51	Male	ADHD	Car repairer
20	22	Male	Dyspraxia	Optician
21	33	Male	ASC and dysgraphia	Heating engineer
22	30	Female	Tourette Syndrome	Janitor
23	37	Male	ASC	Mechanic
24	42	Female	ASC and dyslexia	Chemist
25	25	Male	ADHD	Bartender
26	46	Male	ASC	Osteopath
27	22	Male	ASC	Writer
28	55	Male	ASC	Sociologist
29	50	Female	Dyslexia	Manager
30	38	Male	Dyslexia	Researcher

quality (Szulc 2023), neurodivergent individuals were involved throughout the study to improve accessibility and ensure accurate representation of their perspectives. For example, we conducted member checks of the ethics clearance and the interview guide and made some adjustments to enhance clarity by avoiding jargon (Lincoln and Guba 1985). We involved neurodivergent individuals in study design and incorporated their suggestions, such as sending interview questions beforehand to reduce stress. Interviewees could provide written answers if preferred and all chose an online interview via Zoom or Teams. During interviews, interviewees could turn off their cameras, and we reduced sensory stimuli by using plain backgrounds and clothing and minimizing background noise. Interviewees were informed they could request breaks at any time, that participation was voluntary, that they did not have to answer all the questions and that they could ask for reformulation if needed. To build trust, the first author, who conducted all interviews, disclosed that her family members were all neurodivergent.

2.4 | Reflexivity

Beyond involving neurodivergent individuals, we employed reflexive practices. Aligned with our constructionist perspective, we acknowledge the situated and subjective nature of the narratives. We are transparent about our motives and recognize our stance is not neutral. More specifically, the first author, a White female neurotypical scholar with a disability, acknowledges her privileged position and recognizes barriers neurodivergent individuals face. Her motivation stems from having neurodivergent family members. The second author, a White female neurotypical scholar, is motivated by close collaboration with neurodivergent colleagues and community involvement to understand how social, economic, and technological change can support workplace diversity and inclusion. The third author, a White female scholar who shares characteristics with the ADHD community is dedicated to fostering inclusivity for neurominorities through personal experience and active community involvement.

2.5 | Analysis

The first two authors conducted the analysis collaboratively using Template Analysis (King 2012) on 135 pages of transcripts. Using 10 interview transcripts, we developed a preliminary coding scheme, discussed and resolved disagreement through discussion until reaching consensus. This template was then applied to the full dataset. For example, reading, writing and verbalizing challenges were grouped as 'cognitive challenges', while fatigue and sensory overload were grouped as 'sensory challenges'. The coding of these challenges with illustrative quotes appears in the appendix. As our coding progressed, we identified various ways in which assistive technologies influenced neurodivergent workers, namely by removing cognitive, socioemotional and sensory challenges, by enhancing feelings of confidence, autonomy, self-efficacy, and agency and by reducing the stigma associated with neurodivergence. Further, some codes were split; 'stigma associated with neurodivergence' was divided into multiple stigma reduction processes. While our initial coding was inductive, we went back to the literature to make sense of our initial themes and noticed its alignment with the AMO model, prompting a deductive second coding round. Throughout the process, the coding template was refined and revised as each transcript was coded. Specifically, as we noticed that these processes allowed neurodivergent workers to show their abilities, become more motivated and enhance the attainability of opportunities, we coded this along the three dimensions of the AMO model. The second author had primary responsibility for creating, updating and revising the codes (Guest and MacQueen 2008), while the first author engaged in intensive discussions documented in team meetings to reach consensus on the final template. The third author joined later in the research process.

3 | Findings

This article explores how neurodivergent workers use and make sense of assistive technologies. Specifically, we show how neurodivergent workers construct meanings around abilities and motivation through their use of assistive technologies, which makes opportunities more attainable and allows them to consider different career possibilities. We identify three processes that are presented in more detail below.

3.1 | Process 1: Assistive Technologies Remove or Reduce Challenges at Work Making Opportunities More Attainable

Interviewees encountered a range of challenges related to their neuro-cognitive conditions in the workplace. They highlighted facing cognitive, socioemotional and sensory challenges when performing their tasks. Socioemotional challenges refer to issues related to emotion regulation during stressful situations at work and social interaction, such as communication and interpersonal relationships in the workplace.

