



Systemic Competence Development

An approach to develop the facilitation capacity to manage systemic change and performance enhancement

Capacity development is at the heart of development. Individuals, teams and entire organizations are permanently challenged to adapt to a rapidly changing environment and to improve their performance in order to survive and to maintain competitiveness. Competences are required to facilitate and manage these change processes within organizations in a systemic manner.

The way we understand 'capacity'

Although approaches to capacity development have changed during the past few decades it is still very much determined by a conventional understanding of building capacity: training courses for individuals, provision of material and financial resources as well as restructuring organizations. This rather narrow interpretation of capacity is still prevalent in most development interventions and is still a key determinant of the solutions prescribed whenever organizations are confronted with capacity challenges.

'Hard' capacities	'Soft' capacities (Process Competence)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial and material • Institutional and structural -including organizational structures, hierarchies, mandates, procedures, rules and regulations etc • Policy development and other related instruments • Human resources including- number of employees and skills levels • Monitoring and evaluating output 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Harnessing creativity and innovation • Providing space for staff and enabling them to utilize it (emancipation) • Motivating and inspiring personnel • Instilling a greater sense of ownership among personnel to achieve set organizational goals • Ensuring mutual accountability and responsibility • Communicating effectively with internal and external audiences • Providing visionary and strategic leadership • Learning, focusing and strategizing • Harnessing and effectively utilizing existing capabilities • Retaining, hiring and effectively utilizing competent and productive personnel • Utilizing all the potential within an organization • Predicting, adapting and responding to the volatile and ever-changing environment • Learning and apply lessons learnt to improve performance for effective service delivery • Monitoring and evaluating impact • Applying lessons learnt, adjusting and taking corrective measures

Figure 1: Hard (tangible) and soft (intangible) capacity issues

- PICO's key concepts:
1. SERVICE DELIVERY FRAMEWORK
 2. SYSTEMIC INTERVENTION
 3. PARTICIPATORY ACTION LEARNING / ACTION RESEARCH
 4. SYSTEMIC COMPETENCE DEVELOPMENT
 5. FACILITATION FOR CHANGE

The term 'capacity' entails the ability of people, teams, organizations and societies to recognize development challenges, to prepare and commit themselves for the development of effective strategic solutions and to implement them successfully. In our understanding capacity encompasses both the 'hard' and the 'soft' issues related to the sense of ownership: notion and style of leadership, mindset and attitudinal aspects as well as internal and external organizational dynamics.

Effective capacity initiatives need to deal with the performance of the organizational system as a whole, not just with some of its components. This requires an analysis of the deeper, underlying systemic blockages for performance in organizations and/or broader systems by the actors. Once the real issues are recognized they can be addressed through capacity development interventions, which will unlock a whole range of other factors limiting organizational performance. Such interventions will rarely involve single measures; more likely they will require well managed learning processes which lead towards continuous performance improvement. It is these processes which we call systemic competence development. In the past decades, capacity building interventions focused mainly on the more tangible 'hard' capacity elements, neglecting the importance of the soft elements although these are often seen as the 'real issues' which determine if things work or not. This omission increases the prospects of failure; it does not take into account the interactions and relationships between the various component parts, with potentially detrimental consequences for organizational functioning.

The way we approach the development of capacity

By capacity development we mean a process of performance enhancement driven by results and desired impacts, rather than input based capacity building of individuals. Enhancing performance in this way is closely related to behavioural changes and the intangible 'soft' aspects of capacity. To take an example from sports, no matter how well trained and skilful football players are, they will only perform if the right players are in the right positions; the team has the spirit, attitude and determination to win; the leadership believes in the players and in the ability of the team to win and fosters the players' growth and a culture of working together; and the team has the full support of their fans.

Some key principles and characteristics of this alternative approach to capacity development are described below and these are compared to the conventional approach. This contrasting view is intended to clearly show the differences, but not to suggest that everything in the conventional way is inadequate. The right combination of processes and methods are needed in any given set of circumstances to reach the best results. Figure 3 highlights capacity dimensions at individual, organizational and system level and brings out some key characteristics across all levels.

