"Stop Trying So Hard!"
Disclosing ADHD in the Workplace

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In college, people who have learning differences or ADHD are provided an array of different resources (e.g., notetakers, tutoring, additional test time, counseling, etc.). People with these differences learn ways to manage them, but these strategies do not directly translate to the workplace. Resources are often not available in the workplace, leaving people with learning differences to manage on their own. The case study follows Suzie—a young professional diagnosed with ADHD at an early age—through a day in her new role as a communication coordinator. Suzie has accepted ADHD as a part of her identity, but she often questions the accuracy of her notes, has difficulty interpreting her notes, and finds it difficult to remember conversations. The case begins with Suzie in a meeting with her supervisor. After the meeting, she goes back to her desk to interpret her notes. In doing so, she attracts attention from her coworkers. The case provides opportunities to discuss concepts such as minority stress, stigma, self-disclosure, invisible disabilities, and workplace accommodations.

INTRODUCTION

ADHD and the Workplace

People who have invisible disabilities refer to people burdened by conditions that cannot be seen by looking at them; this includes chronic pain or fatigue, learning differences, brain injuries, cognitive dysfunctions, mental health disorders, hearing impairments, and vision impairments (Syma, 2018). One such invisible disability is Attention-Deficit Disorder or Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). ADHD is considered a chronic, lifelong condition that affects attention, hyperactivity, and impulsiveness. Individuals often assume that the symptoms of ADHD simply go away once an individual reaches adulthood; however, more than eight million adults in the United States are diagnosed with ADHD (Fayyad et al., 2017). So, there are millions of adults trying to manage their ADHD in the workplace with very few accommodations readily available to them.

ADHD is a protected disability by the Americans with Disabilities Act. The Act entitles some individuals to organizational support in the form of workplace accommodations. Organizational support for individuals with ADHD can include informal steps from managers such as dividing large assignments into multiple smaller tasks, providing assignment checklists, using shared calendars to keep the ADHD employee on track, providing organizational tools (e.g., timers, alarms, and color-coded systems), giving precise and clear directions, and setting timelines for projects (Robbins, 2017). More formal and costly interventions include psychotherapy, providing a job coach or counselor, and access to a distraction-free workspace (Nadeau, 2005; Robbins, 2017; Sarkis, 2014).

ADHD Accommodations

For many young adults, college is like their workplace, and their assignments are their work. Accordingly, students with ADHD are supported throughout college, and they are provided an array of resources and accommodations such as notetakers, tutoring, additional time on tests, and counseling (Sarkis, 2008). Over time, and with the appropriate resources, individuals with ADHD learn how to manage their differences. For example, coaching provided through college accommodations can help students with ADHD develop and learn to manage their executive functions (Parker & Boutelle, 2009; Prevatt, 2016). Unfortunately, many people with ADHD find that the strategies they use in school do not directly transfer to the workplace (Sarkis, 2014). The resources present in educational settings are often not available in the workplace, which leaves people who have ADHD to manage on their own (Robbins, 2017). Accommodations such as notetakers, tutoring, and additional time

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