# How is individual-level capacity development defined and conceptualized?

## Executive Summary

This literature review investigates how individual-level capacity development is defined and conceptualized, mapping convergences across disciplines to identify its core attributes.

The review identifies several key insights. First, it highlights the importance of clarifying terminology: while “capacity development” is increasingly understood as an ongoing, internally driven process, terms like “capacity building,” “capacity strengthening,” and “human resource development” carry narrower or context-specific meanings that can obscure broader dynamics. Second, individual capacity emerges as a multidimensional construct that extends beyond technical knowledge and skills to encompass attitudes, motivation, self-efficacy, tacit experience, relational abilities, and meta-competencies such as adaptability and continuous learning. Third, the literature stresses that individual capacity cannot be disentangled from its context: organizational cultures, workplace climates, policy environments, and professional networks either enable or constrain the translation of learning into practice. Fourth, sector-specific perspectives reveal how definitions vary by domain, yet all converge on the recognition that individual-level capacity development must integrate technical, interpersonal, and contextual factors. Finally, conceptual frameworks consistently underscore that capacity is iterative, multi-layered, and sustained by both technical and symbolic mechanisms, such as mentorship and alignment with institutional priorities.

These findings matter because they shift the conversation from viewing capacity as a static set of skills to understanding it as a dynamic process of growth embedded in context. For practitioners and policymakers, this means that successful interventions must integrate technical training with strategies that build confidence, foster motivation, and create enabling environments where new competencies can be applied and sustained. For evaluators, in particular, the review underscores that technical proficiency alone is insufficient; adaptive, relational, and contextual capacities are equally critical for evidence to influence decisions.

## Introduction

This literature review addresses the central research question: *How is individual-level capacity development defined and conceptualized?* Clarifying this question is vital because a lack of shared understanding can undermine the design, implementation, and evaluation of initiatives aimed at strengthening people’s abilities to perform effectively. While capacity development is widely invoked across disciplines, authors differ in how they define and emphasize it at the individual level, with some focusing narrowly on technical skills and others incorporating broader elements such as motivation, values, or adaptive capability (Finn et al., 2021; Danquah et al., 2023). This variation underscores the need for a systematic analysis of how the term is used.

The review proceeds in six stages. First, it clarifies terminology and scope, distinguishing between related concepts such as capacity development, capacity building, capacity strengthening, and human resource development. Second, it examines the core components of individual capacity, including skills, competencies, capabilities, attitudes, and related attributes. Third, it situates individual capacity within broader organizational and systemic contexts, highlighting how personal development depends on enabling environments. Fourth, it explores sector-specific perspectives, reviewing how fields such as public administration, health, education, and evaluation emphasize different aspects of capacity. The review then surveys major conceptual frameworks before advancing an integrative definition and reflecting on implications for practice.

By synthesizing insights across disciplines, the review aims to clarify the conceptual boundaries of individual-level capacity development while highlighting features most relevant for practitioners. The analysis emphasizes that although individuals operate within wider systems, the development of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and adaptive capability is experienced at the personal level. This focus provides a basis for designing interventions that are both conceptually sound and practically applicable.

## Clarifying Terminology and Scope

Multiple terms related to capacity development are used in the literature, sometimes interchangeably and sometimes with subtle distinctions. Before delving into core concepts, it is important to clarify how key terms will be used here and how they differ.

### Capacity Development, Capacity Building, and Capacity Strengthening

The evolution of terminology reflects changing philosophies. In development discourse of the 1970s and 1980s, “capacity building” was commonly used, often implying an external entity imparting skills or resources to a less developed group. By the 2000s, agencies like the UNDP shifted to “capacity development”, emphasizing that capacity must be grown from within and cannot be implanted from outside (Babu & Sengupta, 2006, pp. 3–4). The term development suggests an endogenous, ongoing process rather than a one-time construction. In parallel, many programs (especially in global health and education) adopted the term “capacity strengthening”. In theory, capacity strengthening also implies bolstering existing capacities, but in practice it often refers to targeted training initiatives or technical assistance (Finn et al., 2021, pp. 5–6). Both terms describe iterative processes of growth, but they carry different connotations. For clarity and consistency in this review, we use “capacity development” as the overarching term for a continuous, internally driven process of improving abilities, whereas “capacity building” is retained in historical or framework-specific contexts, and “capacity strengthening” is used when the cited literature employs that term. Because “strengthening” is frequently interpreted as short-term training or technical inputs, we mark this potential narrowing explicitly and note that durable results typically require follow-up and support (Finn et al., 2021, pp. 5–6). This usage keeps the focus on practical implications - designing interventions that extend beyond single workshops to include mechanisms for reinforcement and application - while aligning with how the terms are treated in the cited sources (Babu & Sengupta, 2006; Finn et al., 2021).

