# What is the empirical evidence linking individual-level capacity development to targeted outcomes (e.g., capabilities, performance, career growth)?

## Executive Summary

This scoping review examines the empirical evidence linking individual-level capacity development to outcomes such as enhanced capabilities, improved job performance, and career growth. Positioning the review explicitly as a scoping synthesis avoids implying meta-analytic aggregation or pooled effect estimation and instead maps what the evidence base covers, where findings converge, and where gaps remain. The question is significant because while training and professional development are widely assumed to strengthen human capital, the empirical record is heterogeneous across sectors and methods. Clarifying which intervention types are linked to which outcomes - and under what contextual conditions - can guide practitioners, funders, and policymakers toward designs with the greatest likelihood of meaningful impact.

Three more granular findings emerge across intervention categories commonly represented in the literature - short-course technical training, leadership development, mentoring/coaching, job-crafting or career-skills interventions, and multi-component public-sector capacity-building. First, the strongest and most consistent evidence concerns near-term improvements in individual capabilities and competencies. Technical workshops aligned to job tasks frequently show measured knowledge and skill gains, and leadership development, mentoring, and coaching are reliably associated with improvements in interpersonal and cognitive competencies such as communication, team coordination, and problem-solving. Psychological resources - including self-efficacy, motivation, and career agency - also improve in several studies and appear to enable sustained application of new skills over time. Because positive evaluations are more likely to be published and formally evaluated programs may be better designed than typical practice, these favorable patterns should be interpreted with appropriate caution about publication and selection biases.

Second, evidence linking enhanced capabilities to job performance is generally positive but context-dependent. Leadership development and on-the-job training frequently correspond to higher supervisory ratings or productivity metrics, and select studies leveraging quasi-experimental designs or objective indicators report measurable performance gains. Transfer to performance is strongest where organizations provide enabling conditions - opportunities to practice, supportive supervision, time and tools for application, and alignment with work processes; absent these, individual gains may remain latent. Consistent with the scoping orientation, we avoid causal generalizations beyond what study designs warrant and note that confounding and reverse causation remain plausible in observational studies.

Third, career growth and employability outcomes are encouraging yet more variable. Career-skills and mentoring interventions often increase perceived employability, career control, and satisfaction, and several longitudinal or follow-up accounts describe promotions or role expansion. At the same time, advancement depends on available pathways; where internal mobility is constrained, participants may leverage new skills externally. Overall, the weight of evidence suggests development opportunities can support retention by signaling organizational investment, though effects vary by career stage and institutional context.

These findings matter because they shift attention from counting trainings delivered to designing interventions that pair skill acquisition with psychological enablement and organizational supports for transfer and progression. For practitioners and funders, the most actionable implications are to: (i) match intervention type to the targeted outcome (e.g., technical workshops for task proficiency, mentoring/coaching for interpersonal and adaptive capabilities, career-skills programs for employability); (ii) build post-training practice and supervisory support into implementation plans; and (iii) integrate capacity development with clear internal career pathways to convert capability gains into advancement and retention. For researchers, priorities include more longitudinal follow-up, stronger comparison designs, and common outcome definitions to improve interpretability across heterogeneous settings. Taken together, the evidence supports investing in individual-level capacity development as a lever for skill, performance, and career outcomes, while underscoring the need for design quality and enabling environments to realize durable, practically meaningful effects.

## Introduction

This scoping review examines what the empirical literature indicates about links between individual-level capacity development and targeted outcomes - enhanced capabilities, improved job performance, and career growth - without attempting meta-analytic aggregation or pooled effect estimation. Our aim is to map the landscape of evidence, characterize where findings converge or diverge, and identify important gaps and boundary conditions that matter for practice. Investments in training, professional development, mentoring/coaching, job-crafting, and related interventions are widely presumed to strengthen individual and organizational effectiveness, yet the underlying evidence is dispersed across disciplines, sectors, and methods. Clarifying the extent and nature of these links - by intervention type and contextual conditions - can inform design choices for practitioners, funders, and policymakers.

