

Narratives of ADHD career strengths and success

Motivation for undertaking research

As a career counsellor and researcher with ADHD, it was frustrating to me to see ADHD consistently problematised and pathologised. I wanted to undertake some research into career successes and strengths related to adults with ADHD, to further my own knowledge and understanding, to support other career counsellors, and to provide alternative, positive career narrative resources to other adults with ADHD.

Research Questions

1. How do adults construct their self-identified strengths to explain their career successes?
2. Do adults with ADHD feel that they have succeeded in their career *in spite* of their ADHD or *because* of it?

Methodology

- In depth literature review
- Semi-structured interviews with 16 participants, using FeedForward interview technique (Kluger & Nir, 2010; McDowall, Freeman & Marshall, 2014, based on Positive Psychology principles)
- Analysis of over 250,000 words of 'data'
- Development of proposed model to illustrate findings.

Core themes

- The *equivocality of strengths* - core strengths, strengths developed as coping mechanisms, and overplayed strengths
- An *evolving narrative of success*
- 'Sporadic successes' rather than consistent success
- Importance of contextual factors (supportive and barriers)
- Impact of diagnosis

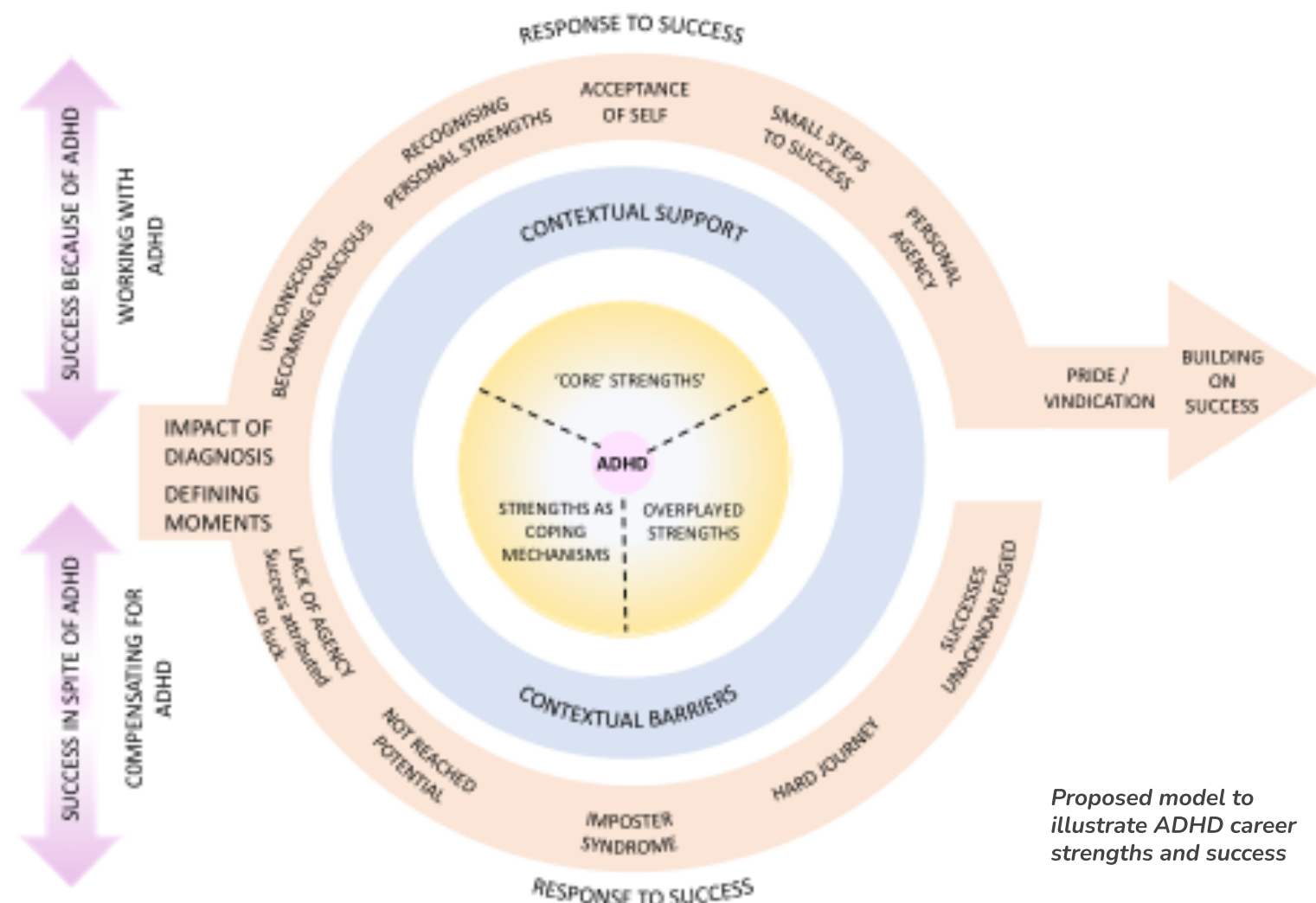
ADHD strengths (self-identified by participants)

Spontaneity	Fairness
Empathy	Energy (physical & mental)
Humour	Altruism
Resilience	Hyperfocus
Making connections	Different perspective

Whether a strength has a positive or negative outcome for the individual is based on the level at which the strength is used, and the context within which the individual is operating, and the combination of strengths used in the scenario.

Implications for career counsellors:

- Neurodivergent clients are over-represented in career counselling settings due to the difficulties they face with their careers (e.g. Nadeau, 2005)
- Understanding that there may be an underlying reason for career difficulties
- Understanding that every person with ADHD or other neurodivergent (ND) condition presents differently - and many will have more than one condition.
- Your ND clients may have a fragility in their sense of self (e.g. Savickas, 2013)
- Need for a positive focus on identifying and use of strengths, but not discounting challenging experiences
- Caution around psychometric test results (Carroll & Ponterotto, 1998) - contextual detail incredibly important
- Consideration around in-session scaffolding and appropriate home-based exercises
- Issues around boundaries of the limits of your expertise, and knowing when to refer



Proposed model to illustrate ADHD career strengths and success

NB: This model is based on my interpretation of my data and does not presume any statistical causality or temporal linearity. Most individuals with ADHD would be expected to move within and between the various stages at different phases of their lives, and quite possibly at different moments of the same day, depending on the context and their own reflective state.

Tamsin Crook
tamsin@makingcareerswork.com
@mcwcareerblog

Research undertaken at Birkbeck College, UCL, as part of MSc Career Management and Coaching 2018.

Research supervisor: Professor Almuth McDowall
Hoping to publish full research later this year.