### Capacity Development and Human Resource Development (HRD)

Another related concept is Human Resource Development (HRD), rooted in organizational psychology and management. HRD traditionally focuses on improving performance of employees within organizations through training, career development, and organizational development interventions. Classic HRD models, such as McLagan’s framework, view training, organization development, and career planning as the tripod of improving human performance in firms (McLagan, 1989). Both HRD and capacity development emphasize that developing people’s abilities is not a one-off event but a continuous process requiring support and alignment with larger goals.

Where the two traditions diverge is in their orientation. HRD is typically organization-centric, aiming to improve employee performance for the benefit of the firm. By contrast, capacity development - as used in international development - extends beyond a single organization to include societal outcomes such as public sector performance and community empowerment (Danquah et al., 2023, pp. 247–252). Danquah et al. (2023) also note that HRD and capacity development converge at the individual level, since both draw on learning theories and behavior change to enhance an individual’s skills and knowledge. In practice, this means that while an HRD initiative might focus on aligning training with company productivity goals, a capacity development initiative in a public health department might not only train health workers but also foster a culture of continuous learning and strengthen the systems that support them.

Recognizing the overlap without overemphasizing differences is useful. It avoids setting up false dichotomies and highlights that insights from HRD research (e.g., on training transfer or adult learning) can still inform capacity development practice. However, for the purposes of this review, the emphasis remains on capacity development as the broader, more societally oriented construct.

### Skills, Competencies, and Capabilities

At the granular level, what exactly is being “developed” when we talk about capacity? Various terms – skills, competences (or competencies), capabilities, knowledge, abilities, attitudes, etc. – appear in the literature. It is important to delineate these concepts:

#### Skill

A skill is generally viewed as the ability to perform a specific task or activity. Skills are often learned or honed through practice and can be technical (e.g. operating a machine, coding in a programming language) or interpersonal (e.g. delivering a presentation). Rodrigues, Fernández-Macías, and Sostero (2021) provide a useful hierarchy: a task is the smallest unit of work, and a skill is the ability to carry out a task to a desired standard (Rodrigues et al., 2021). Skills are thus relatively specific; one can speak of skills in data analysis, in customer service, in conflict resolution, etc.

#### Competence/ Competency

A competency is a broader concept. It typically integrates multiple skills with knowledge, attitudes, and other personal attributes to enable successful performance in a job or role. In other words, competence is not just having isolated skills, but having a well-rounded ability to meet complex demands. For example, “communication competence” might require technical skills (writing or speaking clearly), knowledge (understanding one’s audience and subject), attitudes (confidence, empathy), and behavior (the ability to choose the right approach in context). One formal definition describes a competency as a combination of KSA – knowledge, skills, and attitudes – that an individual can mobilize in performance (Rodrigues et al., 2021, pp. 6–14). Similarly, Jajoo and Deshmukh (2024) conceive of competency as an integrated construct of *knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behaviors (K-S-A-B)*, underpinned by cognitive processes that allow these elements to work in concert. Competence thus implies a level of mastery and contextual awareness. It is often demonstrated by consistent effective performance in a domain. Many professional and vocational frameworks use competencies as the building blocks (e.g., a nurse’s competencies, a teacher’s competencies) because they encapsulate what a person should know and be able to do on the job.

#### Capability

The term *capability* is sometimes used interchangeably with competence in everyday language, but in the literature it has a distinct nuance. Capability often refers to an individual’s capacity to perform in novel or uncertain situations, not just routine ones. It has been described as *“the ability to take appropriate and effective action to formulate and solve problems in both familiar and unfamiliar contexts, with justified confidence in one’s skills”* (Jain, Oweis, & Woods, 2023, p. 401). In other words, if competence is about having the required skills and knowledge to perform a given job effectively, capability is about the potential to adapt those competencies to new challenges (Bolden et al., 2006). A capable individual can apply learning to unique problems, learn new skills on the fly, and innovate when procedures are not obvious. One way to distinguish them is that *competencies are often measured against predefined standards or tasks, whereas capability is demonstrated by effective performance in unanticipated situations*. Educational theorists note that today’s rapidly changing environment calls for cultivating capability – the *learning agility* or meta-competence to keep learning – in addition to specific competencies (Jain et al., 2023).

