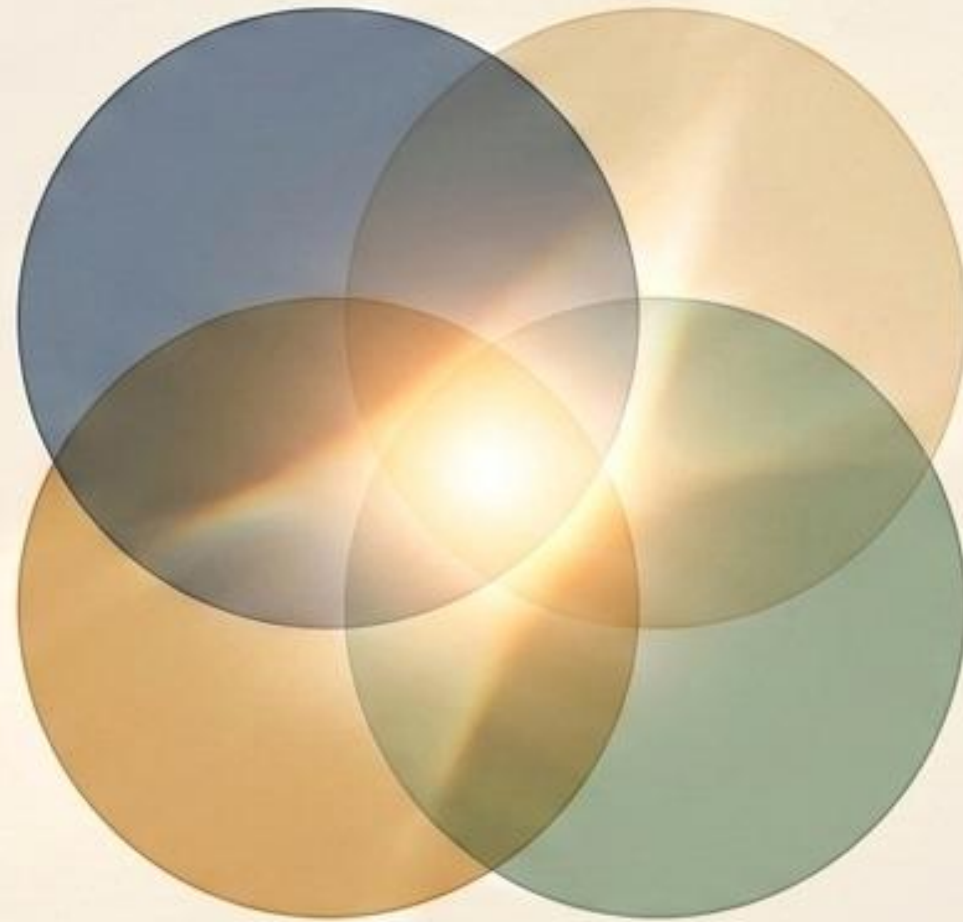


Neurodivergence at Work: The 3Lens Coaching Playbook



A practical toolkit for coaching different brains to thrive
by Michelle Achuthan.

Coaching different brains is a leadership capability

Different brains think, work, and communicate differently — and coaching is one of the most powerful ways to help them thrive. Neurodivergence is common, often invisible, and frequently misunderstood. Coaches and leaders are uniquely positioned to unlock these individuals by **shifting** how we view support.

