

Not a Misfit — Misunderstood

The WEO Framework™ for Rethinking Neurodivergence

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Stop Fixing People. Start Changing Conditions.™

THE FRAME

Wiring × Environment → Outcome

Wiring

A person's characteristic ways of sensing, feeling, processing information, thinking, learning, directing attention, communicating, responding, and regulating: patterns, not fixed traits. Neurotypes help describe these patterns; each person has an individual profile. The examples on this poster focus on autism, ADHD, and dyslexia.

Environment

The conditions a person encounters: what surrounds them, what is asked of them, how they are treated, and what resources, choices, and support are available. More than a place: sensory surroundings, information, relationships, expectations, stigma, timing, tools, and systems. If a condition may affect access, effort, or safety, it belongs in the investigation.

Environment = the ecology of conditions surrounding a person. More than a place.

Outcome

Both the visible results and the person's internal experience under particular conditions: what they accomplish, what they think and feel, the processing effort involved, and the recovery they need. What matters to the person counts, not only what the system measures. An outcome is not a person's ceiling.

WHY USE ×?

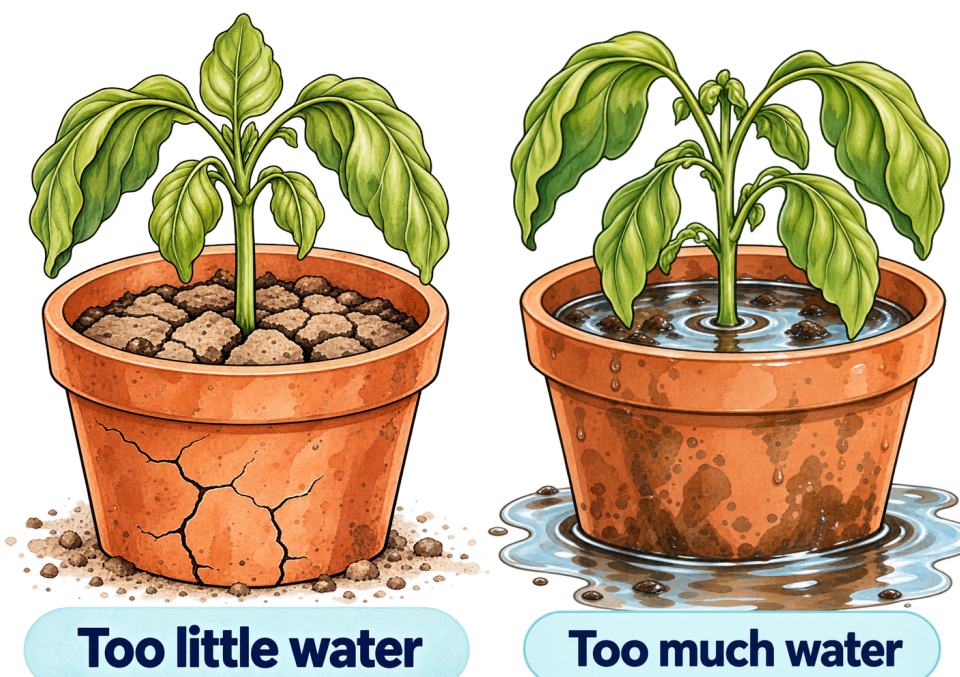
The × emphasizes the power conditions can have over outcomes.

The same condition can open or restrict access to a person's abilities, block a route entirely — or change the effort and recovery behind the same visible result. A conceptual framework for inquiry, not a validated predictive formula. → marks a proposed relationship.

WHERE WE GO WRONG

We don't call a struggling plant unmotivated.

We check the soil, the light, the water.



More water would help one plant and hurt the other.

Same wilt. Different causes. Different needs.

The wilt tells us something needs attention — not why it's happening or what would help.

People deserve that same curiosity.

Yet when a neurodivergent person struggles with a task, we may reach for "difficult" or "unmotivated" before asking what they're experiencing. An assumption becomes an assertion. **A label takes the place of a question.** What's making this hard? What are we missing? What would help? Ask the person. Listen to the answer. Explore the conditions together.