In this review, we adopt the view that individual capacity development involves building competencies - the integrated set of attributes needed for present roles - while also enhancing capabilities, the broader adaptability and learning agility required for future challenges.

## Core Components of Individual Capacity: What Exactly Develops?

Traditional models of individual capacity often start with the triad of Knowledge, Skills, and Attitudes (KSA). Most definitions concur that developing capacity means improving what people know (theoretical understanding and information), what they can do (practical skills and competencies), and how they approach their work (attitudes, dispositions, motivation). Contemporary research, however, emphasizes that this triad alone is too narrow. Psychological, social, and experiential dimensions also influence whether knowledge and skills translate into performance.

### Knowledge and Skills

These remain foundational. Whether strengthening the capacity of a healthcare worker to deliver vaccines or of a civil servant to conduct economic analysis, targeted training typically aims to transfer knowledge and practice skills. For example, a data analyst requires both statistical knowledge and software skills. Capacity development interventions usually include both knowledge-transfer elements (e.g., courses, manuals) and skills-practice elements (e.g., simulations, on-the-job training). Mastery in a domain constitutes technical competence. Many studies therefore measure success by assessing knowledge gain or skill proficiency before and after interventions (Finn et al., 2021, pp. 6–7). Yet, focusing exclusively on knowledge and skills risks overlooking other elements essential for sustained application.

### Attitudes and Mindsets

Attitudinal factors – such as an individual’s beliefs, values, and mindset – significantly influence whether knowledge and skills are applied effectively. For instance, building the capacity of a teacher is not just about pedagogical knowledge, but also about fostering a mindset that embraces innovation and a positive attitude toward student-centered learning. In public service contexts, values and ethos are part of capacity; a public administrator’s capacity includes commitment to ethics, accountability, and public values (Kroukamp, 2007, pp. 88–91). In other words, an individual’s attitude toward their work, confidence in their abilities, and sense of responsibility are integral components of their capacity to perform. Several frameworks explicitly include attitudes: for example, Rodrigues et al. (2021) define competence as a function of knowledge, skills *and attitudes*, and Jajoo & Deshmukh (2024) similarly include attitudes and behaviors in competency. A positive attitude can encompass motivation to learn, openness to change, and resilience in the face of challenges.

### Self-Efficacy and Motivation

Beyond general attitude, self-efficacy - confidence in one’s ability to succeed in specific situations - has emerged as a critical element. Individuals with strong self-efficacy are more likely to apply new skills, persist through challenges, and adapt to novel problems. Capacity development initiatives often seek to boost confidence as much as technical ability. For example, Cooke, Gardois, and Booth (2018) found that mechanisms such as role models, mentorship, and “learning by doing” built researchers’ confidence and commitment (pp. 9–11). Finn et al. (2021) similarly identified “intrapersonal” capacities such as confidence and reflection as central to health workforce competence (pp. 8–9). Motivation - both to participate in and to apply learning - is equally critical. Without motivation, skills and knowledge rarely translate into performance. Adult learning approaches increasingly incorporate techniques to foster intrinsic motivation, such as aligning training with personal goals and allowing autonomy in learning tasks.

### Experience and Tacit Knowledge

Practical experience builds tacit knowledge that cannot easily be transmitted through formal instruction. Rodrigues et al. (2021) explicitly include “experience” in their competence model, noting that efficiency gains often come from accumulated practice (pp. 15–17). An experienced professional develops know-how that guides judgment and improvisation, making on-the-job learning, coaching, and apprenticeships essential complements to classroom-based training.

### Meta-Cognitive Skills and the Capacity to Learn

A key but sometimes overlooked component is the ability to keep learning. Alaerts and Kaspersma (2009) describe this as a “capacity to learn” that enables continuous adaptation (pp. 6–8). In contexts of rapid change, learning agility becomes as important as domain knowledge. Jain, Oweis, and Woods (2023) describe capability in terms of justified confidence to act in unfamiliar contexts (p. 401). Wessels (2024) likewise emphasizes adaptability, sense-making, and ethical reasoning for public servants working in volatile and complex environments (pp. 18–20). This highlights that capacity is not static but requires meta-competencies such as problem-solving, critical thinking, and reflection.