The Outdated View

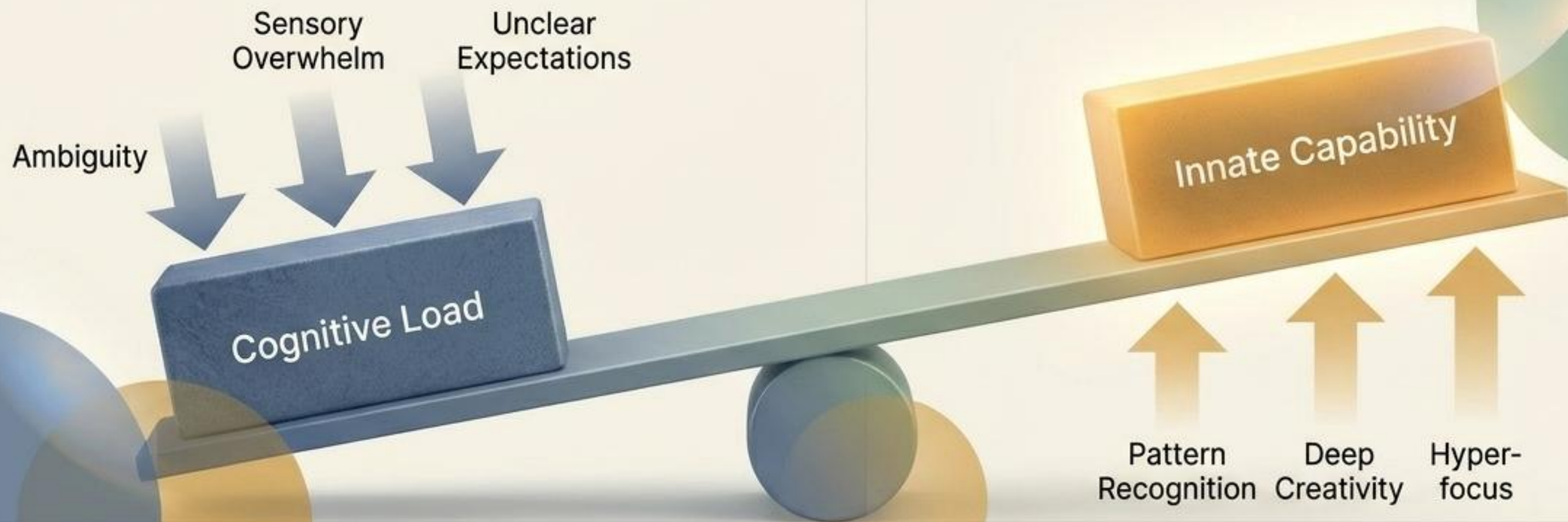
- An HR compliance topic
- Focused on capability deficits
- Managed through formal accommodations

The Strategic Reality

- ✓ A core leadership skillset
- ✓ Focused on cognitive optimization
- ✓ Unlocked through targeted coaching
- ✓ Reduces cognitive load while building psychological safety

The Critical Reframe: Capability vs. Cognitive Load

This is not a capability issue. It is a cognitive load and environment issue.
What manifests as inconsistent performance is almost always the result of inconsistent support or environmental friction.



The landscape of the neurodivergent mind at work

Neurodivergence in adults encompasses a wide spectrum of profiles, including ADHD, Autism, Dyslexia, Dyspraxia, anxiety-based executive dysfunction, as well as gifted individuals with ADHD masking, and late-identified adults.

Common Workplace Challenges

Time blindness &
Task initiation difficulty

Sensory overwhelm &
Working memory challenges

Social fatigue
(High empathy / Low energy)