When reflecting on their cognitive challenges, interviewees explained how they use assistive technologies to reduce or remove reading, writing, verbalizing, focus and planning barriers they face at work. Individuals with reading difficulties explained that they "*discovered a lot of useful tools like audible to avoid reading books*" (interviewee 9). Similarly, writing difficulties were overcome by "*software that reads to me what I've just written. I often forget words or parts of sentences and this allows me to notice and rectify that*" (interviewee 24). Interviewee 11 also explained how reading can generate stress and fatigue mentioning that:

> "*reading is extremely tiring for me. I get it done, but it just requires way more effort. While I used a lot of my free time to get the reading done in the past, which had an impact on my energy levels, it's no longer the case as I'm just listening, it saves me a lot of time and a lot of stress of being afraid to not get things done on time.*"

Technology was also largely mobilized to facilitate structuring and verbalizing one's ideas. For instance, autistic interviewee 8 is "*allowed to use a mindmap during meetings or brainstorming sessions*" as he is "*not good at briefly explaining the main message*" and interviewee 6 can "*organize ideas and information visually so that I can share them with others*" once her manager "*noticed I have a lot of ideas, but often struggle to organize them in a way that is understandable to others.*" Interviewee 6 with ADHD described how technologies helped reduce the effort required to structure, communicate and verbalize his ideas to others:

> "*My brain is always overflowing with ideas. It's tiring and people often don't understand me. When I explain something, I tend to go in all directions and people no longer follow me. I'm bad at structuring my ideas. Luckily there are some cool tools out there to help me keep track of my thoughts*".

Other cognitive challenges related to focus, time management and planning were equally reduced or eliminated through assistive technologies. Interviewee 7 highlights that she is "*using reminders to make sure I stay on top of my schedule*" and interviewee 15 with dyscalculia and ADHD has moved his "*to-do lists online, so that I cannot lose them. I can even share my list with colleagues so that they know when I'll work on it, it helps me to keep on track.*" This interviewee also highlighted that it was "*really helpful*" to be "*allowed to record meetings so I can listen to it again if needed as I often miss important information.*"

In terms of socioemotional barriers, we identified challenges related to emotion regulation and social interactions. Autistic interviewee 4 reflected on the difficulty to regulate one's emotions and mentioned using "*some apps to calm down when needed*". Interviewee 13 with ADD and dyspraxia also mentioned using an app to reduce stress and strong emotional reactions. "*Regulating my emotions is a constant challenge. I often cry and cannot hide it at work. I must look very unprofessional so I'm now using Headspace an app that helps me to acknowledge and manage my emotions so I can get through the day*". Similarly, difficulties with social interactions, generating stress or anxiety for autistic workers are substantially reduced in online environment, as explained by autistic interviewee 10:

> "*Social interaction makes me anxious. I'm happy to go to work and sit in my office, but days away or training sessions are more difficult. I brought it up with HR and*

they allow me to follow some training programs online. It's not always possible of course, but I really enjoy it. I can learn something new while staying comfortable".

Sensory challenges consisted of sensory preferences. Customizing the work environment is an essential enabling property of assistive technologies since it allows workers to control their sensory environment to match their preference. An autistic worker may prefer to reduce sound stimuli to improve his/her focus, while an individual with ADHD might thrive in a noisy work environment. As autistic interviewee 8 stated: "*Noise-cancelling headphones are great. I've used them throughout my studies and still use them at work. It allows me not to get overwhelmed*", while interviewee 19 with ADHD reported:

> *"I like to listen to music as it helps me to concentrate. This seems to be acceptable at work as people don't know whether headphones are used to cancel out noise or whether people listen to music. As long as it doesn't interfere with other people's work, they're happy to let me listen to music when it suits me".*

Our data highlights that assistive technologies allowed neurodivergent workers to reduce or remove a wide range of challenges that had previously hampered their career opportunities. The nature of these challenges varied from one worker to another, due to the variety of conditions of our interviewees. By reducing these barriers, assistive technologies made existing opportunities more attainable. Many workers had not considered or pursued these opportunities before, as the challenges had previously rendered them unattainable. This is illustrated by interviewee 14, a nurse with dysgraphia, who commented that "*never I dared to try [interesting training possibilities] as I thought my dysgraphia would just make it too difficult. With the technological changes in recent years this barrier is gone and I'm looking forward to specializing in elderly care.*" Similarly, participant 30 with dyslexia said that "*while my profession involves a lot of writing, the existence of spell checkers makes that I can still pursue it as a career*".

