Appendix 3

Part 2: WAND2025 Cross-Talk – Distilled Insights

Theme	What We Observed	What Science Shows (Actionable Evidence)	Why This Matters (Practical Takeaways)
Timing of Intervention	Neuro needs are often recognised late, once performance, health, or behaviour has already deteriorated.	Early-stage neural strain is more plastic and responsive to low-intensity interventions. Prolonged stress, cognitive overload, or unmanaged pain increases neural sensitisation, allostatic load, and recovery time.	• Early screening and low-friction support is protective • Late intervention costs more and works less well • Brain Capital is preserved by acting and prevention upstream, not reactive and firefighting downstream
Cognitive Load	People are overwhelmed not by task difficulty, but by poorly designed workflows, tools, and communication.	Constant task-switching, unclear goals, and interruptions degrade working memory, attention, and decision quality. Small design frictions accumulate into measurable cognitive fatigue.	• Reduce task switching, clarify priorities, simplify workflows • Small design workplace changes can produce large performance gains • Cognitive capacity can be designed for in the workplace at a systems-level
Environment	Performance and wellbeing vary dramatically across environments and contexts, even for the same individual.	Brain function is context-dependent. Physical, social, and relational environments matter as they shape attention, regulation, and resilience. Small environmental and relational adjustments can unlock disproportionate brain capital or gains.	• Change the environment before changing the person • Adjust spaces, norms, and interactions to unlock brain capacity, curiosity and creativity • Leaders reflect their environment
Leadership	Leadership behaviour visibly alters team energy, clarity, and psychological safety.	Leaders co-regulate nervous systems through tone, predictability, feedback, and decision clarity. Threat-heavy leadership impairs cognition and psychological safety.	• Leaders are neural multipliers amplifying or draining team brains • Safety enables learning and adaptability • Brain-wise leadership is a systems-level lever and intervention
Diagnosis & Categories	Diagnostic labels often fail to explain how people function day-to-day.	Neuroscience and lived-experience data show high variability within diagnostic categories. Function is shaped by context, history, and meaning-making, not labels alone. Listening to how people live, and function is crucial to the whole person	• Use diagnosis as a guide, not a ceiling • Design support around function, not just categories and dimensions • Systems need functional, not purely categorical, models
Brain Skills	Skills erode quietly under sustained pressure when recovery and renewal are absent.	Attention, flexibility, and regulation require ongoing practice and recovery. One-off training without rest or reinforcement does not sustain neural capacity.	• Brain skills need maintenance, not just training • Recovery is a performance input (sleep, rest, time out), not time lost • Sustained Brain Capital requires sustained rhythm, not intensity
Play	Play is often dismissed as optional or indulgent outside childhood.	Play activates reward, exploration, learning, social bonding, and regulation systems. It enhances neuroplasticity, creativity, and resilience across the lifespan.	• Play is a low-cost, high-return intervention • Play has been shown to accelerate learning and adaptability • Play-rich cultures compound Brain Capital over time