

Capacity Building Technical Assistance: Foundational Capacities

By Caitlin Howley

Capacity building is the cornerstone of our technical assistance (TA) to state education agencies (SEAs) in the Appalachian region. The Appalachia Regional Comprehensive Center (ARCC) approach helps SEAs identify—and grow—the capabilities that will allow them to transform their systems and pursue continuous improvement so they may achieve their goals. This framework undergirds all the TA we offer SEAs, regardless of the content focus of any particular initiative we are assisting them to implement.

Our approach focuses on helping states acquire specific foundational and higher-order capacitiesⁱ common among effective SEAs. These include foundational elements such as knowledge, skills, and structures, as well as more advanced capabilities, such as the ability to build organizational capacity in local education agencies (LEAs).

In this article, we explore the foundational capacities critical to SEA success. We will describe higher-order capacities in the next issue of our newsletter.

Foundational Capacities

Foundational capacities are core organizational aptitudes, without which systems are unlikely to achieve and sustain high levels of performance or even meet fundamental organizational goals.ⁱⁱ Our framework differentiates between types, stages, levels and outcomes of capacity. Exhibit 1 overviews these foundational capacities.

Exhibit 1. Foundational Organizational Capacitiesⁱⁱⁱ

	Capacity Type	Capacity Level	Implementation Stage	Outcome
Foundational Capacities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Human: Intellectual capabilities and will <input type="checkbox"/> Organizational: Communication and collaboration among members <input type="checkbox"/> Structural: Policies, procedures, systems <input type="checkbox"/> Material: Fiscal resources, equipment, software 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Information: Knowledge, data <input type="checkbox"/> Skills: Competencies, abilities, expertise <input type="checkbox"/> Structures: Lines of authority, systems <input type="checkbox"/> Processes: Procedures, operations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Exploration: Development of readiness for change <input type="checkbox"/> Emerging Implementation: Activation of resources, beginning implementation of new practices <input type="checkbox"/> Full Implementation: Comprehensive integration and refinement of new practices <input type="checkbox"/> Sustainability: Consistent, pervasive use and improvement of practices 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Developmental: Organizational members develop a skill or process <input type="checkbox"/> Transitional: The organization transitions from one state to another desired state <input type="checkbox"/> Transformational: The organization achieves significant cultural, structural, and procedural organizational change

Capacity Types. Educational change involves four types of foundational capacity: human, organizational, structural, and material.^{iv} **Human capacity** includes intellectual proficiency and the will to pursue goals. **Organizational capacity** refers to the interaction, collaboration, and communication among members of an organization, whereas **structural capacity** is determined by the elements of an organization that exist independently of the people who work within a particular system (for instance, policies, procedures, and practices). **Material capacity** refers to the fiscal resources, technologies, materials, and equipment that the organization uses to meet its needs and implement change.

Capacity Levels. Levels of capacity focus on the personnel and system needs that must be addressed to achieve goals.^v Our four levels of capacity building begin with an acknowledgement that organizations and the people within them need **information** about the change they aim to undertake to understand the desired state to be attained. Once sufficient knowledge is gained, organizational members need to acquire and use the **skills** necessary to implement the initiative. At the third level of capacity building, information and skills need to be integrated into **structures** that will reflect new knowledge and give staff a framework by which to apply new capabilities. Finally, the organization will need to develop and use new or refined **processes** that operationalize and institutionalize the information, skills, and structures undergirding the initiative.

Implementation Stages. Stage theory suggests that change is incremental and developmental.^{vi} Our approach includes four key stages of change that can be applied to capacity building. The **exploration** stage of capacity building involves creating a readiness for change.^{vii} Once the need for change is decided, organizational members determine the capacity desired and identify the knowledge, skills, structures, and processes necessary to achieve their goal.^{viii} The **emerging implementation** stage of capacity building involves installing needed resources and initially implementing new skills or practices^{ix}, whereas the **full implementation** stage entails integrating new information and skills into a wide range of organizational practices and refining such practices based on evaluation of the changes.^x Finally, the **sustainability** stage of capacity building involves pervasive and consistent use of the refined skills and practices.^{xi}

Outcomes. As organizations develop and implement interventions that will modify, refine, or change the organization, one of three types of capacity-building change can occur.^{xii} **Developmental change** can be either planned or emergent and tends to be incremental, with an organization focusing on the improvement of a skill or process. **Transitional change**, which tends to be planned and episodic, involves efforts to move the organization from an existing state to a different desired state. **Transformational change** results in significant alterations to organizational structures and requires a shift in culture and beliefs among members of the organization.