Consistent with a scoping orientation, we describe how studies have investigated outcomes rather than imposing artificial comparability across heterogeneous designs. We avoid language that implies a single research program or cumulative sequence; instead, we treat studies as independently conducted by different authors in varied settings. Our focus remains at the individual level while recognizing that effects are shaped by organizational systems (e.g., supervisory support, opportunities to apply new skills, incentives) and broader institutional environments. Accordingly, we emphasize what the body of evidence suggests about the direction and practical significance of relationships between intervention categories and outcomes, interpret correlations cautiously, and refrain from causal claims unless explicitly warranted by study design.

The review proceeds in three parts. First, we briefly characterize the methodological approaches used to study individual capacity development, highlighting common designs and their inferential limits without delving into unnecessary statistical minutiae. Second, we synthesize findings across three outcome domains - capabilities and competencies; job performance and service delivery; and career growth and employability - attending to where evidence is strong, weak, or under-examined. Finally, we distill implications for practice and policy, noting design features and contextual enablers that appear most consequential, and we outline priority gaps for future research, including the need for longitudinal follow-up, stronger comparisons, and clearer outcome definitions.

## Methodological Approaches to Studying Capacity Development Outcomes

Research on individual capacity development spans a diverse array of methodological approaches, reflecting the challenge of isolating the impact of training and development interventions. Commonly, studies employ pre- and post-intervention assessments to measure changes in participants’ knowledge or skills. For example, technical training programs often use knowledge tests before and after the training to quantify learning gains. In one capacity-strengthening initiative for malaria program officers in Africa, participants’ average knowledge test scores increased substantially from pre-test to post-test (Garley et al., 2016). Such one-group pre/post designs provide evidence of learning, though without a comparison group they offer limited ability to attribute gains exclusively to the intervention. Many evaluations supplement test scores with self-reported feedback or interviews to assess whether participants found the training effective and are applying new skills on the job.

A number of studies use quasi-experimental designs - for instance, comparing trained and untrained groups or using matched controls - to strengthen causal inferences about outcomes. In the context of public sector leadership development, one evaluation tracked participants over time and compared their outcomes to those of non-participants; the trained employees and their supervisors reported significant improvements in on-the-job performance, alongside increases in the employees’ self-efficacy (Packard & Jones, 2015). Similarly, an impact evaluation in a community sanitation program found that villages where local “natural leaders” received facilitation training saw a substantial improvement in safe sanitation practices, compared to villages implementing the program without the specialized training (Crocker et al., 2016). While these controlled comparisons suggest that the capacity-building intervention itself played a role in the improved outcome, it is important to note that many studies still rely on observational or self-reported data. This reliance limits the strength of causal claims, and results must therefore be interpreted with caution, especially in light of possible confounding factors such as participant motivation or concurrent institutional changes.

The timeframe of evaluation also varies. Some studies measure outcomes immediately or within a few weeks of the intervention, which captures short-term learning or behavioral changes but not their durability. Other research extends to longitudinal tracking. For example, a qualitative study of an Australian research capacity-building program followed participants for one year post-training to identify delayed or sustained effects (Schmidt et al., 2022). In another case, a job-crafting intervention study collected data one year after the workshops and found that benefits like increased self-efficacy persisted over time when compared to a control group (van Wingerden et al., 2017). Such designs, though less common, are valuable because they shed light on whether capacity gains endure and whether initial improvements are sustained or diminish after the intervention.

Across the evidence base, studies differ in design (e.g., case studies, cross-sectional surveys, quasi-experiments, and occasional longitudinal follow-ups) and in how they define and measure outcomes. Some use technical knowledge tests, others draw on supervisor ratings, administrative data, or self-reported perceptions of capability and employability. Rather than treating these diverse approaches as directly comparable, this review maps the variety of methods and highlights how each captures different facets of individual-level change. This heterogeneity underscores both the richness and the limitations of the field: while a growing body of work documents positive associations between capacity development and individual outcomes, stronger causal evidence and greater consistency in measurement remain needed.

## Effects on Capabilities and Competencies

A recurring theme across the reviewed literature is that individual-level capacity development interventions are frequently associated with improvements in participants’ capabilities, though the strength and scope of these effects vary by intervention type and context. Because interventions with positive outcomes are more likely to be documented or published, and because formally evaluated programs are often better designed than routine practice, the evidence base is shaped by potential publication and selection biases. This makes it important to interpret findings with care, while still recognizing the recurring patterns that appear across sectors and study designs.