### Interpersonal and Relational Skills

Individual capacity is also relational. In healthcare, education, and management, capacity manifests in interactions with others. Teamwork, communication, and empathy are widely identified as pillars of capacity (Finn et al., 2021, pp. 8–9). Training programs therefore increasingly combine technical modules with components that build interpersonal and cultural competence. Practitioner-oriented frameworks emphasize that technical expertise without collaboration skills limits impact.

In sum, individual capacity is multidimensional. It includes technical knowledge and skills, but also attitudes, self-belief, motivation, experiential know-how, learning agility, and relational abilities. Effective capacity development interventions therefore combine multiple elements - for example, pairing knowledge transfer with practical exercises, mentoring to build confidence, and group projects to foster teamwork. This holistic understanding helps practitioners design programs that target the full range of attributes influencing performance.

## Embedding Individual Capacity in Context: Multi-Level Considerations

A consistent theme across the literature is that individual capacity is deeply shaped by organizational and systemic contexts. A person’s new skills or motivation may quickly erode if their workplace lacks resources or if the wider system does not support change. This makes it critical to view capacity development not just as an individual matter, but as part of a multi-level process.

The classic three-level model, frequently referenced by agencies such as UNDP and the World Bank, emphasizes this interconnection: individual, organizational, and systemic capacity are mutually reinforcing. Developing a person’s skills is valuable only when organizations provide resources, supportive cultures, and opportunities to apply them, and when enabling institutional environments - policies, governance arrangements, social norms - sustain those changes (Danquah et al., 2023).

Empirical research confirms this. Alaerts and Kaspersma (2009) describe water management cases where engineers trained abroad returned home but struggled to apply new practices because institutional incentives and leadership support were lacking. Conversely, organizations that offered mentorship, feedback, and opportunities for experimentation magnified individual growth. Jackson et al. (2019) reinforce this through their review of “transfer climate,” showing that positive organizational factors - such as supportive supervisors, a culture of learning, and opportunities to use new skills - significantly facilitate training transfer. Even highly skilled and motivated individuals falter when equipment is missing, innovation is discouraged, or demand for new skills is absent.

For this reason, many interventions now pair individual training with organizational development components - for example, job aids, strengthened management, or equipment provision - to ensure individuals can apply what they learn. Morkel and Mangwiro (2019) highlight this dynamic in evaluation: supply-side training is necessary but insufficient unless aligned with organizational demand and embedded in institutional structures, resources, and incentives.

Networks and communities of practice further sustain and amplify capacity by bridging the individual–organizational gap. A trained health worker engaged in a peer learning group, for instance, benefits from ongoing knowledge exchange and social reinforcement. Cooke et al. (2018) describe similar dynamics in research capacity-building, where mentorship and communities of practice enable sustained growth beyond formal training. Golhasany and Harvey’s (2023) review of knowledge mobilization capacity echoes this point: initiatives spanning individuals, organizations, and networks are most likely to achieve lasting impact. In practice, this means that investing solely in individual training without considering organizational culture and professional networks risks short-lived outcomes.

## Cross-Sectoral Perspectives on Individual Capacity Development

Although core concepts of individual capacity recur across disciplines, different sectors emphasize particular competencies or attributes depending on their context. Examining these perspectives highlights how definitions are adapted to meet sector-specific needs.

### Public Administration

In governance, individual capacity involves more than technical skills in policy analysis or administration. Public service values and ethical commitments are integral. In South Africa, for example, education and training reforms emphasized that officials must combine technical expertise with democratic values, accountability, and a service ethos (Kroukamp, 2007, pp. 88–91). Modern competency frameworks in the public sector therefore include integrity, commitment to public interest, and inclusive leadership alongside technical knowledge. As Wessels (2024) notes, public managers must also develop adaptive leadership skills - such as sense-making, systems thinking, and collaboration - to handle volatile and complex environments (pp. 19–20).

### Healthcare and Health Research

In healthcare, capacity strengthening often centers on clinical and research skills but increasingly incorporates interpersonal and intrapersonal competencies. Finn et al. (2021) found that health worker capacity frameworks commonly span three domains: technical (clinical skills), interpersonal (teamwork, communication), and intrapersonal (confidence, ethics) (pp. 8–9). In health research, Cooke et al. (2018) identified role models, mentorship, and “learning by doing” as mechanisms that build confidence and professional identity (p. 10). These examples show that technical expertise is necessary but insufficient; confidence, collaboration, and reflective practice are equally vital.

