

# ADHD and Success at Work

How to turn supposed  
shortcomings into strengths

Heiner Lachenmeier

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Affoltern am Albis, Switzerland

*Translated by*  
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*For Anna, Nara and Gabriela*

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## Preface for the English Edition

In the introduction to the original German edition, I wrote that in order to deal with ADHD successfully, we need comprehensible models of how it functions. I was astonished to receive many letters and emails from ADHDers throughout Switzerland, Germany and Austria, who told me that for the first time they understood why they felt and behaved the way they did. A 30-year-old engineer from Munich described that it was almost embarrassing when he read about typical ADHD problems in puberty that so closely resembled his own experience; it was as if he himself had served as the template for them. He emphasised “almost” because the relief of understanding at last how he came to find himself with these kinds of problems and of learning to master them better than before was overwhelming. But most of the feedback was of course related to workplace issues and the relief of finally understanding how the functionality of ADHD was a contributing factor. On top of that even getting tips on how on earth to overcome them at last.

A growing number of requests about an English edition, both from ADHDers and professionals, soon made it clear to me that this had to be done. It was a stroke of luck to find Mrs Julia Thornton, a British-born musician and translator living in Germany. She not only translated the book in a short space of time but proved to show a deep understanding of the text and was able to communicate the meaning as well as its tone in her translation. A big thank you!

Last but not least I thank my family, first and foremost my partner Gabriela Frischknecht who supports me with her love and her professionalism, and my children Anna and Nara, who make me proud to be their father.

Affoltern am Albis/Scuol, Switzerland  
July 2022

Heiner Lachenmeier

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## Preface

This book is primarily aimed at people with ADHD who want to get along better in their working lives. It can also be a helpful read for their superiors, subordinates, colleagues and for human resources (HR) staff. Relatives may find it useful, too. And not least, it is intended to give medical specialists practice-based tips for tangible, viable treatment options.

The text is illustrated, served up in small portions, highly subdivided for better readability, and clarified with easily understandable case studies. I have sectioned off interesting supplementary information under the heading “Encore” in grey highlighted boxes. If readers are in a hurry, they can skip these sections. To hold the readers’ attention, I have written in a conversational tone. This is a common courtesy when writing a book for ADHDers. And I admit that this also made the many hours of writing it easier, because I could simply recount things.

I suspect that readers may consult individual chapters, if the corresponding issues apply to them, without reading the whole book. I have therefore repeated important content several times, meaning that the sections can always be understood, even if they are read in isolation.

The filter and control models of ADHD have been described in academic literature for many years. In this book, the relationship of these models to everyday tangible reality—to the experience of ADHDers—has been identified and presented in a new way. The differentiated conceptualisation of various characteristics of ADHD such as different learning curves, negative hyperfocus, emergency benefit, self-perception falsification, Mount Everest syndrome, etc. as well as the coping mechanisms and treatment recommendations derived from these characteristics are derived from my experience and practical research.

Some people have accused me of being too casual in referring to “ADHDers”. Since I am an ADHDer too, I have allowed myself to use this nonchalant figure of speech. It is simply easier than the clumsy and somewhat debilitating term “person with ADHD”.

In line with the conventions of Springer Publishing, to improve readability I have sometimes used the masculine pronouns “he”, “him”, “his” when referring to “people in a general sense” and would like to stress that I include all gender variations here.

I needed a great deal of support in writing this book and would particularly like to thank lic. phil. Gabriela Frischknecht, who kept me decisively on course, not only

as a critic beyond compare in this field, but also as my life partner. I am also grateful to my two adult children, Anna and Nara, who taught me a great deal, with protestations and good humour. Thanks also go to Werner Fuchs, whose clear-sighted and sharp professionalism prevented me from losing my way in the world of publishing. What's more, he put me in touch with Emil Gut, a graphic designer who immediately understood what I wanted to visualise and how. Special thanks go to Katrin Lenhart and Christiane Beisel from Springer Publishing for all their patience and support.

And finally, I would like to thank the many people I have come to know as patients. I am very conscious of the fact that without their shared experiences, I would have acquired a great deal of knowledge, admittedly, but have been unable to truly understand anything.

Affoltern am Albis, Switzerland

Heiner Lachenmeier



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## About the Author



**Heiner Lachenmeier** Specialist in psychiatry & psychotherapy

Lachenmeier was first diagnosed with ADHD when he was middle-aged, although there were more than enough signs of it when he was a child. He climbed up every tree—and sometimes crashed down out of them. He also crashed out of one academic high school as the worst pupil in the class—and was top of the class in the next one.