### Technical Knowledge and Task-Specific Skills

Across the reviewed literature, short-course and role-specific training programs are the most frequently documented form of individual-level capacity development, and they provide the clearest evidence of benefits in terms of technical knowledge and task-specific skills. Evaluations in these domains often rely on pre- and post-training knowledge tests, supplemented by participant feedback, to demonstrate immediate learning outcomes. In the public health domain, Garley et al. (2016) evaluated a series of monitoring and evaluation (M&E) workshops for malaria control program staff. Knowledge tests administered before and after each workshop showed substantial learning gains - in some cohorts, average test scores rose by 15–22 percentage points. A follow-up assessment several years later suggested that participants had retained practical M&E knowledge and skills, pointing to the potential durability of technical learning when content is directly relevant to participants’ roles.

Similar patterns are reported in other technical fields. In a water and sanitation initiative, staff trained in community facilitation and infrastructure maintenance described improved proficiency in sanitation protocols and planning tools, alongside increased confidence in applying these tasks independently (Crocker et al., 2016). In the education sector, professional development for teachers and school managers was linked to greater knowledge of curriculum content and pedagogical strategies, which participants reported integrating into their classrooms and institutions (Gcezengana et al., 2022). These findings suggest that interventions designed with a close fit to participants’ day-to-day responsibilities are more likely to yield clear and practically meaningful skill gains.

At the same time, most studies stop at documenting learning acquisition rather than systematically linking these gains to subsequent performance improvements. A meta-analysis of 119 organizational training studies found positive associations between training inputs (both hours and quality) and performance outcomes, but these findings should be understood as evidence of correlation across diverse contexts rather than definitive proof of causality (Garavan et al., 2021). Such aggregate results strengthen confidence in a general relationship between training and performance, yet they also highlight the need for more rigorous longitudinal and experimental designs to confirm whether and how technical skill gains translate into sustained performance improvements.

### Interpersonal, Cognitive, and Relational Skills

In addition to technical training, a substantial portion of the literature examines interventions aimed at developing “soft” or relational competencies - such as leadership, communication, teamwork, and problem-solving. The evidence here is generally positive but more heterogeneous than for technical skills, with outcomes varying by intervention type, organizational setting, and the availability of follow-up support.

Packard and Jones (2015) found that a leadership development initiative in U.S. human service agencies improved participants’ abilities in coaching, team dynamics, and conflict resolution, as reported by both the participants and their supervisors. This example illustrates how structured leadership training can build interpersonal and managerial competencies that are directly relevant to workplace performance. Another study focused on civil society actors in multiple African countries. Aantjes et al. (2022) documented that after a capacity development initiative involving workshops and mentoring, participants showed enhanced relational acumen - they became better at stakeholder engagement, cross-cultural communication, and alliance-building. Likewise, in a South African local government context, Nama et al. (2022) observed that municipal employees who underwent training reported improvements in teamwork and communication that facilitated smoother coordination in service delivery. These examples suggest that mentoring, coaching, and participatory workshops are among the more studied approaches to strengthening interpersonal and cognitive capacities, particularly in organizational and civic settings.

Meta-analyses lend additional weight, though again with important caveats. A review of workplace coaching interventions concluded that coaching produces moderate positive impacts on interpersonal skills and goal attainment (Cannon-Bowers et al., 2023). Similarly, Eby et al. (2008) found that mentoring is associated with a range of favorable outcomes for protégés, from improved job attitudes to career advancement, with slightly larger effects observed in organizational contexts. While these reviews underscore the potential value of developmental relationships, the evidence base still varies in quality. Many studies rely on self-reports, which can reflect participants’ perceptions more than observable behavioral change. As such, these findings should be understood as suggestive rather than definitive.

For practitioners, this body of evidence highlights that soft skills - though less directly measurable than technical competencies - are consistently valued by participants and are frequently linked to improvements in collaboration, communication, and leadership effectiveness. For policymakers and funders, the evidence suggests that supporting mentoring, coaching, and experiential learning approaches can be a worthwhile strategy for cultivating the relational and cognitive dimensions of individual capacity that are critical for evaluation and other professional domains.