### Education and Training

Teachers and trainers require both subject knowledge and pedagogical capacity. Competency-based education reforms have expanded teacher expectations beyond content knowledge to include learner-centered pedagogy, assessment literacy, socio-emotional skills, and the ability to use technology effectively. Training-of-trainers (ToT) programs - used to cascade knowledge in many reforms - conceptualize trainer capacity as combining technical expertise with pedagogical skill (Mormina & Pinder, 2018). In practice, this means interventions must strengthen both what teachers know and how they teach.

### Evaluation

In evaluation, capacity encompasses technical, adaptive, and contextual competencies. Technical research skills - such as study design and statistical analysis - must be paired with adaptive skills like critical thinking and situational awareness, as well as contextual understanding of politics and organizational dynamics. Drawing on African experiences, Morkel and Mangwiro (2019) emphasize that evaluation capacity requires not only technical proficiency but also opportunities for peer learning, mentorship, and the ability to navigate institutional environments.

Across sectors, the common thread is that effective capacity development integrates technical expertise with values, motivation, adaptability, and relational skills. What differs is emphasis: governance stresses ethics and adaptability, health emphasizes teamwork and confidence, education foregrounds pedagogy and continuous learning, and evaluation combines methodological rigor with contextual acuity. For practitioners, the implication is clear: definitions of capacity should remain flexible enough to capture sectoral needs, while still recognizing recurring elements such as continuous learning, adaptive problem-solving, and interpersonal competence.

## Conceptual Frameworks and Models

The literature contains multiple frameworks that attempt to structure and visualize how capacity development operates. These models integrate the components and levels discussed above, providing a more holistic view. Reviewing them highlights both convergence and divergence in how individual-level capacity is defined.

### Task–Skill–Competence Cascade (Rodrigues et al., 2021)

This framework, rooted in labor economics and job analysis, builds upward from tasks to skills to competencies. At the base, specific tasks require certain skills; clusters of skills (plus knowledge and attitudes) form competencies, and combinations of competencies define readiness for broader roles. The cascade is valuable for showing that capacity development can target very specific abilities but ultimately aims at broader competence. It also keeps attention on measurable performance elements (testing a skill on a task, or assessing a competency through a scenario).

### UNDP Three-Tier Model (Danquah et al., 2023)

UNDP’s model delineates individual, organizational, and systemic capacity. It provides a simple but powerful scaffold: any capacity development initiative should consider interventions at all three levels. For individuals, the model emphasizes not only skills but also the incentives and opportunities to use them - implicitly linking personal development to organizational and systemic conditions. The model thus highlights that capacity is not a purely individual attribute but something realized in context.

### TRAIN (Training of Trainers) Framework (Mormina & Pinder, 2018)

The TRAIN framework for global health ToT programs identifies five factors: Talent, Resources, Alignment, Implementation, Nurture. While this is specific to training programs, it encapsulates many general principles. “Talent” corresponds to individual capability (the right mix of hard and soft skills and motivation in trainers). “Resources” acknowledges the required support (time, materials, funding) – linking to organizational context. “Alignment” insists that the individual’s new role (e.g., becoming a trainer) fits their personal goals and the organization’s plans (motivation and relevance). “Implementation” involves actually putting training into practice and evaluating it (the follow-through), and “Nurture” refers to ongoing development and support of the individual (mentoring, reflective practice). Even though aimed at trainers, the TRAIN model conceptually aligns with other frameworks: it views capacity as not static but needing sustained support, and considers both personal attributes and structural factors. It explicitly merges the individual attributes (talent) with organizational/structural elements (resources, alignment), underscoring again that capacity emerges from their combination.

### Intrapersonal–Interpersonal–Technical Triad (Finn et al., 2021)

Finn and colleagues, reviewing health workforce literature, classify capacity into intrapersonal (confidence, ethics, self-management), interpersonal (teamwork, communication), and technical (job-specific knowledge and skills). This is not a process model but a categorization framework. Its value lies in ensuring a balanced perspective: an individual’s capacity is not one-dimensional, and programs that focus only on technical training risk neglecting critical interpersonal and self-reflective elements.

### Points of Convergence and Divergence

Despite differing emphases, these frameworks converge on key points: capacity development is multi-dimensional, iterative, and effective only when situated in supportive environments. Where they diverge is in focus: labor market models stress measurable productivity, cognitive models stress learning processes, and development agency models stress systemic alignment. For practitioners, the lesson is that no single framework is sufficient; instead, different models offer complementary lenses that can be applied depending on context and objectives.

