ND Performance Framework

A strengths + capacity + state-based approach to performance

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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.

Purpose

To support fair, accurate, and sustainable performance by recognising that output is shaped by **conditions**, not just capability.

This framework helps leaders:

- avoid mislabelling ND performance as inconsistency or disengagement
- intervene earlier and more effectively
- separate skill issues from capacity or state issues
- maintain standards without driving burnout

The core model (simple and explicit)

Performance = Strengths × Capacity × State

All three must be present for performance to show up.

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

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1. Strengths

What someone can do well

Strengths include:

- skills and expertise
- problem-solving style
- creative or analytical abilities
- pattern recognition
- depth of focus on meaningful work
- integrity, accuracy, innovation

Key leadership insight

Strengths are usually **stable**.

When performance dips, strengths have not disappeared…
they've become **inaccessible**.

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2. Capacity

How much load the system can carry

Capacity reflects tolerance for:

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

Capacity is:

- finite
- variable
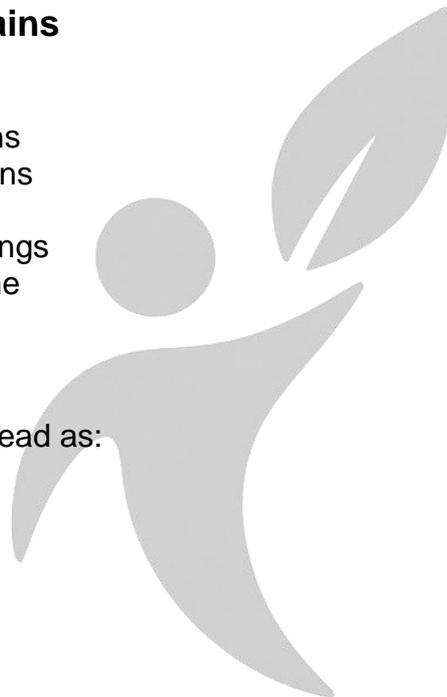- context-specific

Common capacity drains

- sensory overload
- unclear expectations
- constant interruptions
- prolonged masking
- back-to-back meetings
- lack of recovery time

Leadership warning

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, such as:

- settled
- activated
- overloaded
- shut down
- recovering

State can change:

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

Why state matters

State determines access to:

- language
- decision-making
- emotional tolerance
- working memory

Performance cannot be demanded **against state**.

Using the framework in practice

When performance dips, assess in this order

1. **Capacity:** Has load exceeded tolerance?
2. **State:** Is the person currently regulated enough to access skills?
3. **Strengths:** Only then consider skill gaps or development needs.

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

ND-inclusive performance conversations (script)

Instead of:

"Why isn't your performance consistent?"

Use:

- "What conditions help your strengths show up?"
- "What seems to drain capacity fastest in this role?"
- "What signals tell us state is shifting?"

This invites accuracy, not defensiveness.

Designing roles and workloads with the framework

Align work so that:

- strengths are intentionally used
- capacity limits are respected
- state variability is expected and accommodated

Examples:

- protected deep-work time
- asynchronous communication
- flexible scheduling
- sensory-considerate environments
- clear priorities and reduced task-switching

What this framework prevents

- capability processes triggered by overload
- feedback delivered during dysregulation
- rewarding burnout behaviours
- equating visibility with performance
- ND staff exiting despite high value

It reduces **risk**, not rigour.

What this framework does *not* do

- Lower performance standards
- Excuse missed expectations indefinitely
- Replace accountability
- Remove the need for feedback or development

It ensures accountability is **applied accurately**.

Signals the framework is working

Organisations typically see:

- improved retention of ND staff
- clearer performance discussions
- fewer escalations and grievances
- reduced sickness absence
- higher quality output

- stronger trust between staff and managers

These are **system outcomes**, not individual changes.

Policy-ready framing (optional)

"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."

Bottom line for leaders

Neurodivergent performance is not unreliable.

It is **context-sensitive**.

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

This framework makes that visible, fair, and actionable.