Is it You? Is it Me? Or is it Adult ADHD?

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Objectives

- Better understanding of what is ADHD
- Recognize its impact in the workplace
- Identify strategies for overcoming ADHD in the workplace
What Is ADHD?
ADHD, broken down

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder

Types:

Predominantly inattentive
Predominantly Hyperactive/impulsive
Or Combined

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ADHD is...

Paul Wender, renowned ADHD researcher, defines it as:

“A genetic, neurological difficulty of engagement with life activities on demand in which an individual’s performance, mood, and energy level are solely determined by that individual’s momentary sense of interest, challenge, novelty, and sometimes, urgency.”
ADHD is NOT...

- Poor character
- Stubbornness
- Stupidity
- Laziness
- Low intelligence
- Poor willpower
- Bad attitude

It is neurological

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The ADHD Brain is Ignited By:

- Keen interest in the task.
- Challenging and/or competitive task.
- New and novel activity
  - And when all else fails...
- Urgency caused by a deadline or crisis.
  - Fueled by adrenaline.

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ADHD, the Proof It Exists

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Executive Functions

- Organizing, prioritizing, and activating to work
- Focusing, sustaining and shifting attention to tasks
- Regulating alertness, sustaining effort, and processing speed
- Managing frustration and modulation emotions
- Utilizing working memory and accessing recall
- Monitoring and self-regulating action

Source: Dr. Thomas E. Brown
URL: http://www.drthomasebrown.com/add-adhd-model/
What Research Says About ADHD

• Anatomical causes: 20+ studies, discover a reduced volume in the Prefrontal Cortex and Cingular Cortex

• Not the result of poor parenting: Biological parents of adopted children with ADHD are 3 times more likely to also have it

• Molecular genetics: Certain genes associated with ADHD (specifically related to the Dopamine transporters (DRD5) and Dopamine receptors (DRD4))
Socio-Economic Costs

• ADHD may cost the US economy as much as $266,000,000,000 annually

• 83% of this cost is due to adult ADHD

• Workplace issues represent the largest contributor (71-82% of costs)


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Prevalence of Adult ADHD

4.4% of Canadian adults have ADHD\(^1\)

Over 1.5 million Canadians have ADHD

85% of them don’t know they have it\(^3\)


\(^2\)2010 US Census

\(^3\)Kessler, R. C et al. (2006)

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Life With ADHD
I procrastinate and wait until the last minute for everything.

I have to work so hard just to focus.

It’s so hard to pay attention during long conversations.

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What ADHD Feels Like

“I am preoccupied by negative thoughts about my shortcomings.”

“My to-do list just seems to grow and grow. I can’t get ahead.”

“I’m in a constant state of overwhelm.”

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What ADHD Feels Like

How could I forget this important commitment?

I’m always making mistakes

It’s so hard for me to make decisions

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What ADHD Feels Like

“I have so many thoughts – lots of great ideas – but I can’t capture or act on them.”

I can never find anything; I’m just so disorganized

I can’t wait anymore, I have to interrupt

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Challenges in Major Life Activities

Percentage of Each Group Reporting Impairment in Various Domains of Major Life Activities (UMASS)

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Problems in the Workplace

% of Jobs Held in Which Various Workplace Problems Occurred


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Adults with ADHD Tend to

Source: Küpper, T. Et al (2012). The negative impact of attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder on occupational health in adults and adolescents
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Other Important Problems Related to ADHD

- Poor planning / time management
- Poor working memory (short-term memory + classification + recall)
- Emotional volatility
- For certain people, cognitive processing may be slow
On the Bright Side, ADHDers...

- Generate new original, flexible and innovative ideas
- Have more real creative accomplishments

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Some Known ADHDers

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Mining for Gold (or Nickel)

- With the right help and when emphasis is made in developing their strengths and minimizing the use of the weaknesses, they perform as well as their non-ADHD colleagues¹

- Easily treatable: with a high return on investment
  - Productivity that is equal or above that of their colleagues
  - Great loyalty

¹Source: Fitzgerald, M. (2009). *Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder: Creativity, Novelty Seeking and Risk*
Impact of ADHD in the workplace
Untreated ADHDers Face Challenges

- Lose an average of 22 days of productivity/year\(^8\)
  - Poor planning skills – time and projects
  - Struggles to control focus on a task
  - Poor organisational skills
  - Absenteeism
  - Burnout\(^9\)