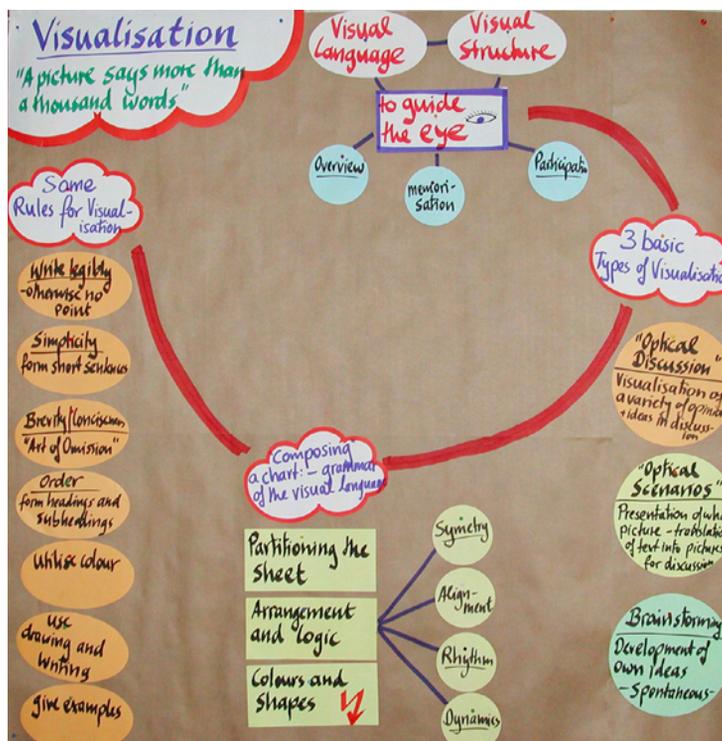
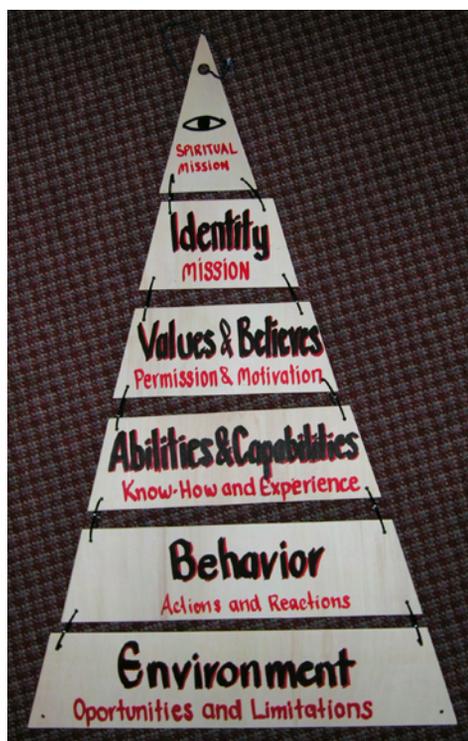


Figure 2: Some learning tools for developing competence

Levels	Conventional way of capacity building	Alternative way of approaching capacity development
Individual Level	Focus on technical skills	Focus on performance and competence; Focus on leadership, responsibility and accountability to results / success of the whole organization
	Training needs assessment as a base for capacity building – often more symptoms based than problem based	Analysis of performance hindrances within the job (deliverables, work processes and rules and regulations, personal competence required to do the job, reward systems etc, performance-based management)
	Training as a response to capacity building	Performance-driven competence development, including attitudes and motivation; Peer and team-based coaching and mentoring on the job through a joint learning process in teams; Training as an input into on-going learning processes; Performance management driven by transformed leadership
	Monetary incentives seen as key driver for performance	Focus on non-monetary motivators: personal growth opportunities, conducive management support
	Entrenching loyalty through job security	Job security through performance; Accountability to the desired success of the organization and to principles of successful practice
	Reward by seniority and compliance rather than performance and creativity	Rewards based on performance, leadership, creativity and innovation, dedication and commitment
Institutional Level	Input-oriented approach: more people, more resources	Output and result driven process to reform and transformation; Reorganization and simplification of processes; Improving the performance of existing staff and leadership
	Focus on mandates; Focus on coordination	Functional approach to mandates, roles and responsibilities of institutions which are dynamic and defined by the goals and results; Primacy of integration of functions over coordination
	Focus on strengthening of systems (e.g. finance & HR)	Deep analysis of functions and rationalization of systems before strengthening; Focus on optimising system performance rather than expansion; Alternative options for delivery of services
	Focus on structure (main target of 'institutional reform')	Focus on behaviour, competence and performance of staff and leadership; Organic development of structure through self-driven analysis and processes rather than restructuring
	Establishment of new institutions to overcome problems with the existing ones	Dealing with the issues of non-performance of existing institutions, including leadership
System Level	Often crisis driven and ad-hoc capacity building interventions	Long-term efforts based on critical analysis of capacity requirements with solid M&E base
	Focus on policy development and reform	Focus on policy implementation and impact, and the resulting performance or non-performance of the system; Policy development as a result of learning from policy implementation
	Analysis of inputs and outputs in a linear way Real issues dealt with under 'assumptions'	Performance driven competence development, including attitudes and motivation; Peer and team-based coaching and mentoring on the job through a joint learning process in teams; Training as an input into on going learning processes; Performance management driven by transformed leadership
	Simple solutions to complex problems based on superficial analysis	Systemic analysis of the deeper problems in terms of institutions, their processes, structures, regulations, resources, peoples' competence and motivation, their behaviour and the context in which the institutions operate (policies, environment, institutional arrangements & functions etc)
	System policies and regulations seen as a control measure to improve performance	Focus on enabling and motivation factors for organizing the system to perform better, rather than control, including leadership transformation
	M&E mainly at the end of processes and delegated to other authorities – long delays in the system through slow feedback loops	Monitoring and evaluation are totally integrated in the design and at all stages of the process of change and are driven by the people who manage the change. Fast learning loops help to steer the change process
Across the Levels	Communication mainly from top to bottom, resulting in information gaps and resistance to change	Communication is a backbone to performance and is everyone's responsibility at all times – a new information seeking communication culture where nobody can justify ignorance with 'I was not informed'
	External analysis and solutions prescribed by people from outside the system	Critical self analysis and acceptance of failures and systemic weaknesses which drives the search for own solutions increasing performance and self transformation; Responsibility and ownership for the weaknesses and solutions; Utilization of competent and transformed expertise and home grown solutions
	Largely individual and issuespecific capacity building interventions	Learning and adaptation by the whole system, not just a few individuals in certain departments
	Capacity building is carried out by institutions which themselves have not transformed, and often by trainers who have never done the job	Critical analysis of capacity development institutions for their own capacity to develop the new cadre of staff and leaders required for transformation