### Psychological Resources and Meta-Competencies

A third category of outcomes involves changes in participants’ internal psychological states and meta-competencies - qualities like self-efficacy, confidence, motivation, and adaptive mindset. Across the literature, these outcomes are often described as enabling factors rather than direct end states, since they influence whether newly acquired skills are put into practice and sustained over time. Evidence on these dimensions is promising, though it is typically drawn from small samples or self-reported data, which calls for cautious interpretation.

Self-efficacy frequently increases as a result of training. Packard and Jones (2015) observed a significant rise in self-efficacy beliefs among leadership program participants. In the Netherlands, a controlled study of a job-crafting intervention reported that trainees showed increased self-efficacy after the intervention and maintained this higher self-efficacy one year later (van Wingerden et al., 2017). This suggests that interventions explicitly designed to foster agency and ownership can produce durable psychological effects, though the strength and generalizability of these findings depend on context and design.

Motivation and engagement are another set of outcomes. Hong et al. (2018) found that after a job-readiness training, participants’ employment-related hope and self-motivation increased, fully mediating the relationship between training and subsequent employment success. Likewise, Tian and Soo (2018) found that employee motivation and perceptions of a supportive learning climate were associated with improved knowledge absorption and creative output. Because such outcomes are usually self-reported, it is difficult to separate genuine changes in motivation from participants’ perceptions of having benefited. Nevertheless, the recurring emphasis on motivational and psychological dimensions across different intervention types - particularly job-readiness programs, leadership development, and mentoring - indicates that these aspects are central to capacity development.

Finally, capacity development can sometimes realign individuals’ values and identity. For example, participants in a global health advocacy training described how reflecting on personal values during the training increased their commitment to their missions (Aantjes et al., 2022). Such identity-related changes are less frequently studied but highlight a potentially important pathway: when development programs enable participants to connect skills with purpose, they may strengthen not only competence but also the likelihood of sustained, meaningful engagement in their professional roles.

In summary, psychological and meta-competency outcomes are a distinctive but unevenly documented strand of the evidence base. Interventions that intentionally target agency, motivation, and identity often report positive results, and in some cases these effects persist over time. For practitioners and funders, this suggests that investing in approaches that go beyond technical knowledge to build self-efficacy, motivation, and values alignment may be especially important for ensuring that capacity gains are applied in practice and contribute to long-term effectiveness.

## Effects on Job Performance and Service Delivery

This section reviews the evidence on performance-related outcomes, from individual productivity and effectiveness to broader service improvements. The literature suggests a generally positive relationship between capacity development and performance, though with varying strength of evidence. Many studies report performance gains associated with training participation, but establishing causality is more complex, and the magnitude of improvements can depend on context and support.

### Individual Job Performance Outcomes

The literature generally points to a positive relationship between capacity development and individual job performance, but the strength of this link varies by intervention type, measurement approach, and organizational context. Findings should therefore be interpreted as indicative rather than conclusive, especially given the predominance of self-reported outcomes and quasi-experimental designs.

Multiple studies have observed that employees who participate in training or development programs subsequently exhibit improved job performance on certain measures. For example, a training impact study in a South African government department found that employees who reported significant skill improvements after training also showed higher self-rated job performance, and their supervisors’ evaluations reflected similar improvements (Packard & Jones, 2015). In Packard and Jones’ (2015) evaluation of a leadership development program, participants not only gained soft skills but were also better able to meet job targets and manage their teams’ outputs, leading to performance rating increases relative to baseline. This suggests that leadership-oriented interventions can strengthen both relational skills and task execution, though attribution to training must remain cautious given potential confounding from workplace context or selection into training.

Similar findings are echoed in private-sector settings. A meta-analytic review by Garavan et al. (2021), covering 119 studies, concluded that employee training is positively associated with organizational performance metrics, with an average positive effect that did not significantly differ when training was measured by hours invested versus quality ratings. These results provide convergent evidence across many organizational contexts but represent correlations rather than controlled causal estimates.