The Underlying Brain Wiring

Interest-based
nervous system

High environmental
input processing

Deep emotional
processing

The Parallel Strengths

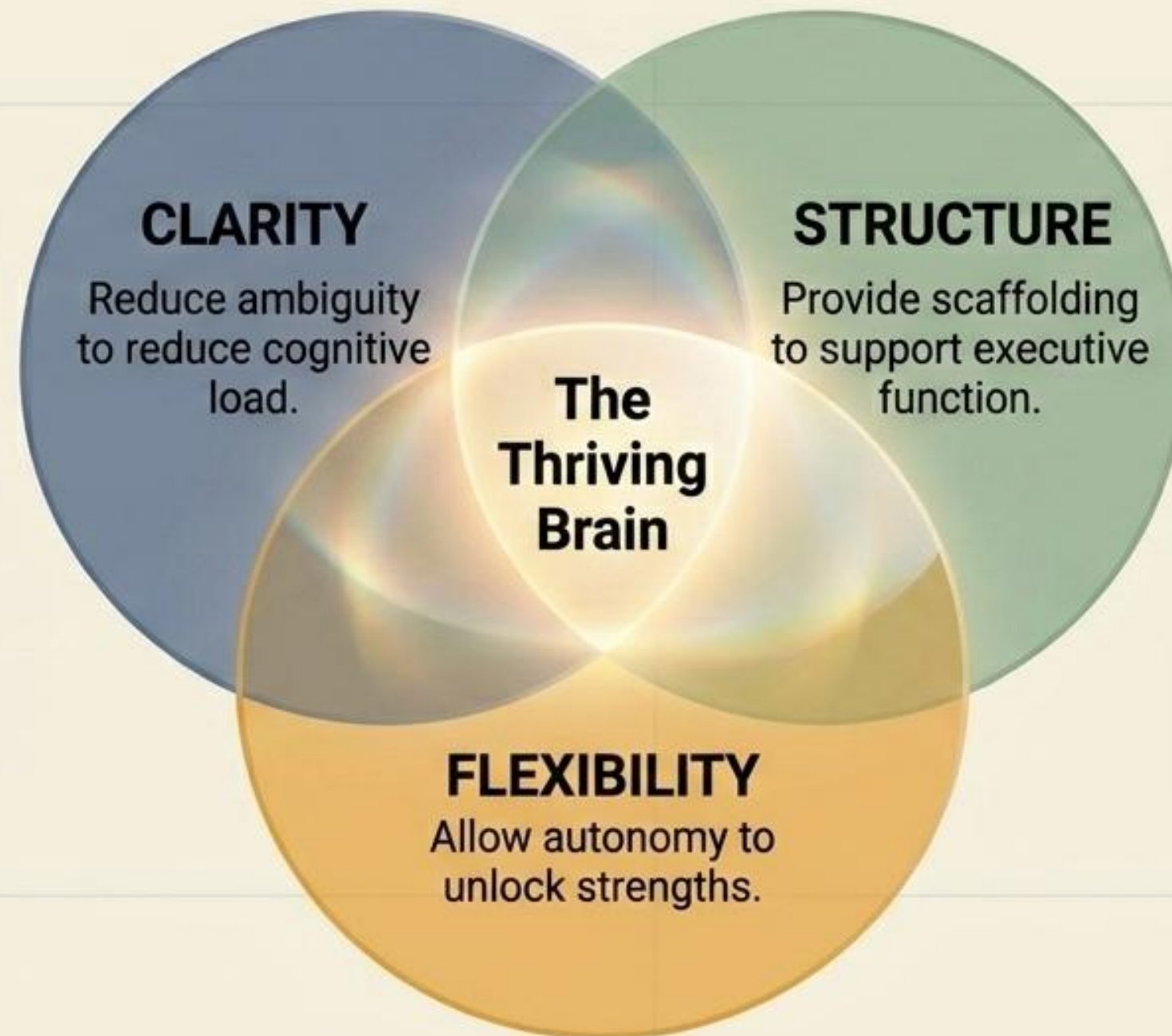
Hyper-focus &
Deep creativity

Pattern recognition &
Systems thinking

Non-linear
problem solving

The 3Lens Coaching Model for neuroinclusive leadership

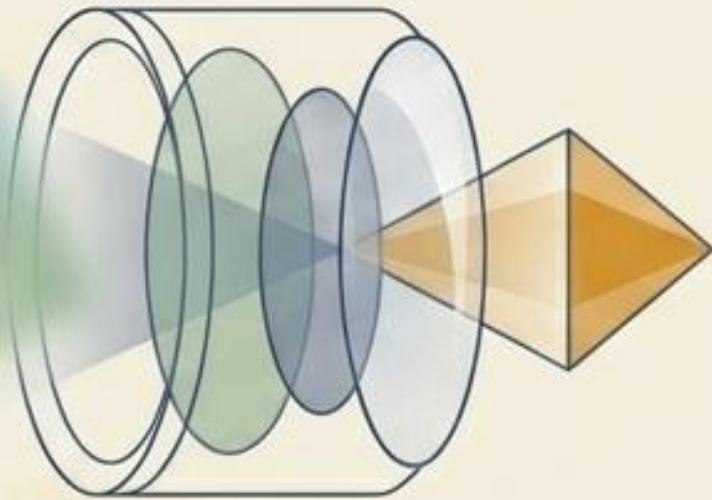
A simple, powerful toolkit to reduce friction and unlock potential. By applying these three lenses simultaneously, coaches create psychological safety and operational clarity.



Lens 1: Clarity reduces cognitive load

Ambiguity is the enemy of executive function. Providing clarity means explicitly defining expectations and eliminating guesswork.

The Goal



Goal: Reduce Ambiguity

Coach Micro-Skills

- Chunk information into digestible pieces
- Use plain and direct language
- Confirm understanding without condescension
- Co-create strict definitions of "done"

Coaching Questions

What does clarity look like for you in this task?

Which part feels unclear or fuzzy?

What outcome are you trying to achieve?

What information do you need to move forward?

Lens 2: Structure provides essential scaffolding

Structure is not about dictating how work is done; it is about providing a reliable framework that supports executive function and momentum.

The Goal



Goal: Support Executive Function

Coach Micro-Skills

- Break large tasks into immediate next steps
- Offer functional templates instead of rigid rules
- Use clear time anchors ('before lunch', 'end of day')
- Co-design accountability that feels supportive

Coaching Questions

What structure helps you stay on track?

Would a checklist, timeline, or visual help?