In sum, the neurodivergent interviewees clearly explained how technology helped them to eliminate, or reduce, challenges they tended to encounter preventing them from pursuing available opportunities, ultimately impacting their career-related outcomes.

3.2 | Process 2: The Use of Assistive Technologies Increases the Feelings of Confidence, Autonomy, Self-Efficacy and Agency to Use Available Opportunities

Interviewees explained how assistive technologies allowed them to overcome barriers they faced at work which seemed to enhance their self-perceived confidence, self-efficacy beliefs, and feelings of autonomy and agency. Interviewee 6 with ADHD stressed that timers and prompts led her to "*feel way more agentic*" and made her "*feel I'm on top of things.*" Further, interviewee 11 with dyslexia, dysgraphia and ADHD stressed that "*technology gives you back that sense of control, that you're*

in charge of your life and destiny." In a similar vein, assistive technologies increased feelings of autonomy. Interviewee 9 with dysgraphia, dyscalculia and dyslexia explained that:

> *"while I had to ask others to check my writing in the past, I can now just speak and use speech-to-text software. It doesn't mean much for most people, but for me, it allows me to act independently, while I was dependent on others before."*

Interviewees also reported that it changed how they saw themselves and reported increased self-efficacy beliefs and greater self-confidence. Interviewee 3 with ADHD reported: "*My self-esteem has always been incredibly low as they made me feel I was just stupid during my school years.*" However, he explained that "*assistive tech has changed that completely, which has given back my confidence.*"

In sum, the use of assistive technologies clearly increased interviewees' self-perceived confidence, self-efficacy beliefs, feelings of autonomy and agency. This allowed them to consider a wider range of career opportunities. Interviewee 18 with dysgraphia, dyslexia, dyscalculia and ADD explains how the lack of self-confidence and self-efficacy had been a self-limiting factor in the past and how the use of assistive technologies changed it:

> *"Sometimes it led to a lot of stress to have to write in front of others. Now I just say it and it's all written out for me, it's really amazing. It makes me less hesitant to speak up as I know they won't see my writing and just listen to what I have to say."*

This interviewee further expressed how having confidence in one's ability to perform one's job without fear of making mistakes was a revelation. The confidence gained helped workers overcome self-imposed barriers and limitations they previously believed were obstacles to taking on certain tasks and responsibilities. Assistive technologies allowed them to pursue opportunities they had thought were beyond their reach, as evidenced in the following representative quotation:

> *"The confidence that you can do your work without having to be afraid to make mistakes is an eye-opener as it removes these self-imposed barriers of tasks and responsibilities that I thought I could aspire to do."*

3.3 | Process 3: Assistive Technologies Reduce Stigma but Can Lead to Digital Masking

Assistive technologies have the potential to reduce the stigma neurodivergent workers often experience in two ways. First, interviewees reported that assistive technologies are no longer seen as workplace accommodations due to the normalization of its use, which reduces its stigma. As autistic interviewee 24 with dyslexia put it: "*Everyone uses technology now, so no one even notices it.*" This is also represented by autistic and dysgraphic interviewee 21:

"As artificial intelligence and assistive tech are becoming more mainstream, it's not as stigmatizing to use it. You're no longer an outsider as you open your computer, but you're like anyone else and that makes a big difference."

A second way in which assistive technologies reduce stigma is through digital masking, which consists of hiding one's neurodivergence through assistive technologies. We found that assistive technologies allow neurodivergent workers to conceal their neuro-cognitive differences and "*go unnoticed*" (interviewee 16, dyslexia and dyspraxia). Indeed, almost all interviewees "*don't want others to know*" (autistic interviewee 17) and linked this to the stigmatizing nature of the condition and that you "*don't want to be stigmatized*" (interviewee 13, ADD and dyspraxia). Interviewee 16 with dyspraxia and dyslexia reported "*handling it by yourself as you don't want to be perceived as incompetent.*" Technology was thus perceived to be a tool to conceal one's differences and avoid neurodivergence-related stigma.

Overall, the removal of stigma associated with neurodivergence facilitated neurodivergent workers in demonstrating their abilities and increased their motivation. This enabled individuals to reflect on their career aspirations, potential career paths and opportunities. To illustrate, interviewee 16 stressed that "*being seen as equal and seeing yourself as able allows you to envisage a different future, a different career path where limitations and barriers no longer play a role.*" Similarly, interviewee 21 reported when discussing the role of technologies that "*having the feeling that I'm now functioning just like others makes me feel that I can also find work that I really want to do, that I do not chose by default*" widening as such the career paths they could imagine for themselves.