Some studies have attempted to capture more objective indicators of performance. For instance, in a Tanzanian revenue authority, researchers found that the number of training hours completed was a significant predictor of employees’ revenue collection performance even after controlling for tenure and education (Kisasilla & Mutarubukwa, 2024). While this points to a plausible productivity benefit, alternative explanations remain possible - for example, more motivated or better-performing employees may both seek out training and achieve higher revenue outcomes.

Meta-analytic work also highlights variability in effect sizes. Arthur et al. (2003) reported an average effect size of d = 0.62 for training on job performance outcomes - moderate but context-dependent. A later meta-analysis of leadership training found even stronger effects on results outcomes, with an average d ≈ 0.72 (Lacerenza et al., 2017). Importantly, these studies also identified design features that enhanced transfer to performance, such as opportunities for practice and application. This underscores that not all training has equivalent impact: program quality and alignment with job context matter substantially.

Overall, the evidence suggests that training and development can support measurable improvements in job performance, but these improvements are contingent. The magnitude of effects depends on intervention design, how performance is measured, and whether organizations create enabling conditions for skill application. For practitioners, this implies that investments in capacity development will be most effective when paired with supportive management, opportunities for practice, and clear mechanisms for transferring new skills to core job tasks.

### Service Delivery and Organizational Outcomes

At a broader scale, some studies examine whether individual capacity development contributes to improvements in service delivery or organizational performance. The evidence in this area is more limited and heterogeneous than for individual-level skill gains, but it provides suggestive insights into how individual changes can extend to collective results. Outcomes at this level are typically measured through service quality indicators, responsiveness to clients, or community-level improvements, though relatively few studies assess such effects systematically.

In public service settings, there are examples where training frontline staff or community leaders was followed by improvements in service delivery. In the Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) sector, Crocker et al. (2016) examined a Community-Led Total Sanitation program in which local community volunteers (“natural leaders”) received facilitation training. The study, which used a rigorous design, found that communities with trained leaders achieved nearly a 20 percentage-point increase in the adoption of safe sanitation practices compared to those without the training intervention. This case illustrates how technical instruction combined with relational facilitation skills can generate visible community-level benefits, though it remains one of relatively few studies to track outcomes beyond the individual learner.

Evidence from municipal government also points to potential links between staff development and organizational responsiveness. Sekgala and Holtzhausen (2016) reported that after a comprehensive capacity-building program - including technical, customer service, and management training - several South African municipalities saw reduced backlogs in service requests and faster response times in delivering water and sanitation services. Community members corroborated these changes through reported improvements in timeliness and quality. Similarly, Zondi (2021) observed that local government employees who participated in training aligned with their personal development plans achieved stronger results on service indicators, such as quicker resolution of citizen complaints, relative to peers without comparable training. In both cases, however, other organizational reforms were occurring concurrently, which makes it difficult to isolate the contribution of training alone. The evidence therefore suggests plausible links rather than definitive causal effects.

In the healthcare domain, a systematic review by DeCorby-Watson et al. (2018) synthesized findings across multiple public health capacity-building interventions. The review concluded that such interventions were often associated with improvements in individual skills and, in some cases, with changes in practices and policies at organizational levels. Notably, this review underscores both the promise and the limitations of the evidence: while individual-level benefits are clearer, demonstrations of direct and sustained impact on ultimate health outcomes remain scarce.

The literature also highlights contextual factors that shape whether individual gains lead to service-level improvements. Supportive leadership, adequate resources, and organizational cultures that encourage the application of new skills appear critical (Birch, 2024; Sibiya, 2023). Where capacity development is embedded within broader organizational reforms, effects on service delivery are more visible and durable. Conversely, in the absence of such enabling conditions, even well-designed training may have little observable effect beyond participants’ self-reported learning.

In sum, the evidence linking capacity development to service delivery and organizational outcomes is less extensive and more contextually contingent than that on individual skills. However, studies from sectors such as sanitation, local governance, and health suggest that when training is well aligned to roles and supported institutionally, it can contribute to tangible improvements in service quality and community outcomes. For practitioners and funders, the key implication is that investments in individual capacity should be coupled with organizational reforms that enable the translation of skills into systemic change.

