# What are the key factors influencing the success (or not) of individual capacity development interventions on targeted outcomes (e.g., capabilities, performance, career growth)?

## Executive Summary

This literature review investigates the *enablers*, *barriers*, and *contextual conditions* that shape whether individual-level capacity development translates into outcomes such as enhanced capabilities, improved performance, and career growth , distinguishing between factors that implementers can influence (e.g., design choices, transfer supports, managerial practices) and those that largely lie outside their direct control (e.g., pre-existing learner attributes, structural constraints).

At the individual level, attributes such as intrinsic motivation, prior knowledge, soft skills, and self-efficacy *can* influence engagement and transfer; however, most are not directly alterable by a given intervention. The practical implication is *not* to select only “ideal” participants, but to mitigate variability through implementer-controlled levers: setting realistic entry requirements, offering bridging or foundation modules, using early mastery experiences and feedback to bolster self-efficacy, and ensuring tasks connect to participants’ roles. In this framing, learner attributes function as *conditions to anticipate and accommodate*, not determinants that justify exclusionary selection.

At the intervention level, the evidence indicates that a *coherent package* of design and delivery choices is *consistently associated* with stronger transfer, while effects vary by context. Actionable levers include: (i) sequenced curricula that progress from foundations to application; (ii) transfer design (practice on real tasks, timely feedback, supervisor involvement, mentoring/coaching) that makes application explicit; and (iii) content relevance aligned with job demands and career incentives. Duration matters less as a standalone feature than as part of this coherent package: both shorter and longer formats can work when relevance, practice, and follow-up are in place. Accordingly, claims of any single “most important” feature are avoided; the emphasis is on fit-for-purpose combinations that enable use.

At the organisational and broader context level, managerial support, peer norms, and incentive structures are frequent *enablers*, while workload pressures, misaligned appraisal systems, and weak demand for evidence are common *barriers*. Implementers can influence parts of this environment - e.g., securing supervisor commitments, scheduling protected practice time, integrating new skills into performance conversations, and creating peer problem-solving forums - even when they cannot shift wider institutional constraints. Where structural conditions (e.g., policy cycles, staffing rules, budget rigidity) limit application, interventions should be scoped to feasible behavior changes and sequenced to moments of organisational receptivity.

Taken together, the evidence supports treating capacity development as a design-for-use problem rather than a discrete training event. Effective practice involves: anticipating individual variability and scaffolding for it; assembling a coherent set of design features that connect learning to work; and negotiating minimal viable organisational supports that make application realistic within existing constraints. This pragmatic approach helps practitioners prioritize *doable* levers, avoid maximalist prescriptions, and increase the likelihood that near-term learning gains convert into sustained performance and career outcomes.

## Introduction

This literature review examines the *enablers*, *barriers*, and *contextual conditions* that shape whether individual capacity development at the learner level translates into outcomes such as enhanced capabilities, improved performance, and career growth. Understanding these factors is critical because capacity development is widely employed across sectors as a strategy to strengthen human capital, yet its results remain uneven. To support practitioners, the review distinguishes between factors that implementers can *directly influence* (e.g., design choices, transfer supports, managerial arrangements) and those largely *beyond their control* (e.g., pre-existing learner attributes, institutional rules, policy or budget cycles). Without clear insight into what enables or impedes success, interventions risk producing limited or unsustainable impact.

The review draws primarily on recent peer-reviewed studies, with evidence from diverse contexts including public administration, health, education, and international development. Its scope centers on interventions in which the individual learner is the primary unit of change, while explicitly accounting for how organisational and systemic conditions *mediate* transfer and durability of effects.

To synthesize a heterogeneous literature, the review applies a multi-level analytical framework. It first analyzes *Individual-level conditions* (e.g., motivation, prior knowledge, soft skills, professional identity) primarily as *contextual conditions* that interventions must anticipate and, where feasible, scaffold; then it examines *Intervention-level design and delivery levers* - including duration and sequencing, transfer design and content relevance, active/experiential learning, and the roles of coaching and mentoring - as potential *success factors* or *barriers* depending on fit and implementation; finally, it considers *Organisational and broader contextual features* - managerial support, learning culture and peer norms, and career incentives - as environmental *enablers* or *constraints* that condition whether individual gains are applied and sustained. The conclusion distills cross-cutting lessons and implications for practice, including evaluation capacity development.