In Sum

Our key goal—and our reason for being—is to assist SEAs as they undertake important reforms by helping them use their existing capacities to best effect and helping them acquire any new capacities required for success. Foundational capacities are at the heart of our services, allowing the ARCC to target assistance more effectively, more responsively, and in ways that allow SEAs to maintain effectiveness once our work is complete.

ⁱ Harsh, S. (2012, January). *Capacity building: The proactive dimension of organizational change*. Fairfax, VA: ICF International; Harsh, S. (2010). *Gaining perspective on a complex task: A multidimensional approach to capacity building*. Charleston, WV: Appalachia Regional Comprehensive Center.

ⁱⁱ Conroy, K., Maddox, M., & Parker, L. (2006). *Enhanced customer experience: A benchmark study*. Cisco Systems, Inc. Retrieved from http://newsroom.cisco.com/dlls/2006/eKits/benchmark_study_080106.pdf; Dwyer, C., Piontek, M., Seager, A. & Orsburn, C. (2000). *What it takes: 10 capacities for initiating and sustaining school improvement at the elementary level*. Northeast and Islands Regional Educational Laboratory. The Education Alliance at Brown University. Retrieved from http://www.alliance.brown.edu/pubs/ten_cap/10_Capacities.pdf; Harsh, S. (2012). *A multiple dimension approach to supporting change and reform*. Charleston, WV: Professional Resources; Morgan, P. (2006). *Study on capacity change and management: The concept of capacity*. European Center for Development Policy Management.

ⁱⁱⁱ Harsh, S. (2012, January). *Capacity building: The proactive dimension of organizational change*. Fairfax, VA: ICF International; Harsh, S. (2010). *Gaining perspective on a complex task: A multidimensional approach to capacity building*. Charleston, WV: Appalachia Regional Comprehensive Center.

^{iv} Century, J. R. (1999, April). *Determining capacity within systemic educational reform*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Montreal, Quebec, Canada.

^v Hall, G., & Hord, S. (2010). *Implementing change: Patterns, principles, and potholes* (2nd ed.). Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon.

^{vi} Fixsen, D., Blase, K., Horner, R., & Sugai, G. (2009, February). *Readiness for change*. Scaling-Up Brief #3. Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute, Center on State Implementation and Scaling-Up of Evidence-based Practices; Hord, S. M., Rutherford, W. L., Huling, L., & Hall, G. E. (2006). *Taking charge of change*. Austin, TX: SEDL.

^{vii} *Ibid.*

^{viii} Hall, G., & Hord, S. (2010). *Implementing change: Patterns, principles, and potholes* (2nd ed.). Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon; Prochaska, J. O., & Di Clemente, C. C. (1992). Stages of change and the modification of problem behaviours. In M. Hersen, R. M. Eisler, & P. M. Miller (Eds.), *Progress in behavior modification*. Lincoln, NE: Sycamore Press.

^{ix} Fixsen, D., Blase, K., Horner, R., & Sugai, G. (2009, February). *Readiness for change*. Scaling-Up Brief #3. Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute, Center on State Implementation and Scaling-Up of Evidence-based Practices.

^x Fixsen, D., Blase, K., Horner, R., & Sugai, G. (2009, February). *Readiness for change*. Scaling-Up Brief #3. Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute, Center on State Implementation and Scaling-Up of Evidence-based Practices; Hall, G., & Hord, S. (2010). *Implementing change: Patterns, principles, and potholes* (2nd ed.). Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon; Kegan, R., & Lahey, L. (1984). Adult leadership and adult development: A constructivist view. In B. Kellerman (Ed.), *Handbook on socialization theory and research*. Chicago, IL: Rand McNally.

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- ^{xi} Fixsen, D., Blase, K., Horner, R., & Sugai, G. (2009, February). *Readiness for change*. Scaling-Up Brief #3. Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute, Center on State Implementation and Scaling-Up of Evidence-based Practices; Hall, G., & Hord, S. (2010). *Implementing change: Patterns, principles, and potholes* (2nd ed.). Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon.
- ^{xii} Ackerman, L. (1997). Development, transition or transformation: The question of change in organizations. In D. Van Eynde, J. Hoy, & D. Van Eynde (Eds.), *Organisation Development Classics*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey Bass; Mock, M., & Bartunek, J. (1987). First-order, second-order, and third-order change and organizational development interventions: A cognitive approach. *Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*. 23: 4.