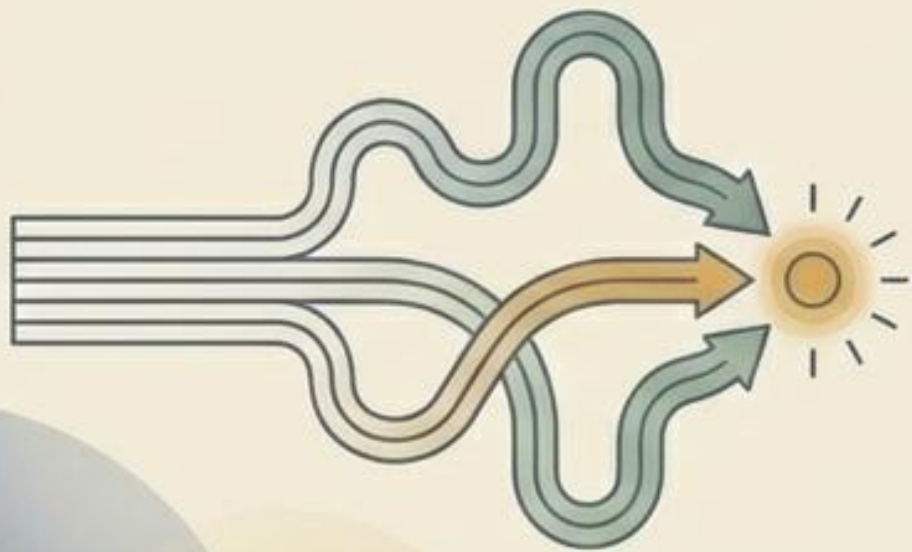
What's the first 5-minute action?

What rhythm of check-ins works for you?

Lens 3: Flexibility unlocks natural strengths

Once clarity and structure are in place, flexibility grants the autonomy necessary for different brains to optimize their unique working styles. Focus on outcomes, not methods.

The Goal



Goal: Allow Autonomy

Coach Micro-Skills

- Offer operational options
- Allow asynchronous communication
- Permit sensory adjustments to the environment
- Relentlessly focus on outcomes over specific methods

Coaching Questions

How do you work best?

What adjustments would help you deliver your best work?

Where can we flex the how while keeping the what?

What environment helps you think clearly?

Applied Coaching: Translating the lenses into practice

Frameworks only matter if they survive contact with reality. Here is how the 3Lens Model applies to realistic, everyday workplace scenarios.



The Overwhelmed High Performer

Brilliant strategist, but misses deadlines.



The Quiet, Brilliant Analyst

Excellent, high-quality work, but suffers from severe social fatigue.



The Creative Idea Generator

Constant stream of amazing ideas, but struggles with follow-through.

Scenario 1: The Overwhelmed High Performer

Context: A brilliant strategist who produces exceptional work, but frequently misses deadlines and avoids initiating complex tasks.

The Diagnosis

The Observable Barrier

Avoidance and missed deadlines.

The Root Cause

Executive dysfunction + fear of failure + unclear expectations.

The Playbook

Lens Application

- **Clarity:** Let's define what 'done' looks like.
- **Structure:** Let's break this into 3 steps.
- **Flexibility:** What's your best working window for deep work?

The Exact Script

“Let's take the pressure off. What's the smallest next step you can take that moves this forward?”

Scenario 2: The Quiet, Brilliant Analyst

Context: An analyst who consistently delivers excellent, high-quality work, but actively avoids meetings and clearly struggles with social energy.

The Diagnosis

The Observable Barrier

Avoidance of synchronous interaction and apparent withdrawal.

The Root Cause

Social fatigue + sensory overload from continuous meetings.

The Playbook

Lens Application

- Flex meeting formats to reduce demand.
- Offer asynchronous written alternatives.
- Aggressively reduce unnecessary synchronous interactions to protect their energy.

The Exact Script

“What parts of meetings drain you, and what parts help you contribute meaningfully?”

Scenario 3: The Creative Idea Generator

Context: A dynamic contributor with a constant stream of amazing, innovative ideas, but who fundamentally struggles with execution and follow-through.

The Diagnosis

The Observable Barrier

Dropped projects and unfinished initiatives.

The Root Cause

ADHD + hyper-focus + significant difficulty sustaining long-term interest.