By synthesizing findings across levels and contexts, this review seeks to clarify pragmatic levers for design-for-use and credible limits on implementer control, indicating where targeted adjustments can raise the likelihood that learning converts into improved performance and professional growth without relying on maximalist, “do-everything” prescriptions.

## Individual-Level Factors

### Motivation and Learning Orientation

Motivation and learning orientation consistently emerge as contextual conditions that shape whether learners engage with and sustain the benefits of capacity development. These are not typically within the direct control of program designers, but they can be anticipated, supported, and partially reinforced through specific design choices. Learners driven by intrinsic motives - a genuine desire to gain knowledge or improve skills - engage more deeply in learning and persevere in applying new skills in the workplace. Research confirms that a learning-goal orientation (focused on mastering new competencies) is more strongly associated with absorptive capacity and innovative outcomes than a performance-goal orientation (aimed at external validation or credentials). For example, Tian and Soo (2018) show that engineers with strong intrinsic motivation and a learning orientation demonstrated higher absorptive capacity, which in turn facilitated the translation of new knowledge into workplace innovation and performance improvements.

A key success factor is ensuring alignment between training content and participants’ personal or career goals, which implementers can influence through careful needs assessment and co-design. When training is relevant to personal aspirations, intrinsic engagement is stronger; by contrast, mandated or irrelevant training often functions as a barrier, producing only superficial participation (Parsons, 2025). Motivation to transfer learning - the willingness to apply skills in practice - is also shaped by environmental cues: supportive organisational climates and managerial reinforcement act as enabling conditions, whereas discouraging climates (e.g., lack of recognition, resistance to change) constrain transfer (Elnaga & Imran, 2013; Wassem et al., 2019).

The distinction between autonomous and controlled motivation adds nuance. Autonomous motivation, rooted in personal interest, is a contextual enabler for persistence and long-term application, while controlled motivation, driven by external pressures, is a constraint that often results in compliance without sustained impact. Implementers cannot alter participants’ underlying motivational orientation, but they can create design features - such as embedding applied projects, providing timely feedback, and framing training as directly relevant to advancement - that strengthen autonomous motivation and buffer against the risks of controlled motivation.

Overall, motivation and learning orientation are baseline learner attributes that strongly condition outcomes. They are not levers implementers can select or engineer, but they can be scaffolded by aligning training content with participant goals, reinforcing relevance through organisational signals, and embedding practical opportunities that demonstrate immediate utility. Without such enabling structures, even motivated learners may disengage, while well-designed supports can help less intrinsically motivated participants persist and apply skills.

### Prior Knowledge

The extent of learners’ prior knowledge functions as a critical contextual condition that shapes how capacity development interventions unfold. It is largely beyond the control of implementers, but its effects can be anticipated and, to some extent, mitigated through diagnostic and scaffolding strategies. Chetty and Moodley (2022) describe South Africa’s state-owned company Transnet, where junior project managers entered advanced project management courses with limited prior exposure to large-scale projects. This mismatch created a barrier: participants struggled to apply newly acquired tools, relied heavily on external consultants, and left internal capacity underdeveloped despite significant training investments. This illustrates how insufficient baseline knowledge can undermine even technically sound interventions, particularly in public-sector contexts where systemic skill deficits are common.

Implementers can, however, take practical steps to scaffold entry conditions. A success factor highlighted in the literature is the use of tiered tracks, preparatory modules, and refresher sessions to level the playing field for participants starting with weaker knowledge (Darling-Hammond, Hyler, & Gardner, 2017). These mechanisms do not eliminate baseline disparities but mitigate their impact, making advanced content more accessible. In practice, this may involve offering foundation courses or structured mentoring before learners attempt higher-level modules. Such scaffolding reduces attrition risks among those who might otherwise disengage.

Experimental evidence further illustrates how prior knowledge interacts with learning dynamics. Zambrano et al. (2019) found that learners with higher task-specific prior knowledge consistently outperformed novices in both individual and collaborative settings. This highlights a barrier: insufficient prior knowledge increases cognitive load and reduces efficiency. Yet the same study points to an enabling condition - collaborative modalities - which allowed groups of partially knowledgeable learners to pool insights and compensate for individual gaps. Conversely, when learners already had complete prior knowledge, collaboration introduced redundancy and acted as a constraint, raising cognitive load unnecessarily.