While digital masking allowed neurodivergent workers to conceal their condition(s) at work, it is important to stress that it is a solution that does not solve the underlying issues. Just like other forms of masking, hiding one's differences and consequently appearing neurotypical through assistive technologies makes their challenges invisible to others, implying that, in the long run, it may hinder getting workplace support. This challenge was acknowledged by the interviewees and formulated by interviewee 1 with dyslexia and dysgraphia: "*The downside of this strategy is that my challenges are even less visible…by trying to cope with it by yourself, you make it less visible, which then leads to less support, so that's a bit tricky.*" While digital masking allowed neurodivergent workers to conceal their conditions, it seems a double-edged sword as it concomitantly reduces awareness of and support for neurodivergence in the workplace. This risk may be even more pronounced in situations where neurodivergent workers independently acquire assistive technologies, often without organizational support, making their challenges less visible and perpetuating the cycle of invisibility. Many interviewees spoke about paying for these technologies by themselves instead of requesting them from their employer. An autistic interviewee 4 reported: "*I did not even ask them, I just needed it, so I got myself noise-cancelling headphones*". Similarly, interviewee 14 with dysgraphia told the researcher: "*I'm now using technology that I pay for myself before I send off anything written.*" It shows that digital masking strategies generate a financial cost for neurodivergent workers.

4 | Discussion

Drawing on 30 semi-structured in-depth interviews with neurodivergent workers in France, this article examined how neurodivergent workers use and make sense of assistive technologies. We show how assistive technologies influence the abilities and motivation of neurodivergent workers, making opportunities more attainable and allowing them to consider different career possibilities. We identify three processes through which assistive technologies may ultimately influence the career-related outcomes of neurodivergent individuals. This is depicted in our conceptual model below in Figure 1.

First, assistive technologies can reduce or remove the cognitive, socioemotional and sensory challenges that neurodivergent workers regularly experience at work. Second, they enhance feelings of confidence, autonomy, self-efficacy, and agency among neurodivergent workers. Third, assistive technologies can help reduce the stigma associated with neurodivergence in two ways: by normalizing the use of technology in the workplace, thereby lessening the stigma tied to accommodations, and through what we call digital masking in which individuals can conceal their neuro-cognitive differences.

These three processes allow neurodivergent workers to better showcase their abilities and increase their motivation, ultimately making available opportunities more attainable. We build on the literature on the positive outcomes of assistive technologies in the context of work (Khan et al. 2025; Walkowiak 2021; Zhou et al. 2025) by identifying its underlying processes. Indeed, previous research has mainly identified how it removes barriers to their participation in the labor market (Almgren Bäck et al. 2024; Tomczak 2022), through the lens of employers or carers. In addition, we found that the three processes we identified are interconnected and can also reinforce one another. For example, reducing challenges can boost confidence, while decreased stigma may further enhance feelings of autonomy and self-efficacy, creating a positive feedback loop that amplifies their combined impact. Indeed, assistive technologies allow individuals to have more control over their decision whether to disclose their neurodivergent condition or not and, if they wish, allows them to hide it (Santuzzi and Keating 2023). However, it is important to acknowledge that one of the potential risks of assistive technology is the possibility of digital masking, which, while reducing stigma, may also inadvertently limit the attainability of opportunities by restricting access to necessary support and workplace accommodations. Thus, assistive technologies may help neurodivergent workers to showcase their abilities by removing cognitive, physical or socioemotional barriers, increase their motivation through enhanced feelings of confidence, autonomy, self-efficacy and agency (Klavina et al. 2024) and make career development opportunities more attainable (Dispenza 2021). Yet, their use does not remove structural barriers such as the hegemony of neurotypical norms that are reflected in many organizational structures, processes and policies (Hennekam et al. 2025).