Get curious about the conditions before drawing conclusions about the person.

THE DIAGNOSTIC FALLACY

Not a claim that clinical diagnosis is a fallacy: here, this means the leap from a behavior to a verdict about the person before anyone checks the conditions.

The Assumption-to-Assertion Cascade — three composite cases from practice

PERSON	OBSERVE	INTERPRET	ASSUME	ASSERT	ACT
ADHD · account manager	Missed two deadlines	"Disorganized?"	"Doesn't care."	"Unreliable."	Taken off the account.
Autistic · analyst	Asked three times for the agenda in writing; went quiet in meetings	"Difficult? Disengaged?"	"Doesn't want to collaborate."	"Not a team player."	Left off the pitch team.
Dyslexic · student	Slow to finish a timed, handwritten essay; spelling errors	"Careless?"	"Not trying."	"Not academic."	Moved to a lower track.

WHAT INVESTIGATION REVEALED—AND WHAT FOLLOWED

ADHD · account manager	Shifting drafts; scattered instructions; unclear priorities. With one agreed thread and the final draft and priority confirmed before the deadline, he stopped missing deadlines.
Autistic · analyst	Loud, unstructured meetings. With smaller, quieter, structured meetings and a better-informed team, he became a valued collaborator, helping ensure nothing was overlooked.
Dyslexic · student	40-minute hard stop; handwritten; no computer. With extended time, a computer, and a separate room, she excelled in honors English.

We see a behavior. We assume we know why.

Then someone lives with the consequences of an assumption we never checked.

Composite cases drawn from my practice and people's accounts of their own experiences; details changed.

Not a misfit — misunderstood.

"Misfit" puts the problem in the person. It lets the conditions off the hook. We've reached a verdict before we've understood the mismatch. What does this person need? What's getting in their way? What becomes possible when the conditions change? The person we've been judging is someone worth listening to.

Get curious. Understand the person. Rethink the fit.

THE MECHANISM

Conditions are the multiplier.

Capacity possessed ≠ capacity accessible.

– CONSTRAINING CONDITIONS (examples) Unclear expectations; shifting priorities Stigma; pressure to mask Sensory demands, no adjustment Text-only information; tools restricted Rushed pace; constant interruption Rigid methods; no breaks POSSIBLE OUTCOMES · Access to skills reduced · Effort and distress up · Participation costly · Recovery need higher



Same wiring.
Strengths and challenges.
Different conditions.
Different access and cost.

+ ENABLING CONDITIONS (examples) Clear expectations; agreed priorities Respect for difference; trust; safety to ask Sensory options matched to the person Accessible formats; assistive tools Processing time; protected focus Autonomy in how to work; breaks and recovery POSSIBLE OUTCOMES · Access to skills restored · Effort and distress down · Participation supported · Recovery need lower

Illustrative examples, not exhaustive lists. Needs and effects vary by person, task, and situation — identify what helps with the person.

Same person. Changed conditions. Different outcomes.

Conditions—first, not conditions-only.

Support the person and redesign the room. These are not rival projects.

100 is a reference value for one person and one task, held constant within this illustration. The numbers illustrate access — not measured capacity, output, or worth.

Same person. Three rooms.

100		ENABLING CONDITIONS · ACCESS SUPPORTED $100 \times 1 = 100$ Clear priorities, accessible information, preparation time, sensory options. A workable route to the work.
100		TAXING CONDITIONS · ACCESS RESTRICTED $100 \times 0.5 = 50$ Unwritten rules · open-plan noise · shifting priorities · pressure to mask. Access may be restricted while strong visible performance conceals the effort and recovery required.
100		BLOCKING CONDITIONS · ACCESS BLOCKED THROUGH THIS ROUTE $100 \times 0 = 0$ An autistic applicant is screened out on social presentation before the skills the job needs are assessed. The record says "no suitable candidate."

Zero means blocked access through this route — not zero ability or potential.

Assess conditions with the person — not instead of the person.