From an implementation standpoint, the actionable lesson is that full customization for every participant may be impractical, but proportionate diagnostics can guide design choices. Basic assessments of readiness can inform whether cohorts require an introductory phase, whether collaborative formats will mitigate or exacerbate disparities, and whether more advanced modules should be deferred.

Taken together, the literature positions prior knowledge as a contextual condition largely outside implementers’ direct control, though its effects can be shaped through design decisions. Success factors include scaffolding entry requirements and calibrating learning formats to baseline skill levels; barriers arise when interventions ignore entry disparities and overload learners; and enabling conditions occur when collaborative designs are matched to groups with partial but complementary knowledge.

### Soft Skills and Adaptive Interpersonal Capabilities

Soft skills represent individual-level factors that significantly influence the effectiveness of capacity development. Unlike contextual conditions, they are attributes that shape how learners interact with training content, peers, and organisational environments, and they function as enablers or constraints depending on their presence and strength.

Interpersonal and adaptive skills - such as teamwork, communication, and openness to experience - shape how individuals integrate new knowledge and sustain its application. Nugroho et al. (2021), studying Indonesian university lecturers, found that adaptability and teamwork not only enhanced innovation capabilities directly but also amplified the benefits of organisational learning processes. In this way, soft skills act as success factors by multiplying the returns of technical training. Conversely, weak interpersonal skills can serve as barriers, limiting collaboration, reducing uptake of new practices, and constraining transfer.

Corzo-Morales and Contreras-Pacheco (2024), in their literature review of innovative behavior, identify personality traits such as openness, conscientiousness, and emotional stability as consistent predictors of whether individuals embrace new ideas and persist in applying them. These traits function as individual enablers, buffering against resistance and supporting sustained engagement, while the absence of such traits can constrain training impact.

Semenova et al. (2021) extend this understanding by showing how leadership - an adaptive interpersonal capability - catalyzes growth in cognitive, digital, and socio-behavioral domains among Russian engineering students. Leadership, operationalized through influence, motivation, and decision-making, evolved through structured teamwork and project-based learning. Here, program design interacted with soft skills: structured group tasks served as a success factor by giving participants opportunities to develop and exercise leadership, which in turn reinforced application of technical expertise. Without such structured opportunities, leadership potential may remain latent, limiting individual growth.

These findings underscore that soft skills are not static traits but can be intentionally cultivated through education and training. From a practitioner perspective, while pre-existing interpersonal capabilities represent baseline individual conditions that interventions cannot control, program design choices - such as embedding collaborative projects, role rotations, or reflective exercises - can act as success factors in strengthening soft skills. Failing to provide such opportunities constitutes a design barrier, leaving participants without the adaptive tools required to translate technical training into effective performance.

Soft skills are individual-level enablers that magnify training benefits when present and developed, and barriers when weak or neglected. Implementers cannot fully engineer these capabilities but can strengthen them through structured design features that provide practice, feedback, and reflection.

### Self-Efficacy and Professional Identity

Self-efficacy and professional identity are individual-level factors that strongly mediate whether capacity development results in sustained outcomes. Self-efficacy - belief in one’s ability to perform tasks and overcome challenges - and professional identity - how individuals perceive their role, values, and belonging within an occupational community - function as psychological anchors that either enable or constrain transfer.

Evidence links self-efficacy directly to training transfer and clarifies how workplace conditions shape its durability. Hanum et al.’s (2024) longitudinal study of clinical nurse specialists shows that while knowledge and skills were acquired during training, only those with high self-efficacy maintained transfer over the first year, and that the salience of managerial support increased over time. Here, weak self-efficacy served as a barrier, while reinforcement from managers functioned as an enabling contextual condition. Complementing this, Darling-Hammond, Hyler, and Gardner (2017) show in teacher professional development that individuals with higher self-efficacy and commitment were substantially more likely to implement new instructional practices and sustain them in classrooms. Kim and Bang’s (2025) review similarly identifies self-belief and commitment to professional growth as recurring enablers, with weak self-efficacy repeatedly cited as a barrier to capacity transfer.

Identity shifts also play a role in sustaining training outcomes. Jones, Chesley, and Egan (2020) describe corporate “vertical leadership development” programs in which managers placed in stretch assignments combined with coaching and reflection reported not only improved skills but also a renewed sense of identity as capable leaders. This shift acted as a success factor by motivating participants to champion initiatives and tackle complex challenges. Pirrioni’s (2018) study of apprentices in the UK likewise shows that apprentices who came to view themselves as skilled professionals demonstrated more durable performance improvements. By contrast, when professional identity remained weak or unchanged, learners were prone to disengage or revert to old practices, highlighting a barrier that can undermine even high-quality training (Elnaga & Imran, 2013).