Figure 3: Comparing the conventional with an alternative way of capacity development at different levels

Systemic competence development

Our alternative way of approaching capacity development simultaneously embraces various capacity dimensions at different levels (individual, institutional and system level). This systemic approach has been proven to be highly effective in PICOTEAM's capacity development interventions.

In the context of this systemic approach, capacity is understood to be made up of key 'competences' of individuals, teams and organizations. This is much more than qualifications or skills; it is the creative and entrepreneurial spirit of doing business and finding innovative solutions to challenges and to redesign and optimise work processes continuously.

There are two fundamental requirements for such performance development:

- first, individuals require space to develop their potentials and co-create / co-manage work processes and structures (e.g. resources, rights, information, choice & opportunity, degrees of freedom from management etc., acceptance of the value of learning from mistakes, etc). We call this '**EMPOWERMENT**' (normally given from outside)
- second, it requires the capacity of individuals and teams to create, negotiate and utilize, their space effectively (e.g. confidence, competence, articulation / voice, self-organisation etc.). We call this dimension '**EMANCIPATION**' (from inside)

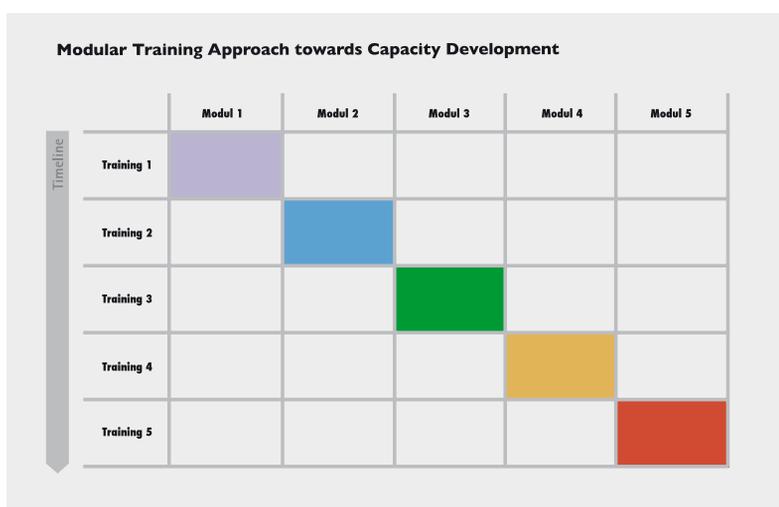
How we develop systemic competence

The **development of systemic competence** requires a very different approach from conventional training based capacity building. In the latter (which may have value in some situations, such as providing and building on technical capacities) training is provided in modular topics either in isolation or in a sequential way (see Figure 4).