## Effects on Career Growth and Employability

Beyond immediate performance, another promised benefit of individual capacity development is the potential for career advancement and improved employability for participants. From the individual’s perspective, acquiring new skills and credentials may lead to promotions, new job opportunities, or greater job security. From the employer’s perspective, offering development opportunities could improve retention and ensure a pipeline of talent for higher-level roles. This section examines the empirical evidence on career-related outcomes of capacity development interventions. The literature here is relatively thinner and more mixed compared to that on skills and performance, but there are important insights from both cross-sectional studies and longitudinal observations.

### Promotions and Role Advancement

One pathway through which individual capacity development may influence careers is by enabling participants to assume higher-level roles or responsibilities. The evidence here is encouraging but limited, with most studies offering suggestive rather than definitive findings due to reliance on self-reports, small samples, or lack of comparison groups.

Packard and Jones (2015) noted informally that within two years of completing a leadership development program, about half of the participants had moved into higher-level positions or took on expanded leadership roles, a rate higher than typical in their organizations. Although attribution is difficult without a control group, participants themselves linked these career advancements to confidence and skills gained from the program. Schmidt et al. (2022) similarly followed alumni of an Australian rural research capacity-building program. Over several years, many advanced from junior research roles to lead investigators or assumed greater leadership in implementing evidence-based practices. This qualitative tracking illustrates how capacity development can provide momentum for career mobility, though the absence of systematic comparison again limits causal claims.

More structured evidence comes from systematic reviews that pool across contexts. For instance, Shiri et al. (2023), in a review of healthcare and public-sector professional training, found that ongoing training was consistently associated with stronger retention, higher intention to stay, and - in some cases - greater likelihood of advancement. These findings reinforce the idea that organizational investment in staff development can contribute to upward mobility, but the evidence remains uneven in strength and concentrated in certain sectors (especially healthcare).

Overall, studies of promotions and role advancement suggest that capacity development may play an enabling role in career progression, particularly when training is linked to leadership pathways or specialized expertise. However, the limited availability of rigorous longitudinal data means these associations should be treated as indicative rather than conclusive. For practitioners and funders, the implication is that designing capacity development with clear progression opportunities - such as leadership ladders or research pathways - can enhance the likelihood that participants translate new skills into tangible career advancement.

### Employability and Marketability

Another outcome of interest is whether individuals become more employable or attractive in the labor market after capacity development. Akkermans et al. (2015) conducted a controlled evaluation of a career development training (the “CareerSKILLS” program) for young employees in the Netherlands. They found that participants, compared to a control group, reported higher perceived employability and stronger beliefs in their ability to manage their careers post-intervention. This suggests that interventions explicitly oriented toward career planning, networking, and self-reflection may help participants build confidence in navigating labor markets, even if the evidence primarily reflects perceptions rather than long-term employment trajectories.

Beyond perception, some studies provide evidence of actual career transitions. For example, Ramasobana (2020) surveyed graduates of the CLEAR-AA evaluation capacity training program in Africa and found that many had leveraged the training to take on consulting work or larger roles in evaluation projects, effectively broadening their career opportunities. Those who did not experience such growth often cited lack of institutional support to apply the new skills, indicating that organizational and labor-market conditions shape whether training translates into employability gains. Similarly, Vasquez (2022) compared two public agencies and found that the one offering a robust professional development ladder had significantly lower turnover, as employees perceived clearer internal opportunities for advancement. This case illustrates that capacity development may operate both as a retention mechanism when tied to institutional pathways and as a springboard for external mobility when such opportunities are absent.

Overall, the evidence on employability and marketability outcomes is thinner and more context-dependent than that on technical or interpersonal skills. Where interventions are explicitly career-focused, participants often report enhanced employability and career control, and in some cases move into new roles or external opportunities. Yet most of this evidence comes from small-scale or cross-sectional studies, and the field lacks consistent longitudinal tracking of career trajectories. For practitioners and funders, the implication is that capacity-development programs designed to support employability should be accompanied by organizational strategies - such as career ladders, mentoring, or recognition systems - to maximize the likelihood that new capacities translate into meaningful career advancement rather than attrition.