For those designing and delivering capacity development, the actionable lever lies in embedding program elements that actively reinforce self-efficacy and professional identity. Success factors include integrating early mastery experiences, providing constructive feedback, and embedding structured opportunities for reflection. These design features help participants see evidence of their growth, which strengthens confidence and reinforces professional identity. Conversely, a barrier arises when programs overload learners without scaffolding or when feedback is absent, leading to erosion of confidence and identity.

In sum, self-efficacy and professional identity are individual factors that heavily influence whether new skills are applied and sustained. They are shaped by learners’ pre-existing dispositions but can be reinforced through program design. Success factors include mastery experiences, feedback, and reflective exercises; barriers include low self-belief and lack of identity recognition; contextual conditions such as managerial support further mediate whether self-efficacy endures beyond training.

## Intervention-Level Design and Delivery Factors

### Duration and Sequencing

The temporal design of interventions - including both their overall duration and the sequencing of activities - functions as an intervention-level factor that can enable or constrain outcomes depending on how it is structured. While evidence is mixed on the precise effects of duration, studies consistently highlight that it interacts with sequencing, participant readiness, and organisational conditions to shape transfer.

Short, one-off workshops may raise awareness or provide a quick infusion of knowledge, but they rarely instill complex skills or foster long-term behavioral change. Desimone (2009) emphasizes that sustained engagement with opportunities for practice and reflection is a recurring success factor in professional development. Nīmante et al.’s (2025) scoping review of teacher learning also identifies duration as one of several design features associated with effective practice, though findings remain heterogeneous. This points to a constraint: duration on its own does not guarantee success, and the broader design context must be considered.

Examples from global health illustrate these dynamics. Mormina and Pinder (2018) find that training-of-trainers programs shorter than one year left participants with knowledge of teaching techniques but insufficient time to develop confidence in applying them - a barrier to sustainability. By contrast, 12–18 month programs with phased components (workshops, refreshers, practicum periods) created enabling conditions for participants to become self-sufficient trainers. Similarly, at the Tanzania Revenue Authority, phased induction training followed by mentored practice and later specialized courses helped reduce cognitive overload and built confidence incrementally (Kisasilla & Mutarubukwa, 2024). These findings underscore sequencing as a success factor when programs are structured progressively, though they also highlight a contextual condition: availability of organisational resources and time to accommodate longer formats.

Longitudinal evidence from adult education provides further nuance. Rüter and Martin (2022) found that increasing the variety of temporal formats (short, medium, long courses) boosted participation rates by better matching learners’ time availabilities and expectations. Here, flexibility in duration served as a success factor, while rigid formats acted as barriers by excluding those unable to commit. Participation gains were greatest when programs offered sustained courses that aligned with learners’ perceptions of value, suggesting that perceived return on investment functions as a contextual enabler.

Sectoral variation also matters. Rüter and Martin (2022) note that vocational and basic education, tied to certification requirements, were less sensitive to course length, while areas such as culture, politics, and society saw clear participation gains from longer formats. This heterogeneity highlights a constraint beyond implementers’ direct control: institutional and sectoral demands condition what durations are feasible or credible.

For practitioners, the actionable implication is not to default to “longer is always better” but to design temporal structures that are sequenced, flexible, and realistic within organisational constraints. Success factors include phased progression from foundations to advanced skills, offering a range of formats to match participant needs, and building in practice intervals. Barriers arise when training is compressed without reinforcement, or when rigid structures exclude participants. Contextual conditions such as institutional certification requirements, resource availability, and workload distribution ultimately mediate whether duration and sequencing choices translate into sustainable outcomes.

### Transfer Design and Content Relevance

Transfer design and content relevance are intervention-level levers that can determine whether learning translates into practice. Success arises when training is deliberately structured to bridge learning and workplace application, while barriers appear when transfer mechanisms are absent or when content is misaligned with participant roles and organisational priorities. Contextual conditions - such as institutional reforms, workplace culture, or policy timing - mediate whether even well-designed interventions succeed.

