

A Manager’s Guide to Recognising ADHD in the Workplace

 Neurodiversity

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is a neurodevelopmental condition that influences a person's executive functioning system, the brain's command centre for starting tasks, regulating attention, organising thoughts, and managing time.

In a professional setting, ADHD rarely looks like “hyperactivity” in the traditional sense. Instead, it manifests as distinct, sometimes contradictory cognitive styles that can be easily misunderstood.



The Reality of Workplace ADHD



2 million adults in the UK are estimated to be living with ADHD, yet 8 out of 10 remain undiagnosed. Many of your team members may be struggling without knowing why.



Up to **93% of adults** with ADHD report experiencing severe workplace burnout symptoms, compared to just 30% of neurotypical employees. This is often due to "masking", the exhausting process of hiding struggles to fit in.



Adults with ADHD are **61% more likely** to have been fired and **53% more likely** to have quit a job, often because structural mismatches are treated as capability failures.



According to NHS England data and major UK independent clinics, the average wait time for an adult NHS ADHD assessment is between 12 and 36 months, with some people waiting **over 5 years**.

The Three Core Work Styles to Understand as Managers

To recognise ADHD early, managers should look out for a unique blend of these three internal processing styles:

Executive Dysfunction

Severe friction when trying to initiate mundane or low-stimulation tasks, track multi-layered logistics, or accurately estimate how long a project will take.

Hyperfocus

The ability to deeply zone into highly engaging, complex, or novel projects. When hyper-focussing, an employee can often produce exceptional, high-speed outputs that outpace standard timelines.

Variable Attention

Attention is not absent; rather, it is incredibly difficult to regulate. Highly stimulating or urgent tasks receive intense focus, while routine or administrative tasks require a painful, disproportionate amount of mental energy.

Early Indicators: What to Look For

While everyone experiences stress or disorganisation occasionally, managers should look for consistent, repeated pattern of these behaviours over time, especially when they cluster together.

Early sign / behaviour	Often misinterpreted as...	The reality
Inconsistent Delivery: Alternating between brilliant patches of high-speed innovation and sudden, paralysed delays on routine admin (e.g., timesheets, CRM updates).	Carelessness, laziness, or a lack of commitment to the team.	Executive Dysfunction. The employee's brain struggles to generate the dopamine required to initiate low-stimulation, repetitive work, regardless of how smart they are.
Last-Minute Adrenaline Binging: Consistently delivering high-quality project work, but only at the absolute final deadline (e.g., submitting at 11:59PM).	Poor time management, poor planning, or intentional procrastination.	Adrenaline Dependency. Without a looming crisis, the brain cannot find the "go" signal. While the output is great, relying on constant crisis-mode to function is a primary driver of sudden burnout.
Social or Meeting Withdrawal: Going quiet in long meetings, missing multi-step verbal instructions, or actively avoiding cameras/large group discussions.	Lack of commitment to the team and investment in the work.	Working Memory Challenges. For ADHD, "out of sight is out of mind." Archiving an email or closing a tab feels like deleting it from existence. Clutter is often their version of an active filing system.
Intense Disorganisation: A chaotic physical workspace, dozens of open digital tabs, or missing minor logistical details in emails despite strong core outputs.	Unprofessionalism, untidiness, or a lack of commitment.	Working Memory Challenges. The internal systems required to track minor logistical details are overwhelmed.
Verbal Interruption / Over-explaining: Blurring out ideas in meetings, interrupting colleagues, or sending incredibly dense, high-context emails to explain a simple point.	Being dominant, or unable to communicate concisely.	Impulse Control & Anxiety. They may interrupt because their working memory drops thoughts rapidly and they fear forgetting it. Over-explaining is often a trauma response to past misunderstandings.

Five Practical Actions for Your Organisation



Start with a neurodiversity policy

A standalone, accessible document that sets out **clear definitions, practical guidance, and signposting to further support**. A strong policy gives employees confidence to come forward, gives managers a framework for action, and signals unambiguously that your organisation is a safe place to have these conversations.

 [Download Fertifa's gold-standard Neurodiversity Policy Template](#)



Audit how your organisation communicates

Miscommunication is one of the most damaging, and most preventable, challenges. Use engagement surveys, ERGs, or focus groups to find out what your people actually need. Then consider introducing:

- AI transcription tools for meeting summaries
- Grammar and spell-check software
- Clear, jargon-free written briefs alongside verbal instructions
- Meeting agendas sent in advance



Make reasonable adjustments the norm

Many of the most impactful adjustments cost very little. HR teams should proactively communicate what's available, rather than waiting for employees to ask.

- **Environment:** Noise-cancelling headphones, quiet zones, anti-glare screens
- **Flexibility:** Fixed desks, flexible hours, dial-in meeting options
- **Technology:** Caption software, screen readers, organisational tools



Train your managers on neuroinclusive practices

Policies only work if the people implementing and executing them understand why they matter. Invest in neurodiversity training for all managers and team leads, **focusing on distinguishing between a performance issue and an unmet support need**.

When managers understand neurodivergence as a natural variation in how brains work, it transforms how they respond. Even a half-day session can meaningfully shift how a team operates.



Treat neuroinclusion as an ongoing commitment, not a one-off project

Embed neuroinclusion into your existing processes: your annual engagement survey, your manager check-ins, your benefits review cycle. **Neuroinclusion shouldn't sit outside your people strategy, it should run through it.** You will get things wrong, but you will learn and improve. The organisations that succeed are those that build in regular feedback loops, checking in with neurodivergent employees and reviewing what's working.

How Fertifa Can Help

Fertifa helps HR teams turn neurodiversity policies and commitments into meaningful, comprehensive support offering ongoing clinical provision your employees can rely on.

Clinical Expertise

We fill critical gaps in standard provision by providing direct access to specialists, for diagnostics and workplace needs assessments, to neurodiversity coaches, without long NHS waiting lists. Fertifa also gives employees access to navigational advice, wellbeing support and referrals to childhood neurodiversity specialists.

Policy & Compliance Guidance

Navigating legislative shifts around the Equality Act 2010 and Employment Rights Act 2025 is easier with a dedicated partner. We advise clients on creating practical strategies and navigating upcoming regulatory changes.

Retention Strategies

By supporting neurodivergent employees proactively, Fertifa helps companies retain talent that might otherwise leave due to lack of support, directly strengthening your workforce and employer brand.