



Understanding and Supporting Employees with ADHD: Addressing Task Procrastination in the Workplace

Introduction

“There is no such thing as an unproductive ADHD adult, just unsupported ADHD adults...”

Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is a neurodevelopmental disorder characterised by patterns of behaviour that can include difficulty in maintaining attention, hyperactivity, and impulsiveness.

In the workplace, employees with ADHD may face unique challenges, one of which is a tendency to procrastinate on tasks. Procrastination among employees with ADHD is not a sign of laziness or desire to work; rather, it is a manifestation of the emotional and ‘executive function impairments’ that are part ADHD.

This document aims to provide employers with insights into the reasons behind task procrastination in employees with ADHD and offer strategies for support.

Understanding ADHD and Procrastination

1. Executive function deficits: ADHD is associated with deficits in executive functions, which are the thinking skills that control and regulate behaviour. This includes difficulty with planning, prioritising, initiating tasks, and managing time effectively.
2. Task initiation challenges: Employees with ADHD often have difficulty starting tasks, particularly those that are complex, lacking full information or repetitive. This is often due to a lack of internal motivation systems that individuals without ADHD rely on to initiate tasks.
3. Overwhelm with task complexity: Multistep tasks or projects with many components can be particularly challenging for an individual with ADHD to approach, leading to procrastination. The difficulty in breaking down a task into manageable parts can result in feeling overwhelmed and hence a delay in task initiation.
4. Time perception difficulties: People with ADHD may have a different perception of time, known as "time blindness," making it challenging to plan and use time effectively. They may underestimate the time a task will take or may be unable to manage their time efficiently, resulting in delayed starts or last-minute rushes.



5. **Distraction and hyperfocus:** An employee with ADHD might be easily distracted by external events or distractions, or unrelated thoughts, diverting attention from the task at hand. Conversely, they may become 'hyperfocused' on certain tasks that are stimulating and delay others.

6. **Fear of failure and perfectionism:** Employees with ADHD may avoid starting a task due to a fear of not completing it perfectly. This anxiety can lead to avoidance and procrastination as a coping mechanism.

Strategies to Support Employees with ADHD to Overcome Procrastination

1. **Provide clear instructions and expectations:** Ensure that instructions for tasks are clear, concise, and accessible. Clearly define the outcome expectations, priority, deadlines, and the reasons why the task is important.

2. **Provide Visual Aids:** Visual schedules, checklists, mind mapping software and planners can be helpful for employees with ADHD. These tools help in visualising the tasks, their sequence, and deadlines.

4. **Encourage regular breaks:** Short, structured breaks can help employees with ADHD manage their energy and attention levels, reducing the urge to procrastinate. And avoid burnout.

5. **Foster a Supportive Environment:** A workplace culture that encourages open communication and non-judgmental support can make employees with ADHD feel more comfortable seeking help or accommodations when they begin to feel overwhelmed. Consider setting up a neurodiversity support group.

7. **Encourage asking questions:** Research shows that if people with ADHD are empowered to ask questions they can be both productive and successful.

8. **Utilise technology and apps:** Recommend the use of productivity apps that can help manage tasks, provide reminders, and keep track of deadlines.

9. **Positive Reinforcement:** Acknowledge and reinforce progress and task completion, which can boost the employee's confidence and motivation.

Final thoughts

Procrastination in employees with ADHD is often a result of the interplay between their ADHD symptoms and the demands of the task at hand. Understanding the root causes of this procrastination is the first step in providing the right support. With the right strategies



and accommodations, employers can create an inclusive workplace that allows employees with ADHD to thrive and contribute to their full potential.

By addressing the underlying reasons for procrastination and implementing supportive practices, employers not only assist their employees with ADHD in overcoming procrastination but also enhance overall workplace productivity and employee satisfaction.