Evidence consistently highlights the importance of alignment. Training integrated into ongoing reforms or linked to real workplace challenges enables participants to apply new skills immediately. Birch’s (2024) review of governance reform programs shows that embedding training within live reform processes served as an enabling condition, while generic workshops disconnected from institutional needs acted as barriers. In education, Desimone (2009) emphasizes coherence between training and classroom standards as a success factor. Darling-Hammond, Hyler, and Gardner (2017) similarly find that consistency with reforms reinforced professional purpose. In development contexts, Kim and Bang (2025) report that content misaligned with local priorities undermined interventions, while context-sensitive curricula adapted to language, culture, and institutional norms created enabling conditions for success. These findings underscore that implementers can directly influence alignment through needs assessments and co-design, but they cannot fully control contextual conditions such as institutional priorities or reform trajectories.

Perceptions of relevance also matter. Ucha (2023) shows that perceived usefulness - strongly driven by content relevance - was the primary predictor of persistence and knowledge transfer in massive open online courses (MOOCs). This indicates that subjective judgments can act as either enablers or barriers: when participants see direct career value, they remain engaged; when they do not, attrition rises. Implementers can strengthen perceptions of relevance by explicitly linking training to advancement pathways, embedding workplace tasks, and demonstrating practical utility.

Transfer design mechanisms further condition outcomes. Tonhäuser and Büker’s (2016) review highlights the enabling role of action planning, supervisor involvement, and structured follow-up. Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) stress that timely feedback builds confidence, while Baldwin and Ford (1988) identify it as a robust predictor of transfer. Case studies reinforce these points: at the Tanzania Revenue Authority, supervised practice combined with feedback functioned as a success factor for performance gains (Kisasilla & Mutarubukwa, 2024); in Ethiopia, pairing health workers with mentors for a year after training created enabling conditions for improved data use (Chanyalew et al., 2022). Conversely, barriers arise when coaching is poorly structured or absent, when supervisors disengage, or when organisational systems fail to provide continuity.

Research also highlights interaction effects. Bhatti and Kaur (2010) identify perceived content validity - ensuring alignment with job tasks - as both a success factor and a mediator of motivation. Their framework shows that transfer design strengthens outcomes when it explicitly demonstrates how to apply skills, thereby building self-efficacy. Bhatti et al. (2014) add that transfer design interacts with learner readiness and environmental support: when all align, application is reinforced; when any one is weak, barriers appear. This highlights a contextual constraint: transfer mechanisms are most effective in organisations with supportive climates, but less so where resources, time, or managerial attention are limited.

For practitioners, the practical implications are clear. Success factors include embedding practice opportunities, ensuring supervisor involvement, providing timely and specific feedback, and tailoring content to participants’ roles and organisational priorities. Barriers include generic or misaligned curricula, absence of structured follow-up, and lack of organisational reinforcement. Contextual conditions - such as whether reforms are underway, whether managers value evidence, or whether institutional norms support adaptation - ultimately determine whether well-designed transfer systems achieve their intended impact.

### Active and Experiential Learning

Active and experiential learning approaches are intervention-level factors that often serve as strong enablers of transfer. They emphasize practice, reflection, and application rather than passive absorption of information. Success arises when learners are given opportunities to engage with real tasks, reflect on performance, and receive feedback. Barriers appear when interventions rely primarily on didactic delivery, when practice opportunities are absent, or when organisational contexts fail to support experimentation.

Research in adult learning consistently shows that passive delivery modes such as lectures are weaker in producing durable outcomes. Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) identify active learning, modeling, and collaborative participation as success factors in teacher professional development. Baldwin and Ford’s (1988) review similarly underscores practice opportunities with feedback as among the strongest enablers of transfer.

Sectoral cases illustrate these dynamics. At the Tanzania Revenue Authority, trainees who engaged in supervised on-the-job practice achieved stronger gains than those exposed only to classroom sessions (Kisasilla & Mutarubukwa, 2024). In global health, training-of-trainers programs that included facilitation practice with feedback produced better outcomes than observation alone (Mormina & Pinder, 2018). Amde et al. (2019) show that modular health workforce training with intervals for field application acted as a success factor by creating enabling organisational opportunities for institutionalizing new skills. Conversely, barriers emerged where practice phases were omitted, feedback was inconsistent, or organisational constraints limited opportunities to apply new knowledge.