For the development of systemic competence, we do not provide training in modular topics; rather we engage people in learning processes to enable them to perform their jobs better. Through a learning and coaching process, people acquire the understanding, skills, and attitudes required to constantly improve their performance. As required, we also provide the technical knowledge needed to complement these other competencies.

For each intervention we define a set of core competence areas around the work to be done, and these are dealt with in a series of workshops. These areas are explored in increasing depth, matched to the needs of the job to be performed, in successive workshop and coaching sessions. The sequence is not modular, but related to different depth of understanding. The deeper the understanding and more honed the skills to deal with the emerging challenges, the more systemic / interconnected an individual's competence becomes in dealing with the connections and linkages (the complexity) of the system and making it work.

Isolated training sessions on diverse topics only strengthen people's performance if these are clearly targeted and designed to overcome their specific shortcomings. Experience shows that few people can effectively identify their shortfalls and develop their own training plan to improve their performance on the job.



The applied methods are tuned coherently with the training content in order to optimize learning through a process of reflection and analysis before coming to their own conclusions. The topics of subsequent learning workshops build on the findings of the previous ones and also past field experience. Each workshop is an integrated part of a conclusive overall concept for systemic competence development. Core competences are further developed systematically from workshop to workshop so that at the end of the learning process participants are empowered and emancipated to perform better and tackle more effectively the challenges they face in their jobs.

Figure 4: Modular training programme design



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Learning Process

Time 1,5 years

Learning Workshop 1

Field-Practice
Peer-Learning
Coaching

Learning Workshop 2

Field-Practice
Peer-Learning
Coaching

Learning Workshop 3

Field-Practice
Peer-Learning
Coaching

Learning Workshop 4

Field-Practice
Peer-Learning
Coaching

Learning Workshop 5

Towards
Learning Networks &
Communities of Practice

Some Key Competence Dimensions

Personal
Development

Team
Development

Organisational
Development

Facilitation and
Communication

Technical
Issues

Depth of systemic Understanding and Integration of knowledge and practice
Level of competence to deal with the real performance issues

Basic Understanding of the systems, elements and the challenges

Deeper Understanding and exploring of real systemic bottlenecks and solutions

Increasing ability to integrate the different dimensions

Emerging competence to deal with the systemic issues and improve performance

Full understanding and practice (capacity to facilitate change)

The instruments of the learning process are:

- Learning workshops
- Coaching and mentoring field practice
- Peer-learning groups to support field practice
- Strategic change management support at organisational Level

Learning workshops

From the outset of the first learning workshop, participants' core competences are developed simultaneously - not separately in a modular manner. Core personal, social and communication competences, as competencies in key methods are not elements that could be dealt with separately. They are systemically interlinked dimensions of a holistic competence which together represents the performance competence of an individual. Training contents like teamwork, personal development, strategic planning, coordination and cooperation are synchronized in a way that individual and collective learning will take place. The systemic approach also corresponds to participants' very heterogenic and complex on the job realities.

Methodologically, we focus primarily on utilizing and critically analysing participants' experiences, building on these and adding new inputs to deepen and widen the understanding of core issues.

Coaching and mentoring field-practice

To assure the immediate application of training outcomes on the job, and in order to continue and deepen the learning processes, each participant commits to fulfil certain tasks or apply certain training contents when they are back at work. Participants are coached by experienced mentors during the field practice so that they can discuss doubts and questions that arise whilst implementing change together with this competent counterpart.

Experience gained during the field practice, problems and challenges faced, obstacles overcome and highlights experienced are all presented at the next learning workshop. These are reflected on jointly with other participants, the main insights and lessons learnt derived. To build on this learning process, new training topics are then facilitated as required.

Peer-learning groups

Small, local learning groups made up of participants are a powerful instrument for competence development. Peers know best the situation they face and are therefore likely to offer the best advice. The members of these peer-learning groups meet on a regular basis (every week or two) and reflect systematically on the outcomes, difficulties and challenges faced during implementation of what they have learnt during the workshops. If required, some meetings of these peer-learning groups could be facilitated by external coaches in order to encourage more systematic reflection and learning.

Strategic change management support at organizational level

Part of any professionals' core competences is the ability to navigate in an organizational context that enables them to efficiently and effectively tackle the challenges of their job.

To create or improve the organizational framework professionals work within, or at least to create conditions and space which allow them to perform according to the task, it is very important that decision makers know how to foster change processes within their own organisation. Participants of systemic competence development initiatives can only flourish if they are supported by their managers and operate in a conducive environment.