4.1 | Theoretical Implications

We make several contributions to the AMO model. First, we broaden the traditional understanding of the AMO model by
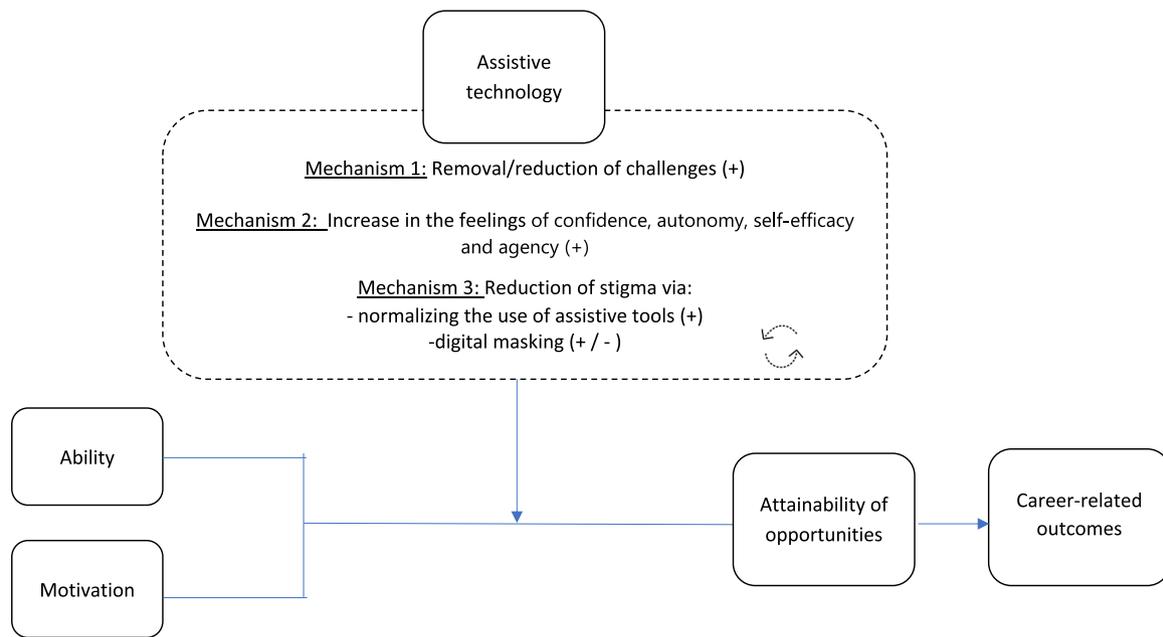
FIGURE 1 | Conceptual model on the impact of assistive technologies on the careers of neurodivergent workers through an AMO lens. [Color figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

integrating assistive technologies as a conceptual lens for exploring how abilities, motivation, and opportunities are experienced and enacted in practice. Whereas prior AMO research has predominantly focused on HRM practices in enhancing ability, motivation, and opportunity (Bos-Nehles et al. 2023; Szulc et al. 2021), we show how assistive technologies shape how workers interpret or engage with these core dimensions. The three enabling processes of assistive technologies that we identified (challenge mitigation, empowerment building, and stigma reduction) support neurodivergent workers' participation at both the individual level (by enhancing abilities and motivation) and the organizational level (by reshaping the attainability of opportunities). In particular, we introduce the notion of attainability of opportunities to highlight that opportunities, even when formally available, may not be equally accessible or actionable for all workers, and that assistive technologies can transform organizational inclusiveness by making opportunities more attainable for neurodivergent workers. In doing so we respond to calls for more research on the role of assistive technologies in shaping the career experiences of marginalized, invisible and stigmatized populations (Ezerins et al. 2024; Hennekam and Follmer 2024; Szulc and Staniszewska 2025) and identify three enabling processes through which assistive technologies shape careers for neurodivergent workers.

Second, by centering the lived experience of neurodivergent workers, we highlight a limitation in the traditional AMO model: the implicit neuro-normative assumption that available opportunities can be equally leveraged by all. Building on the concept of attainability, we argue that opportunity realization is dynamic and context-dependent, varies across individual and situations, and therefore cannot be inferred solely from the presence of opportunities (Ospina 2019). This approach does not add new components to the AMO model, but rather problematizes its underlying assumptions, foregrounding how accessibility and context condition the reciprocal interplay

between abilities, motivations, and opportunities in shaping careerss (Bölte et al. 2025).