Systematic reviews confirm these patterns. DeCorby-Watson et al. (2018) found that interventions incorporating active engagement outperformed information-only training in public health. Nīmante et al. (2025) highlight collaborative problem-solving and peer-to-peer learning as enablers of retention and self-efficacy among teachers. However, contextual conditions such as class size, workload, and institutional openness to interactive methods mediate whether these approaches can be implemented effectively. For example, large groups or rigid curricula may constrain the feasibility of experiential learning.

Recent studies deepen understanding of how experiential formats function. Torres and Augusto (2017) show that business simulations in Executive MBA programs strengthened analytical competencies, serving as a success factor for leadership development. Yet they also found limited impact on underlying decision-making styles, pointing to a constraint: some deeper dispositions may not shift through experiential exercises alone. Coker et al. (2017) demonstrate that both depth (sustained engagement in one domain) and breadth (exposure across domains such as research, service, and leadership) independently predicted stronger outcomes. Depth acted as an enabler for higher-order thinking, while breadth strengthened teamwork and relational skills. The absence of either dimension limited potential gains, highlighting barriers that arise when programs provide only narrow or superficial exposure.

In practice, these findings highlight several concrete implications for practitioners. Success factors include embedding structured practice opportunities, integrating reflection and feedback loops, and designing curricula that balance depth and breadth of experiential exposure. Barriers arise when interventions default to didactic teaching, omit applied practice, or fail to provide feedback. Contextual conditions such as available time, institutional willingness to adapt delivery methods, and participant workload ultimately shape whether experiential designs can be implemented effectively.

### Coaching and Mentoring

Coaching and mentoring are intervention-level mechanisms that often act as strong enablers of sustained capacity development. By providing individualized guidance, accountability, and psychosocial support, they help bridge the gap between training and workplace application. Their effectiveness, however, depends on both program design and the organisational context in which they are embedded.

Regular mentorship sessions, action plans, and feedback loops have been shown to enhance technical proficiency while fostering accountability and ownership among participants. Chanyalew et al. (2022) demonstrate that in Ethiopia, the Capacity Building and Mentorship Program (CBMP) improved health workers’ data-use practices when mentoring was continuous and institutionally supported. Here, the success factor was the structured integration of mentoring over an extended period, while the absence of follow-up or institutional endorsement would have acted as a barrier.

Meta-analytic evidence affirms coaching’s role in performance improvement. Jones et al. (2015) find that coaching enhances skill-based, affective, and individual-level outcomes. Success factors included use of internal coaches with contextual knowledge and incorporation of goal-setting and reflective dialogue. Barriers emerged when coaching was paired with multisource feedback that diluted its impact, or when external coaches lacked understanding of organisational realities.

Mentoring also influences career development and psychosocial outcomes. Jyoti and Sharma (2015) highlight that mentoring provides both career support (e.g., sponsorship, visibility, protection) and psychosocial support (e.g., role modeling, counseling). These functions acted as enablers of career progression and satisfaction. Yet their effectiveness was mediated by contextual conditions such as organisational culture and structure. In cultures that institutionalized feedback and promoted ownership, mentoring was reinforced; in rigid or hierarchical organisations, even well-structured mentoring could be undermined.

For implementers, coaching and mentoring represent levers they can design into interventions: success factors include establishing clear objectives, selecting mentors or coaches with contextual knowledge, embedding regular sessions, and ensuring alignment with institutional priorities. Barriers arise when mentoring is short-term, ad hoc, or poorly matched to participant needs. Contextual conditions - including organisational culture, workload allowances, and leadership endorsement - ultimately shape whether these mechanisms can be sustained and effective.

In sum, coaching and mentoring are powerful enablers when embedded as continuous, supported processes. Implementers can influence design and matching of mentors/coaches, while long-term impact depends on contextual factors - such as institutional buy-in and culture - that are not fully within their control.

## Organisational and Contextual Factors

### Managerial Support

Managerial support is an organisational-level factor that consistently acts as either an enabler or a barrier to training transfer. While implementers cannot directly control managers’ behaviors, they can design interventions that encourage and facilitate managerial engagement, making it more likely that participants receive the support needed to apply new skills.

Supervisors shape transfer climates by signaling whether training is valued, providing coaching, and integrating new competencies into performance appraisals (Elnaga & Imran, 2013). Poole et al. (2023) show that when apprentices’ managers failed to adjust workloads or schedules, participants struggled to complete study tasks, often resorting to overtime - a barrier that produced burnout and limited the effectiveness of training. Conversely, when managers reallocated duties or arranged coverage, apprentices were able to fully engage, resulting in higher completion rates and stronger skill acquisition - an enabling condition that reinforced training outcomes.