He studied medicine at the University of Basle and did his doctorate at the University of Zurich. He trained as a specialist in psychiatry and psychotherapy. During the 1990s, he established and was director of the Swiss Training Institute for Analytical Short-term Psychotherapy (GIK). Lachenmeier's involvement in the policies of his profession includes membership of the executive board of the Swiss Society for Psychiatry and Psychotherapy (SGPP) and the Swiss Medical Association (FMH). In 2002 he brought the Swiss specialist psychiatric associations together into one collective umbrella organisation (FMPP) which he subsequently presided over.

Lachenmeier has focused on ADHD in adults for around 20 years. He focuses on researching how ADHD functions, its relevance to how ADHDers experience the condition, and implementing his observations in practice-based models to explain and treat ADHD. He coaches executives with ADHD as well as the managers of employees with ADHD. He undertakes a wide range of activities as a lecturer, supervisor and coach.

Heiner Lachenmeier is divorced and the father of two adult children. With his life partner lic. phil Gabriela Frischknecht, a specialist in psychotherapy, he runs a

psychiatric-psychotherapeutic specialist practice near Zurich. Together they give seminars and courses on ADHD as well as ADHD and gestalt therapy.

Heiner Lachenmeier is an honorary member of the Aargau Society for Psychiatry and Psychotherapy and an honorary member of the Swiss self-help organisation adhs20plus; he is also a member of several professional associations such as the Swiss Society for ADHD (SFG ADHS), ADD-Forum Berlin and the World Federation of ADHD.

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# Introduction

# 1

As people, we need to be able to understand our world. This applies whether we are the so-called “little ones” or fully fledged adults. Understanding our world enables us to find and follow our path in it.

Understanding is much deeper than just knowledge. Knowledge is something you can learn off by heart. If I learn off by heart from a tour description that I need to turn right on a mountain bike tour at a specific coordinate, then I could actually have a fatal accident if I strictly followed this knowledge. Perhaps a piece of rock has slid down, a chasm in the path has been created and I will need to turn right earlier. Every sensible person would understand this when looking at the path and would not stubbornly follow the coordinates they have learned—although some of us, blindly following the “knowledge” of our satnavs, have ended up with our car in a field.

Today’s psychiatric and psychological diagnoses system is much too strongly based on fragmented-statistic knowledge of a very limited number of possible symptoms. As a consequence, quite a few specialists do not seek, as a matter of course, to understand human existence and suffering. Neither in terms of fundamental human insight, nor in terms of understanding the individual person. They neglect to understand contexts, processes, interrelationships and developments (Andreasen 2007).

But the fact is that the more in-depth we understand something, the better we can deal with it. It’s more likely that we will be able to find practical solutions if we have any difficulties. In the example quoted above, we naturally adapt our route to the changed circumstances. Without a fundamental understanding of the terrain, with the isolated knowledge of the route coordinates we would be stranded in front of the rockfall, unable to act, or we would stubbornly continue on the original route and fall down.



## **ADHD Means Being a Little Different in This World**

Everyone needs an understanding of their environment and themselves. What if you belonged to a large group of people, although compared with the entire humanity, actually a small group of people, who function slightly differently than the average person? How much more important it would be for you to understand how you yourself tick? And how & where other people tick differently?

According to the current state of knowledge, around 5% of people have ADHD (Barkley 2017). I deliberately didn't write "...suffer from...". Not all of them suffer from having ADHD. And a whole lot of them suffer less from ADHD itself but much more from the fact that they do not understand it and therefore get repeatedly entangled in misunderstandings and conflicts.

We therefore need plausible models which enable us to understand ADHD. This is a prerequisite for being able to find our path in life with ADHD—particularly in our working lives—without unnecessary conflict. If we are able to understand this, even if only partly, we are often able to deal with most life situations in a sufficiently appropriate and flexible way. In short: with less trouble and more success.

At this point and for the first time, I would like to emphasize the term "sufficient". It's about a "sufficient" understanding and also "sufficient" implementation of tasks. Perfectionism can definitely be important in special situations and areas, but in everyday life, it's only rarely a good idea and sometimes even obstructive and can even create a total block.

It's about having clearly understandable, plausible models of ADHD.

A model is developed using various elements. In them, findings from fundamental research (above all neurobiology, genetics and pharmacology) as well as other insights from the fields of psychology and psychiatry are processed. However, the absolutely essential fundamental elements are the experiences reported by people with ADHD as well as the behavioural patterns and processes observed externally. A model should be able to bring the different elements into a logically plausible correlation.

In this way, a model serves as a kind of functional overview; the basis for understanding people with ADHD, including their emotional contexts.

This must be possible in a linguistically simple way, without excessive terminology such as synapse, prefrontal, striatum, limbic system, amygdala, locus coeruleus and so on. We need correct but generally understandable terms that are specific and useful.

For example, you can explain football simply: two teams with 11 players, one defined field, two goals, one ball, a few other basic rules—and you have to kick the round thing into the net. Everyone understands this—it's sufficient as a simple plausible basic model. The game can begin—it doesn't matter if this means you start to play yourself, or you want to watch from the side.