Third, we contribute to the literature on masking by introducing a novel concept that we label "digital masking". Indeed, while previous research consistently links AMO-enhancing practices to positive outcomes for both individuals and organizations (Ferrarini and Curzi 2023), our findings indicate that assistive technologies can lead neurodivergent workers to mask their conditions. While masking by neurodivergent workers and its potential negative consequences (Radulski 2022) has received scholarly attention, digital masking is a new coping strategy that has not been previously identified in the literature. Research by Santuzzi and Keating (2023) shows that neurodivergent individuals face complex decisions about disclosing their conditions to managers and co-workers. The costs and benefits of disclosure versus masking depend on one's assessment of one's work environment. Our findings indicate that digital technologies shift this cost-benefit calculation. Neurodivergent individuals can use assistive technologies to digitally mask their condition, potentially at lower psychological and economic cost or in more efficient ways than they can do in non-digital environments. However, research on masking in traditional environments also warns of long-term consequences: reduced authentic relationships, limited workplace advocacy opportunities, increased stress, and damaged self-esteem (Radulski 2022). Just like non-digital masking, digital masking can lead to a lack of workplace support and hinders awareness and acceptance of neurodivergence in organizations. Thus, while assistance in the form of assistive technologies can be emancipatory by better showcasing one's abilities and motivation and making opportunities more attainable, it does not address cultural and structural inequalities as it can simultaneously and unconsciously incite individuals to mask their neuro-cognitive differences, echoing earlier research on entrepreneurs (Hidegh et al. 2023).

Fourth, the existence of digital masking calls for reinterpreting the complementarities between neuroinclusive organizational practices and assistive technologies (Walkowiak 2024; Spoor and Walkowiak 2024) that exist only when neurodivergence is disclosed by workers. Indeed, by enabling "perfect invisibility" of neurodivergence, digital masking may undermine workplace support systems that assume disclosure, such as formal accommodations and informal support mechanisms. Digital masking may conflict with disclosure-dependent support systems, making potentially accommodation contingency counterproductive or even obsolete in digital workplaces.

4.2 | Practical Implications

First, our results show that the cognitive, socioemotional and sensory barriers reported by neurodivergent workers can be reduced or eliminated with digital technologies. Consequently, digital literacy training targeting neurodivergent workers, as well as open-access digital communities through which neurodivergent individuals can foster shared experiences and gather peer support, could be beneficial for this population (Russo et al. 2023). The development of online forums or networks can enhance the technological empowerment of neurodivergent workers by informing them about accessibility features. These forums can create feedback loops for tech companies to improve the accessibility of their products.

Second, as digital masking offers neurodivergent workers greater control over whether they want to reveal or conceal their differences, workplace support or specific accommodations that are contingent upon disclosure may not be the most suitable (Kalmanovich-Cohen and Stanton 2025). Instead, organizations may want to reflect on how to give access to formal accommodations such as flexible scheduling and environmental modifications without requesting workers to disclose their neurodivergence (Gignac et al. 2021). While neurodivergent workers are entitled to access assistive technologies as accommodation by the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities infers the (Smith et al. 2024), their access being conditional on disclosure pushes them to directly pay for these technologies. This can create new inequities. Organizations could address this by providing assistive technology stipends or equipment lending programs that do not require disclosure. Further, digital masking can reinforce managerial blindness regarding neurodivergence, preventing managers from identifying team members who need support (Russo et al. 2023). Neurodiversity awareness training, creating a psychologically safe and neuro-inclusive climate in which trust and inclusion are practiced will allow neurodivergent workers to reveal their differences without fearing negative repercussions if they wish to do so.

Third, assistive technologies have the potential to open up career possibilities for neurodivergent workers by reducing the stigma associated with neurodivergence and by reducing its visibility. Yet, technology remains an insufficient solution and needs improvement if we want all workers to thrive, regardless of their neuro-cognitive profile. Indeed, assistive technologies do not remove systematic barriers (Chen 2023). Redesigning organizational processes and policies and enhancing awareness about neurodivergence should complement digital solutions (Ali et al. 2024). Raising awareness of and educating individuals about neurodivergence through diversity training is a good first step. Further, normalizing the use of technologies, such as online remote work, speech-to-text software, or visual aids, by making their adoption more universal rather labelling them as special accommodation, could also reduce the stigma associated with the need for adaptations or support (Kowalski et al. 2017). This approach, combined with early career counselling starting in educational settings, would benefit neurodivergent individuals to avoid self-limiting beliefs and behaviours.

4.3 | Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

First, the study reports on semi-structured in-depth interviews with neurodivergent workers at one point in time. However, as technologies and their use are rapidly evolving, it would be interesting to follow neurodivergent workers over time, for example, through the use of daily diaries or repeated interviews.