Bhatti et al. (2014) highlight the motivational role of supervisory support. Their study identifies success factors such as meeting with employees before training to clarify expectations, linking training to job tasks, and following up after training with feedback and opportunities to practice. These actions created enabling conditions by fostering transfer motivation. Barriers arose when supervisors failed to reinforce training relevance, provide feedback, or allocate time for practice, undercutting the likelihood of application.

Timing also matters. Support provided before training prepares participants with a transfer mindset, while during- and post-training support sustains motivation and enables skill application. The absence of such continuity constitutes a barrier that limits long-term impact.

For practitioners, the key implication is that managerial involvement should be integrated into intervention design to the extent possible. Success factors include securing explicit commitments from supervisors, involving them in pre-training orientation, and embedding structured opportunities for follow-up conversations. While implementers cannot control contextual conditions such as overall workload pressures, staffing policies, or leadership culture, they can mitigate these barriers by negotiating minimal protected time and by equipping managers with guidance on how to reinforce learning.

Ultimately, managerial support is not a one-off endorsement but a continuous process across training phases. It becomes a success factor when managers adjust workloads, provide feedback, and link new skills to performance expectations. It functions as a barrier when managers are disengaged or unwilling to adapt structures. Contextual conditions - including organisational workload norms and leadership priorities - ultimately shape the space for managers to act, but interventions can influence the likelihood and quality of support through deliberate design choices.

### Learning Culture and Peer Support

Organisational learning culture and peer support are contextual factors that strongly condition whether individual training gains are sustained. They are not created by a single intervention, but program implementers can design features that either leverage existing learning cultures or help nudge organisations toward greater openness to learning.

A strong learning culture normalizes professional development, rewards innovation, and embeds new practices in routines. Parsons (2025) shows that when promotions, pay, and recognition systems reward skill application, employees are more likely to persist in new behaviors - an enabling condition that reinforces transfer. Conversely, rigid or change-resistant institutions often undermine capacity development, creating barriers that negate even well-designed interventions (Kim & Bang, 2025).

One success factor is the deliberate creation of peer-learning structures that reinforce and spread individual training gains. DeCorby-Watson et al. (2018) found that communities of practice (CoPs) - regular forums where trained staff shared lessons and troubleshooted problems - helped embed new practices into daily work. For example, public health professionals trained in evidence-based planning adapted best practices to local realities through CoPs, which acted as enablers by sustaining motivation and supporting contextual problem-solving. Similarly, in Ecuador, NGOs with internal learning meetings and after-action reviews were more successful in translating individual training into collective organisational capacity (Ledesma Silva, 2018). Here, peer structures multiplied individual gains into systemic improvements, while their absence functioned as a barrier by isolating trained staff and limiting diffusion.

Bhatti et al. (2014) confirm that peer support influences transfer motivation: colleagues’ expectations, encouragement, and recognition acted as success factors, strengthening motivation and reinforcing new skills. By contrast, environments where peers dismissed or resisted new practices acted as barriers, undermining motivation and discouraging application.

For practitioners, the actionable levers include embedding peer-support mechanisms into program design (e.g., learning circles, collaborative assignments, facilitated knowledge-sharing sessions). These can function as immediate success factors by fostering accountability and creating social norms around application. Yet the strength of these mechanisms ultimately depends on contextual conditions - such as whether organisational culture values collaboration and whether time is allocated for peer exchange - that extend beyond implementers’ direct control.

In sum, learning culture and peer support are powerful enablers when aligned with training objectives and reinforced through recognition and structures. Barriers arise in rigid cultures or peer environments resistant to change. Implementers cannot singlehandedly build a learning culture but can design interventions that leverage peer dynamics and advocate for supportive organisational practices, thereby increasing the likelihood that training gains diffuse and persist.

### Career Incentives

Career incentives function as organisational-level factors that can either enable or constrain the application of new skills. When recognition and advancement pathways reinforce training outcomes, employees are more likely to sustain engagement. Conversely, absent or misaligned incentives act as barriers that weaken motivation, even when training is well designed.

