



# ND Performance Framework

**Strengths × Capacity × State**

*A neuro-inclusive model for accurate performance, fair management, and sustainable output*

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## **Important note**

This resource is intended to support understanding and good practice in neuro-inclusive workplace design. It provides general guidance and does not constitute legal, medical, or clinical advice. Organisations should apply the principles in line with their own policies, regulatory obligations, and professional judgement.

Traditional performance frameworks assume consistency.

Neurodivergent performance is **contextual, state-dependent, and nonlinear...** without being unreliable.

This framework replaces deficit thinking with a **three-variable model** that explains *why performance varies* and *how to support it without lowering standards*.

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## The core model

Performance at any moment is a function of:

**Performance = Strengths × Capacity × State**

All three must be present for performance to express.

If one is constrained, performance will drop... **even when skill and motivation are high.**

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### 1. Strengths

*(What someone can do well)*

**Strengths** are:

- skills
  - talents
  - experience
  - problem-solving styles
  - creative or analytical capacities
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These are often **high and stable** in ND staff.

#### Common ND strengths

- pattern recognition
- deep focus on meaningful tasks
- systems thinking
- creative insight
- high integrity and accuracy
- crisis response
- innovation under autonomy

#### **Key point:**

Strengths do not disappear when performance drops.

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They may simply be **inaccessible**.

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## 2. Capacity

*(How much load the system can carry)*

**Capacity** is the nervous system's ability to tolerate:

- cognitive demand
- emotional load
- sensory input
- social interaction
- time pressure

Capacity is:

- **finite**
- **variable**
- **context-specific**

### What reduces capacity

- sensory overload
- prolonged masking
- unclear expectations
- constant interruption
- emotional threat
- fatigue and burnout
- inflexible scheduling



Low capacity is often misread as:

- lack of effort
- poor attitude
- disengagement

It is neither.

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## 3. State

*(What condition the nervous system is in right now)*

**State** refers to moment-to-moment regulation:

- settled

- activated
- overloaded
- shut down
- recovering

State can change:

- within a meeting
- across a day
- after a single interaction

## Why state matters

Even with strong skills and sufficient capacity, a **dysregulated state blocks access**.

State determines:

- speed of processing
- verbal access
- emotional tolerance
- decision quality

Performance cannot be demanded **against state**.

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## Why this framework matters in workplaces

Most performance management focuses only on **Strengths**.

When performance drops, organisations often assume:

- skill gaps
- motivation problems
- behavioural issues

This leads to:

- inappropriate capability processes
- missed reasonable adjustments
- increased burnout
- legal and ethical risk
- loss of high-value staff

The Strengths × Capacity × State model prevents these errors.

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## Applying the framework in practice

## 1. Performance dips: what to assess first

When output drops, ask **in this order**:

1. Has **capacity** been exceeded?
2. Is **state** compromised right now?
3. Only then: are **skills** actually the issue?

Most ND performance issues sit in **capacity or state**, not competence.

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## 2. Designing roles and workloads

Align work so that:

- strengths are used intentionally
- capacity is respected
- state variability is accommodated

Examples:

- deep-work tasks protected from meetings
  - flexible scheduling around cognitive peaks
  - asynchronous communication for thinking time
  - sensory-safe environments
  - output-based evaluation
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## 3. Performance conversations (ND-safe framing)

Replace:

“Why aren’t you performing consistently?”

With:

“What conditions help your strengths show up?”

“What reduces your capacity?”

“What signals tell us your state is shifting?”

This invites accuracy, not defensiveness.

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## What *not* to do (common organisational errors)

Avoid:

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- treating capacity issues as conduct problems
- pushing through dysregulation
- rewarding burnout behaviours
- equating visibility with performance
- assuming good days are the baseline

These practices **distort performance data**.

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## Performance ≠ consistency

Neurodivergent performance often looks like:

- spikes of excellence
- periods of recovery
- nonlinear output
- deep contribution over time

This is not instability.

It is a **different performance rhythm**.

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## Using the framework in formal processes

### Performance reviews

- evaluate **outcomes**, not constant pace
- discuss conditions, not just results
- document adjustments that support access

### Capability procedures

- rule out capacity/state barriers first
- ensure adjustments have been trialled
- avoid medicalising performance variation

### Talent development

- invest in role-fit, not conformity
  - build around strengths
  - protect capacity proactively
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## Indicators the framework is working

Organisations typically see:

- improved retention of ND staff
- more accurate performance assessments
- fewer escalations and grievances
- reduced sickness absence
- higher quality output
- stronger trust between staff and managers

These are **system outcomes**.

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## Policy language recommendation (example)

“The organisation recognises that performance is influenced by individual strengths, capacity, and nervous system state. Managers are expected to consider environmental and structural factors before attributing performance concerns to capability or conduct.”

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## Final workplace framing

Neuro-inclusive performance management does not lower standards.

It **removes distortion**.

When strengths are matched to roles, capacity is respected, and state is protected, neurodivergent performance is not just sustainable... it is exceptional.

This framework makes that visible.