The Playbook

Lens Application

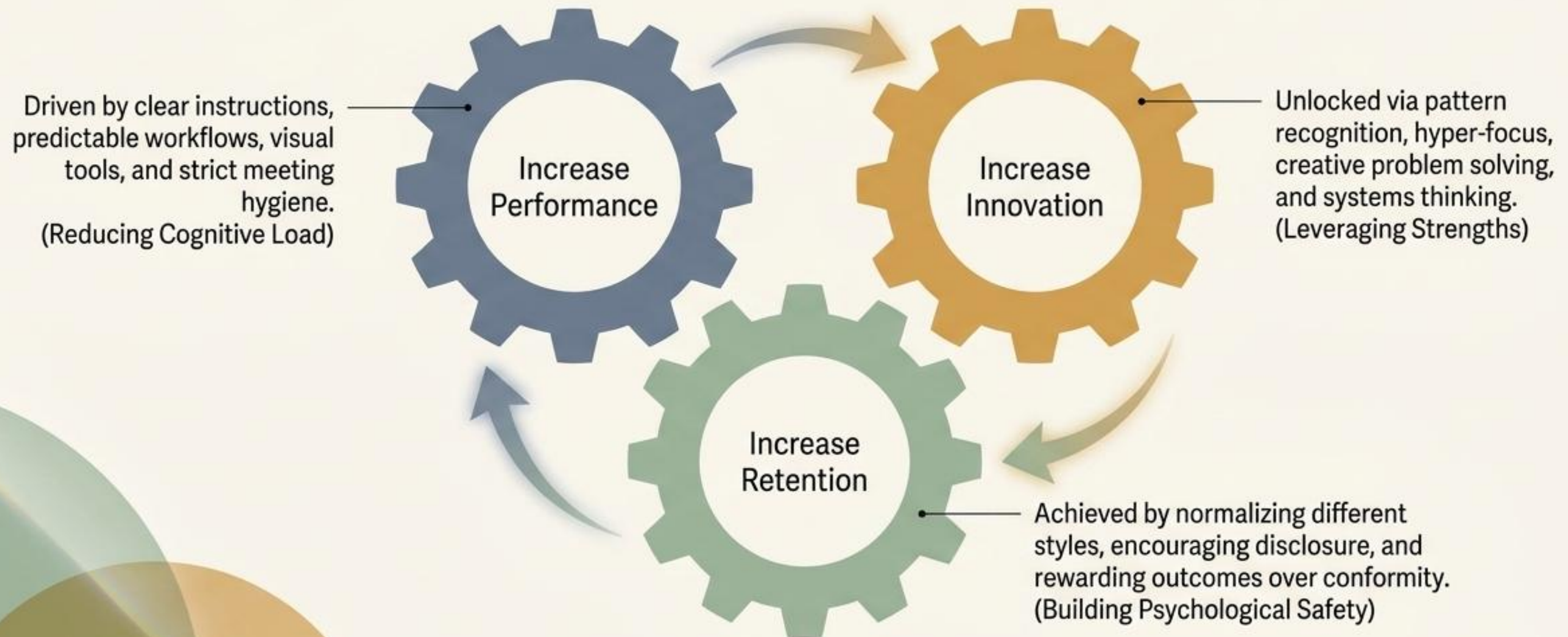
- Co-design accountability structures.
- Utilize time-boxed sprints to maintain urgency.
- Pair ideation phases with a 'finisher' colleague to ensure delivery.

The Exact Script

"Which idea matters most right now, and what's the first 10-minute action to bring it to life?"

The Macro Synthesis: Scaling neuroinclusion into business impact

Designing for the edges improves the center. When we reduce cognitive load for neurodivergent employees, we inadvertently optimize the entire organization.





Building a workplace where every brain can thrive

“When we coach with clarity, structure, and flexibility, we don’t just support neurodivergent employees — we build workplaces where every brain can thrive.”

– Michelle Achuthan



ADDENDUM

The Diagnostic Matrix: Designing for Different Brains

The Question (Ask This)	What It Reveals (Understand This)	How To Optimise (Do This)
<p>[Working Style] What helps you do your best work?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working style • Sensory needs • Clarity preferences 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide written instructions • Predictable routines • Quiet spaces • Structured check-ins
<p>[Culture Match] What kind of environment or team helps you thrive?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pace • Collaboration needs • Social energy • Autonomy levels 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Match to right team culture • Align communication style
<p>[Energy Management] What parts of a workday energise you, and what parts drain you?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cognitive load triggers • Task-switching tolerance • Sensory fatigue 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schedule deep work in high-energy windows • Reduce unnecessary meetings • Allow recovery time
<p>[Processing Style] How do you prefer to receive feedback, instructions, or updates?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Processing style • Communication needs • Overwhelm triggers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use written follow-ups • Predictable feedback rhythms • Clear step-by-step expectations
<p>[Executive Function] What helps you stay organised and on track when juggling multiple tasks?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Executive-function strengths • Executive-function gaps 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offer project boards • Shared trackers • Priority lists • Co-created timelines
<p>[Psychological Safety] What support or conditions help you feel confident and at your best in a new role?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Onboarding needs • Psychological safety • Clarity requirements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Design onboarding to reduce ambiguity • Assign a buddy • Create early wins