Cost is often invisible. High performance alone does not reveal the effort, distress, or recovery involved. A tax can surface later as a resignation the record didn't predict. Ask about the person's experience.

CONDITIONS-FIRST™ IN PRACTICE

From judgment to curiosity — with the person at every step.

1 Notice the signal Describe what is happening. Don't assume its cause.	2 Get curious. Ask and listen. What matters to the person? What are they experiencing? What helps?	3 Investigate together Explore the conditions, the barriers, and what already works.	4 Agree and redesign Define success together. Choose a change and the support to try it.	5 Try the change Put the change and support in place. Invite feedback as you go.	6 Review and repeat Review the results together — including the person's experience. Agree on what to keep, adjust, or try next. Then return to step 2.
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"Better" may mean more access, less struggle, a usable strength, or the same result at a sustainable cost.
No diagnosis is needed to begin asking what helps.

TRAINING & CONDITIONS-FIRST™ AUDITS FOR ORGANIZATIONS · **Training** helps leaders and teams question assumptions, recognize hidden friction, and apply Conditions-First™ thinking. · **Conditions-First™ Audits** examine whole businesses, teams, classrooms, or clinics for conditions that drain energy, restrict participation, or leave strengths unused. With the people affected, identify barriers, strengthen enabling conditions, and agree what to change and how to evaluate improvement. · **Conditions-First™ Hiring Access Audits** focus on recruitment and selection: who never gets through the door, what the process may overlook, and which barriers may prevent people from demonstrating what they can contribute. **Identify invisible struggles. Reduce hidden friction. Strengthen the conditions that help all kinds of minds thrive.**

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

Same trait. Different room. Different verdict.

Person and pattern	Room A: constraining	Room B: enabling
Autistic employee: asks detailed clarifying questions	Vague brief; questions discouraged. "Difficult. Not a team player." Concerns dismissed.	Clear brief; questions welcomed. "Catches the mistake we missed before it ships."
Employee with ADHD: shares ideas rapidly, sometimes before their turn	No agenda; unstructured discussion. "Rude. Impulsive." Ideas dismissed.	Agenda ahead; a place to capture ideas; clear turns. "Connected two problems nobody had linked."
Dyslexic employee: reads dense documents slowly	40-page pack sent the night before. "Unprepared. Unprofessional." Expertise overlooked.	Materials a week ahead; audio option. "Found the flaw on page 12 that would have sunk the plan."

Illustrative individuals, not diagnostic rules. Strengths and needs vary by person — ask the person what helps.

SELECTED WORKPLACE FINDINGS

Conditions track outcomes: performance, experience, staying.

Clearer questions. Better-rated answers. In a mock-interview study, answer ratings improved when questions were explicit, broken down, and provided in writing — particularly for autistic participants, narrowing the gap. 42 adults completed both interviews, 21 of them autistic. **Maras et al., 2021**

Safety, support, and intention to leave. Among 985 UK neurodivergent employees, manager support and psychological safety predicted career satisfaction and intention to leave. **McDowall, Doyle & Kiseleva, 2025**

Flexible working. Benefits depend on fit. In a nationally representative UK sample of 25,000+, flexible working practices were associated with better employment outcomes for neurodivergent people, including tenure. Which arrangement helped varied by group — fit, not flexibility in general. **Branicki et al., 2024**

What employees say helps. In a 2026 survey, 72% of neurodivergent employees named work-structure support (flexible or home working) as enabling their best work. **McDowall & Srinivasan, 2026**

These findings support investigating conditions; they do not validate WEO.

YOUR TURN

Help me test this.

- When have different conditions eased a struggle or brought out a strength — for you, or for someone you know?
- When has doing well on the outside come at a cost others couldn't see?
- What two or three changes in conditions would help most — and how would you know they helped? *Think effort, access to abilities, recovery, or wanting to stay.*
- Where does the WEO Framework™ fall short? What would you add — and what would convince you it's wrong?

Your experience, questions and disagreement are all welcome — disagreement most of all.



Scan for the full work.

- Technical companion — references and method
- White paper — for organizations
- This poster

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