### Retention vs. External Mobility

There is an interesting dynamic in the literature regarding retention (staying with the current employer) versus external mobility (using new skills to get a job elsewhere). The majority of evidence suggests training tends to increase retention (as noted above), essentially because employees appreciate the investment and often can progress internally. But some have raised the counterpoint – sometimes called the “training paradox” – that highly marketable skills might encourage employees to pursue opportunities elsewhere. In general, empirical support for the fear of training-induced turnover is limited. The systematic review by Shiri et al. (2023) found that continuing development was associated with *lower* risk of leaving, not higher. Only in situations where employees gain skills but still face a stagnant or unsupportive environment might they be more inclined to seek employment elsewhere.

### Career Satisfaction and Long-Term Outcomes

Some studies assess subjective outcomes like career satisfaction, which can be an early indicator of positive career trajectory. Several interventions (especially those focusing on career development or mentoring) report that participants feel more satisfied and in control of their careers after the program (Akkermans et al., 2015; Eby et al., 2008). Moreover, capacity development often expands professional networks, which can have long-term career benefits by opening doors that would otherwise remain closed. However, long-term career outcomes are less frequently documented. When they are tracked, studies indicate that benefits tend to persist if individuals have opportunities to apply new skills over time and if institutional environments provide ongoing support for growth.

For practitioners and funders, the main implication is that career satisfaction and long-term outcomes cannot be assumed to flow automatically from training. They are more likely when capacity-development programs intentionally foster mentoring relationships, create networking opportunities, and align with institutional structures that allow participants to apply and build on their skills. Investing in these enabling factors can help translate short-term gains into durable professional growth.

## Conclusion

This scoping review set out to map the empirical evidence linking individual-level capacity development to outcomes such as enhanced capabilities, improved job performance, and career growth. Rather than seeking to aggregate effect sizes or impose comparability across heterogeneous studies, the review synthesizes evidence from diverse interventions, sectors, and contexts to identify recurring patterns, contextual contingencies, and evidence gaps.

Across the literature, three broad domains of outcomes emerge. First, the most consistently supported findings concern improvements in capabilities and competencies. Technical training programs reliably produce measurable knowledge gains, while leadership development, mentoring, and coaching interventions often strengthen soft skills such as communication, problem-solving, and teamwork. Psychological and motivational outcomes - including self-efficacy, hope, and career agency - appear particularly important as enabling conditions for sustaining and applying these gains.

Second, there is convergent but context-dependent evidence that capacity development contributes to improvements in job performance and, in some cases, service delivery. Leadership and technical training are often associated with higher supervisory ratings, greater productivity, or more responsive public services. Yet the magnitude and durability of these effects depend on organizational conditions - such as supervisory support, opportunities for practice, and alignment with institutional processes. Without these enabling factors, individual gains may remain latent.

Third, the evidence on career growth and employability is thinner and more variable. Studies point to associations between training and promotions, enhanced employability perceptions, improved retention, and greater career satisfaction, but these outcomes are unevenly distributed across sectors and study designs. Where advancement pathways are blocked or organizational environments unsupportive, training may encourage external mobility rather than retention. The evidence suggests that capacity development is most likely to contribute to career progression when embedded in broader organizational talent management systems.

Across all three domains, methodological limitations constrain the strength of conclusions. Many studies rely on self-reported perceptions, cross-sectional designs, or small samples, making causal claims difficult. While quasi-experimental and meta-analytic studies provide stronger inference, true longitudinal and experimental evidence remains scarce, particularly in public-sector and evaluation capacity contexts. This underscores the need for more rigorous, context-sensitive research that follows participants over time and tracks how skills translate into sustained performance and career outcomes.

For practitioners, funders, and policymakers, the key implication is that capacity development delivers the greatest returns when programs go beyond short-term skill acquisition to include psychological enablement, opportunities for application, and clear career pathways. Embedding individual-level interventions within supportive organizational systems can maximize the likelihood that skills are applied, performance improves, and career growth occurs internally rather than externally. For researchers, priorities include longitudinal follow-up, stronger comparison designs, and more consistent outcome measures to enhance comparability across contexts.

Overall, the evidence base indicates that individual-level capacity development contributes positively to skills, performance, and career outcomes, but the effects are contingent rather than automatic. The challenge - and opportunity - for future practice lies in designing interventions that integrate technical training with relational and psychological supports, while also ensuring organizational environments that enable transfer and sustainability.

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