Learning networks and communities of practice

After participants have gone through the competence development process they have reached a level of capacity that allows them to facilitate change processes and to perform better on their jobs.

However, without further nurturing the gained knowledge, the potential is not fully utilised. We therefore foster continued peer networks for learning and also quality circles to continuously improve their own performance. Follow up activities are being supported by PICOTEAM if required through organising such platforms for sharing and learning (incl. electronic platforms), through direct continued coaching of practitioner and trainer networks. The personal learning process continues beyond the competence development initiative.

All too often there is no direct linkage between training inputs and challenges faced on the job. As a consequence, most professionals do not apply what they have learnt on training courses; training remains as mere information which, if not applied, will be forgotten over time. Knowledge does not develop through participating in a one-off training session: this requires well-designed learning processes.

The concept of systemic competence development is grounded on this rationale. It integrates participants into a learning process through which they build up the core competences they need to perform better in their jobs.

Community of practice

The concept of a community of practice refers to the process of social learning that occurs, and the shared socio-cultural practices that emerge and evolve, when people who have common goals interact as they strive towards those goals.



Figure 5: Learning workshop situation

Examples from practice (publications)

PICOTEAM has applied systemic competence development approaches over the past 15 years in more than 20 long-term interventions for management team and leadership development in higher education, research management, reforming rural service systems, natural resource management, local organisational development, and other task-based performance improvement initiatives. Some recent examples are given below.

Development of facilitator competence for innovation platforms (www.picoteam.org) - Groups of facilitators who are specialised in supporting innovation platforms and value chain development were developed in several countries.

Development of 'Future Leaders' in organisations (trainee program for management and leadership in organisations) (www.picoteam.org) - Groups of high potential officers and managers who are generally technically oriented were groomed in management skills and leadership – as a pool out of which future leadership will be recruited – often a missing dimension in technical organizations.

Leadership, Change Management and Facilitation in Research Organisations - A Learning Program for Research Managers in NARI, SRO, CGIAR and Universities (www.picoteam.org). Management competence of research managers was developed within organizations as peer groups.

Development of rural facilitation competence - The following cases describe competence development processes of extension / rural service organizations in Zimbabwe, South Africa, Dominican Republic, Cambodia, Ghana, Tanzania. Extension staff's key competences to facilitate rural community development, farmer organizations renewal and smallholder's innovation development were built up through systemic learning process approaches.

Learning Together through Participatory Extension – A guide to an approach developed in Zimbabwe. Hagmann with *Chuma, Murwira and Connolly* (1998) <http://www.picoteam.org/publications/pdf/Learning%20Together%20through%20Part.%20Extension-1998.pdf>

Learning about developing competence to facilitate rural extension processes. *Hagmann, Moyo, Chuma, Murwira, Ramaru and Ficarella* (2003) <http://www.picoteam.org/publications/pdf/learning%20about%20developing....doc.pdf>

Facilitating competence development to put learning process approaches into practice in rural extension. *Hagmann and Moyo* (2000) <http://www.picoteam.org/publications/pdf/Facilitating%20Competence%20Development-2000.pdf>

Guía del enfoque EPAM: Extension como Proceso de Aprendizaje Mutuo aplicado en la Cuenca Alta del Rio Yaque del Norte en la Cordillera Central, Republica Dominicana. *Peter* (2008) <http://www.picoteam.org/publications/pdf/Guia%20EPAM%20DOM%20REP%20-%202008.pdf>

Change competence development in soft skills and personal mastery in Universities - The first example below highlights a competence development process of a group of lecturers and professors in Makerere University, Uganda in the context of RUFORUM. A key result was that a large number of the participants moved into major leadership positions in the University within 2-3 years. Teaching quality improved greatly as well as action research and consultancy assignments. The second example analysis the key lessons learnt from a competence development process with a group of PhD students at Wageningen University, The Netherlands.

Learning To Make Change - Developing Innovation & Change Competence in African Universities. *Hagmann, Kibwika, and Ekwamu* (2009) Book Chapter in: *Farmer First Revisited: Innovation in agricultural research and development*, pp. 238-246). Edited by Ian Scoones, John Thompson. Practical Action Publishing, or full version: <http://www.farmer.first.org>

A group of PhD students at Wageningen University, The Netherlands was taken through a learning process to strengthen their key competences for future leader positions in their mother countries. Developing "soft skills" in higher education. *Hagmann and Almekinders* (2003): <http://www.picoteam.org/publications/pdf/developing%20soft%20skills....pdf>

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