

Module 2

Understanding Cognitive Differences

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

CASE STUDY PACK

Three brief cases for discussion. All names and details are composite.

Case A — "He's Just Not Trying"

Marcus, age 14, is failing 7th-grade math despite scoring in the 95th percentile on the reasoning subtest. His teacher reports that he stares at the page during timed quizzes and rarely finishes. His parents are told he "isn't trying."

A processing-speed assessment places Marcus in the 18th percentile for speed, with reasoning still above the 95th. He is not failing math; he is failing a timer.

Discussion: What accommodations target processing speed without lowering rigor? How would you reframe the conversation with the teacher?

Case B — The Quiet Quitter

Priya is a senior engineer who delivered three major projects in two years and is now visibly disengaged. Her manager assumes she is interviewing elsewhere. A 1:1 reveals that her team moved into an open-plan office six months ago, and she now spends ~40% of her working-memory budget filtering ambient sound before she writes a line of code.

Discussion: What does this case tell us about the cost of environmental decisions made without sensory input? What is the lowest-cost intervention here?

Case C — The Sunday Meltdown

Every Sunday after church, 9-year-old Eli has a meltdown in the car. His parents assume it is about transitions or food. A load audit reveals: fluorescent lights in the sanctuary, two hours of social masking, a noisy fellowship hall, and a 45-minute drive home. The meltdown is not about transition — it is the system finally putting the budget down.

Discussion: Which interventions are upstream (during church) versus downstream (in the car)? Which are sustainable for the family and the congregation?

Cross-case questions

- Which cognitive system is most central in each case?
- What did the original interpretation cost the person and the system around them?
- What is the cheapest, earliest intervention available in each case?
- Which of these patterns shows up in your own context, with the names changed?