Cooke et al. (2018), for example, show that research capacity-building relies on both “functional” mechanisms (resources, training) and “symbolic” mechanisms (mentorship, role modeling), underscoring that capacity emerges from their interaction (pp. 12–13). This duality bridges otherwise distinct frameworks: the functional side aligns with technical and organizational support, while the symbolic side highlights empowerment and culture.

## Toward an Integrative Definition of Individual-Level Capacity Development

Bringing together insights from diverse fields and frameworks, this review proposes a working definition that reflects recurring themes while remaining practical for design and implementation.

Individual-level capacity development can be defined as a context-embedded, ongoing learning process by which an individual acquires, enhances, and sustains the competencies (knowledge, skills, attitudes, and related attributes) and the capability (adaptability, self-renewal, and confidence) needed to perform functions, solve problems, and achieve objectives in a given domain, in alignment with organizational and societal goals.

Several elements of this definition warrant unpacking:

* Context-embedded: Capacity develops and is demonstrated within enabling or constraining environments. Individual growth is meaningful only when conditions exist for application, echoing multi-level models (Danquah et al., 2023).
* Ongoing learning process: Development is iterative rather than a one-time event, encompassing formal training, informal learning, practice, feedback, and adaptation (Cooke et al., 2018).
* Acquires, enhances, and sustains: These verbs capture stages of development - initial acquisition, further improvement, and retention over time. Sustaining requires both motivation and organizational support.
* Competencies: Explicitly includes knowledge, skills, attitudes, and other attributes such as values, motivation, and self-efficacy (Rodrigues et al., 2021; Jajoo & Deshmukh, 2024).
* Capability: Goes beyond current competence to include adaptability, confidence, and the ability to learn in novel situations (Jain et al., 2023).
* Alignment with organizational and societal goals: Ensures individual growth is connected to collective outcomes, echoing public sector literature on ethics and accountability (Kroukamp, 2007).

The literature also reveals areas of divergence. Some authors advocate narrow definitions focused on technical competencies, cautioning against diluting clarity by including too many “soft” elements. Others support broader definitions that incorporate empowerment, motivation, or even external opportunities. This review adopts a broad but centered approach: the individual remains the unit of analysis, but capacity is recognized as inseparable from context and alignment.

For practitioners, the implication is to design initiatives that develop both competencies for current roles and capabilities for future adaptation. Technical training alone is insufficient; programs that also foster confidence, motivation, and alignment with organizational or societal objectives are more likely to translate into performance and impact.

## Conclusion

This review set out to clarify how individual-level capacity development is defined and conceptualized across disciplines. The analysis shows that while the term is widely used, its meaning remains fluid, shaped by context, disciplinary traditions, and evolving debates. A central finding is that individual capacity development must be understood as a dynamic and multidimensional process, not reducible to narrow skill acquisition or one-off training inputs.

Across the literature, several themes converge. First, conceptual clarity depends on distinguishing related terms. Capacity development emphasizes endogenous, ongoing processes, whereas capacity strengthening and human resource development often carry narrower or organizationally focused connotations (Babu & Sengupta, 2006; Danquah et al., 2023; McLagan, 1989). Second, individual capacity comprises more than knowledge and skills - it includes attitudes, motivation, self-efficacy, experiential know-how, and meta-competencies such as adaptability and learning agility (Rodrigues et al., 2021; Jajoo & Deshmukh, 2024; Jain et al., 2023). Third, capacity flourishes or falters depending on organizational cultures, policy frameworks, and wider enabling environments (Alaerts & Kaspersma, 2009; Jackson et al., 2019; Morkel & Mangwiro, 2019).

The implications are particularly salient for evaluation capacity development (ECD). Technical proficiency in research methods alone is insufficient; evaluators also need adaptive and relational skills to navigate organizational politics, foster stakeholder engagement, and sustain credibility. As Morkel and Mangwiro (2019) argue, individual learning must be paired with organizational demand and systemic support. For practitioners, this means that investments in evaluator training should be balanced with strategies to cultivate enabling contexts - for example, supportive professional networks, mentorship structures, and institutional incentives to use evidence (Golhasany & Harvey, 2023; Jackson et al., 2019).

Ultimately, the literature converges on a pragmatic insight: individual-level capacity development is best understood as a continuous, context-embedded process that enhances both competencies for present roles and capabilities for future adaptation. For practitioners working on ECD, the priority is not to implement every possible intervention but to design context-appropriate strategies that integrate technical, interpersonal, and adaptive dimensions in ways that align with organizational and societal goals.

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