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The Adult With ADHD

- Deploys more and more energy to accomplish their work without gaining any satisfaction
  - Know they should be able to accomplish more
  - Their frustration accumulates
  - Self-esteem drops

- Invest more and more time at work
  - Until they burnout
  - Struggle with imposing limits
  - Perfectionism
ADHDer to the Rescue

• Tendency toward organisational citizenship behaviour
  • Helping colleagues with an organisational problem
  • Putting out fires for the organisation


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Roadblocks to Peak Performance

• Activities that hold little or no interest, novelty or that won’t bring immediate satisfaction
• Tasks requiring sustained effort or attention
• Situations where there is a lot of noise competing with interactions
• Certain group situations

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Team / Supervisor Issues

- Poor productivity impacts the team’s performance
  - Chronic lateness with commitments
  - Forgets appointments
  - Mistakes, missed details
- Communication issues
  - Interrupting
  - Zoning out of long conversations
Traditional Solutions Don’t Work

- Traditional time management programs don’t work
  - They are based on “neurotypicals”
- A coach or trainer not familiar with ADHD would
  - Quickly become frustrated by the lack of progress in his ADHD client
  - Judge him/her as “not trying enough”, “resistant to change”, not coachable.

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What Can You Do?
Utilize a Strengths-Based Approach

- Help identify your employees’ strengths
- Help them develop them
- Provide opportunities to contribute them
- Acknowledge them

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Job Crafting

- Role innovation
- Task revision
- Personal initiative

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The Ideal Job

- Very interesting or novel activities or activities
- Work associated with a rapid positive gain
- Guidance without micromanagement
- Expected **results** are specific and well communicated
  - Ideally the impact of results
- Face-to-face conversation vs. group discussions
Favorable Work Environment

- How can you improve all employees’ performance?
  - Take advantage of each employee’s strengths
  - Focus on results
  - Offer flexibility in HOW the work is completed
There’s Still a Problem?

1. Properly identify the source of the gap in performance
2. Assist employee in identifying the problem
3. Integrate reasonable accommodations in the work setting
4. Provide supervisors with help to supervise employees
5. Offer ADHD Coaching in the workplace
1) Properly identify the source of the gap in performance

Knowledge
- Does not know what is expected from them
- Don’t receive feedback about their performance
- Have no way to measure and adjust their performance
- Don’t know how to do

Desire
- Does not want to do certain tasks
- Do not accept a certain change
- Don’t want to go against group norms.

Power
- Do not have the proper tools, equipment or resources needed to perform their work
- Have not say in decisions
- Don’t have the required profile for their position.
- Don’t have the required competencies to perform their work well.
2) Assist employee in identifying the problem

- Provide access to Employee Assistance Programs
- Provide a self-evaluation form
- Offer financial assistance in seeking help

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3) Integrate reasonable accommodations in the work setting

- Definition: Requires adjusting working conditions so that people can continue to work when there are Code grounds that may make it hard for them to work without accommodation.

- When providing accommodations
  - Act quickly to accept a request in good faith
  - Only ask for information on accommodation needs
  - Actively search for solutions, get expert help if needed
  - Ensure dignity and respect and confidentiality
  - No reprisal
  - Cover costs of accommodations

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Accommodations May Require:

- Modified duties, standards and rules
- Changes to facilities or workstations
- Supplying assistive devices or support
- Allowing some time off to attend to certain needs
  - If a less expensive or different accommodation is supplied it must still meet that person’s needs.
  - After the accommodation is in place the employee must be able to perform essential duties
4) Provide supervisors with help to supervise employees

- Help supervisors see the advantages of helping the employee improve their performance:
  - Retention of a creative employee with optimal contribution
  - Excited, motivated employees – improving one employee’s performance positively impacts the others
  - Better work environment
    - More cohesion and collaboration
- Ensure supervisor knows his/her role
- Help supervisor avoid harassment toward employee
5) Offer ADHD Coaching in the workplace

- Recommended by experts in the field of ADHD
- Long-term efficacy
- Allows the employee to use strategies that will work for them by:
  - Optimizing the use of their strengths
  - Minimizing the impact of their weaknesses

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Your Return on Investment

- Increased performance and efficiency
- Improved team work
- Access to employee’s strengths
- Faster completion of projects
- Avoid costly productivity losses
- Improved employee retention

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Conclusion

- Investing these resources allows:
  - The employee with ADHD to continue to work to make his greatest contribution to the success of the organisation
  - The organisation to retain a valuable employee