Second, the study was conducted in France, where neurodiversity falls under the disability umbrella. The findings should therefore be interpreted in the light of this legal, cultural and economic context. For example, none of our interviewees mentioned affordability problems in accessing assistive technologies. Future research should include non-Western countries as the experiences of neurodivergent workers beyond the Western world are strongly underrepresented, and access to technologies varies substantially among workers and across countries.

Third, we asked individuals to report on their use of assistive technologies. However, we did not ask whether this use was borne out of mandatory accommodations provided by the organization, whether they were proactively offered these tools or whether individuals had bought them out of their own pocket. This is an important shortcoming as the most agentic individuals may have requested assistive technologies as a workplace adaptation or bought it themselves as an individual solution. Given that assistive technologies may lead to enhanced feelings of self-efficacy and agency, this may indicate a recursive process that we did not explore.

Fourth, the notion of digital masking presents exciting avenues for future research. For example, it would be interesting to study how emotional labor is performed in relation to digital masking. Further, although our findings point to both similar and different barriers as well as specific forms of technology use per neuro-cognitive condition, we can only report on tentative tendencies. More research that focuses on distinct conditions, co-occurring conditions, and studies that account for the intersection with other characteristics, such as physical health challenges (Donaghy et al. 2023) or mental health conditions (Accardo et al. 2024), is needed. Relatedly, future research should examine potential differences per job type and sectors as workers in various functions and sectors may use assistive technologies in different capacities which may have various influences on their abilities, motivation and the attainability of opportunities. Finally, how neurodivergent workers consider challenges related to algorithmic biases, the digital divide and privacy risks inherent to technological development need more attention in future research endeavors.

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Appendix

Illustrative quotes on the various barriers neurodivergent individuals face

Sub-codes and themes	Illustrative quotes by sub-code
Theme 1: Cognitive barriers	
Reading	*Reading and writing are obvious skills, everyone masters them. For me it was not so easy. I've spent hours every evening to read over all the materials I couldn't finish (interviewee 1, dyslexia and dysgraphia). Reading is extremely tiring for me. I get it done, but it just requires way more effort. While I uses a lot of my free time to get the reading done in the past, which had an impact on my energy levels (interviewee 11, dyslexia, dysgraphia and ADHD).*
Writing	*I had to ask others to check my writing in the past (interviewee 9, dyslexia, dysgraphia, dyscalculia).*
Verbalizing	*My brain is always overflowing with ideas. It's tiring and people often don't understand me. When I explain something, I tend to go in all directions and people no longer follow me. I'm bad at structuring my ideas (interviewee 6, ADHD).*

(Continues)

Sub-codes and themes	Illustrative quotes by sub-code
	During meetings or brainstorming sessions I'm not good at briefly explaining the main message (interviewee 8, ASD).
	I always struggled to say what was in my head. I had it all sorted out, but I was never able to explain that in a structured, clear manner (interviewee 18, dyslexia, dysgraphia, dyscalculia and ADD).
Focus	*I easily forget[s] things (interviewee 7, ADHD).*
	I'm quite impulsive, I'm all over the place and I've got an attention span of zero. That's just how I am (interviewee 6, ADHD).
Planning	*I struggled to finish projects. I'm often very motivated at the beginning, but then I get distracted and never finalize it (interviewee 6, ADHD).*
Theme 2: Socioemotional barriers	
Social norms	*It's a shame companies don't come with a manual. For me, the neurotypical norms aren't obvious at all. I don't get it, don't fit in (interviewee 2, ADHD/ASD*
Social interactions	*Social interaction makes me anxious. I'm happy to go to work and sit in my office, but days away or training sessions are more difficult (interviewee 10, ASD).*
Regulation of emotions	*Regulating my emotions is a constant challenge (interviewee 13, ADD and dyspraxia).*
Theme 3: Sensory and physical barriers	
Sensory overload	*Sensory overload is an issue. My office is very plain, no photos, no decoration, little light. The brightness on my screen is as low as possible and I like it (interviewee 4, ASD).*
Fatigue	*To be honest, it's exhausting. It's like you're trying to run with a colleague who's got a slightly faster pace and you're constantly trying to follow him. You can do it, but not in the long run, at some stage you have admit that he's running too fast for you and that you require a slower pace (interviewee 9, dyslexia/dyscalculia/dysgraphia).*