

Module 2

Understanding Cognitive Differences

How attention, processing, memory, and sensory systems vary across brains.

EXECUTIVE BRIEFING

A two-page leadership summary suitable for boards, executives, and partners.

Why this module matters

Every human brain runs on the same broad machinery — attention, sensory processing, working memory, processing speed, and emotional regulation — but the settings on those systems vary dramatically from person to person. Module 2 maps that variation and shows where the popular myths get the science wrong.

What looks like "not paying attention" is often attention working differently — distributed across many inputs rather than narrowed to one. What reads as "slow" is frequently deep processing arriving at a more complete answer. What appears "oversensitive" is a sensory system collecting more data than the room is designed for. None of these are failures; they are profiles.

What changes when leaders use this framework

When leaders, educators, clinicians, and family members can name these systems with precision, two things change. First, the conversation moves from character (lazy, careless, dramatic) to design (mismatched environment, missing support). Second, real accommodations become possible — not generic ones, but ones aimed at the actual system under load.

This module gives you that vocabulary, the research behind it, and a set of practical moves you can apply in the next conversation you have at home, at work, or in a classroom.

Five executive takeaways

- Cognitive variation is normal. Attention, sensory processing, working memory, processing speed, and regulation each vary independently.
- Behavior is a downstream signal. Asking which system is under load is more useful than judging the behavior it produced.
- Most accommodations that help neurodivergent people help everyone — reduced context-switching, written instructions, environmental control, and protected focus time are universal goods.
- Speed and capability are not the same thing. Penalizing deliberate processing is penalizing depth.
- The cheapest intervention is early. Load awareness — yours and theirs — beats crisis management every time.

Apply this week

- Name one decision your organization makes that treats speed as a proxy for capability. Decide whether to keep it.
- Audit one shared space against the five sensory variables: light, sound, scent, seating, scheduling.
- Identify one role where deep, detail-first attention is being underused.