Parsons (2025) highlights that aligning incentives with skill application serves as a success factor by signaling organisational priorities. Shiri et al. (2023) similarly find that linking continuing education to advancement pathways enabled retention and strengthened motivation to transfer. Symbolic incentives also matter: Kim and Bang (2025) show that when organisations publicly celebrated staff who applied new skills, social recognition functioned as an enabling condition that fostered uptake, particularly in resource-constrained environments.

Baldwin and Ford (1988), however, caution that absent or poorly aligned reward systems can undermine transfer. A barrier arises when training is seen as disconnected from career progression or when incentives reward speed or output quantity at the expense of quality, discouraging sustained application. Bhatti et al. (2014) provide nuance by distinguishing between extrinsic and intrinsic rewards: extrinsic rewards such as pay increases boosted performance quantity but also increased error rates, while intrinsic rewards such as recognition and meaningful work acted as enablers of quality and innovation.

Bagdadli and Gianecchini (2018) broaden this perspective by situating incentives within organisational career management (OCM) practices. Structured programs such as mentoring, training, assessment centers, succession planning, and career counseling functioned as systemic enablers, enhancing career outcomes through developmental, informational, and relational mechanisms. Yet they also identify contextual conditions - such as culture, performance appraisal systems, and institutional norms - that determine whether identical incentives succeed or fail. Transparent and equitable appraisal systems reinforced transfer as an enabler, while biased or opaque systems acted as barriers that eroded motivation.

For program implementers, a key takeaway is that capacity development initiatives should be aligned with clear and visible career incentives wherever possible. Success factors include linking training to promotion criteria, ensuring recognition mechanisms are in place, and coordinating with human resources to integrate skill application into appraisal systems. Barriers arise when training is detached from advancement opportunities or when reward structures are misaligned. Contextual conditions - such as organisational culture, labor market structures, and institutional norms - ultimately determine whether incentives translate into sustained application.

In sum, career incentives signal the value of capacity development within organisations. They act as enablers when linked to advancement pathways and recognition systems, barriers when absent or misaligned, and are conditioned by broader organisational and institutional environments. While implementers cannot change structural norms, they can strengthen the connection between training and career outcomes by coordinating with organisational leaders and embedding recognition into program design.

## Conclusion

This review examined the factors that enable, constrain, or condition the success of individual capacity development interventions in producing outcomes such as enhanced capabilities, improved performance, and career growth. Evidence across diverse sectors shows that outcomes are shaped by interactions between individual-level factors, intervention design features, and organisational or contextual conditions. No single dimension is sufficient on its own; instead, their alignment determines whether skills are sustained and applied.

At the individual level, motivation, prior knowledge, soft skills, self-efficacy, and professional identity function as conditions that influence engagement and persistence. These are not fully within implementers’ control, but they can be supported through program design - such as scaffolding entry requirements, embedding mastery experiences, and creating opportunities for reflection and identity reinforcement. Barriers appear when learners lack readiness or confidence and interventions do not account for these gaps.

At the intervention level, success factors include sequencing that progresses from foundational to advanced skills, transfer mechanisms that make application explicit (e.g., feedback, mentoring, coaching), active and experiential learning, and content aligned with participants’ roles and aspirations. Barriers emerge when programs are too compressed, overly generic, or detached from workplace realities. Implementers can directly influence these design features, though their effectiveness is conditioned by contextual constraints such as limited time, workload pressures, or institutional mandates.

At the organisational and contextual level, managerial support, learning culture, peer norms, and career incentives act as enabling conditions when aligned with training objectives. Conversely, resistance to change, rigid hierarchies, and misaligned incentives are common barriers. These contextual conditions are largely beyond implementers’ direct control, but they can be influenced indirectly by securing managerial commitments, advocating for recognition systems, and embedding peer-support mechanisms.

Taken together, the evidence underscores that capacity development should be approached as a design-for-use problem rather than as a stand-alone training exercise. The practical implications are threefold: (1) anticipate and scaffold individual-level variability rather than assuming ideal participants; (2) prioritize a coherent package of design features that connect learning to real tasks and reinforce transfer; and (3) leverage organisational supports where feasible, while recognizing the limits imposed by broader institutional environments.

For practitioners and policymakers, the central lesson is to focus on *actionable levers* within their control, while realistically accounting for barriers and contextual conditions they cannot fully change. Interventions that integrate these pragmatic considerations are more likely to convert short-term learning gains into sustained improvements in performance and career growth.

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