



**COR  
DES  
CAPS**

CAPACITY  
CO-STRENGTHENING

# 10 Key Capacities for Addressing Systems Change

OVERVIEW AND DESCRIPTION OF CAPACITIES





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## What is CorDesCaps?

The capacity co-strengthening project (known as “CorDesCaps” for its French name, “Corenforcement des capacités pour des changements systémiques justes, inclusifs et durables”) is an experimentation project that supported those seeking to codevelop their capacity to bring about equitable, inclusive and sustainable systems change. From 2018 to 2023, more than 200 people from areas of practice including community development, territorial development, social economy, social innovation, the environment, socio-ecological transition, and Indigenous community development have attended CorDesCaps’ activities. Coordinated by Innoweave and Communagir, CorDesCaps is supported by the McConnell Foundation, the Mirella & Lino Saputo Foundation, the Lucie and André Chagnon Foundation, and Mission inclusion.

One of the project’s fundamental principles was committing to an experimental approach, with the idea of respecting the process and taking the time to learn and adapt along the way. This not only emphasized the importance of learning collectively, but also showed how besides practicing and co-strengthening a capacity, adopting a learning-based approach as the project unfolds is essential to better inform next steps. The project has shown that this way of working in an open experiment, with humility and curiosity, allows for more new perspectives or “aha moments” to emerge.

## Why keys capacities?

How can we bring about meaningful systemic change? When initially asked, field practitioners, support organizations and financial partners hypothesized that co-strengthening capacities could contribute to more effective systems change.

The methodology used to develop the capacities relied on the experiential knowledge of the people participating in the process. The proposed definitions are not claimed to be definitive or complete. They reflect the pulse and current readings collected over the stages of the project.

The capacities that you will read about in this document are the result of an iterative process during which they were: 1) Initially identified in January 2019, 2) Streamlined into 9 capacities in February 2021, 3) Explored, modified and analyzed during “Open diagnostic” sessions in 2021, and addition of a 10th capacity, 4) Refined and detailed in May 2022 (current version).

## How they work

Capacities, as described here, are a combination of the qualities, skills, knowledge, attitudes, and values needed to handle a complex systemic situation. These definitions are meant to help individuals identify, recognize, and integrate the capacities, so that they can be mutually reinforced, and help develop systems change reflexes, both collectively and individually.

Depending on the situation, the capacities will be either mutually dependent, timeframe-specific, conditional to one another and/or bound to a particular moment in time. Like muscles can be trained and strengthened, we encourage practicing these capacities to increase one's potential for personal, social, and systemic transformation.



# 1

## Fostering Inclusion



### Fostering inclusion

- 1.1 The capacity to clearly establish the intentions, motivations and aims of the group as a whole
- 1.2 The capacity to create spaces, find time and implement structures and rules for discussion that support full participation, regardless of status or role in society
- 1.3 The capacity to be flexible in applying established rules to welcome everyone's contribution



# 2

## Building Bridges



### Building bridges

- 2.1 The ability to initiate a dialogue with people whose values, concerns or goals differ from one's own
- 2.2 The capacity to navigate across boundaries and collaborate with people from multiple sociocultural and disciplinary contexts and perspectives
- 2.3 The capacity to adapt and translate one's communication style to connect with people whose context is different from one's own



# 3

## Critical Thinking From an Ethical Perspective



Critical thinking from an ethical perspective

- 3.1 The capacity to be self-aware when faced with a social situation or issue
- 3.2 The capacity to engage in self-reflection, go beyond polarizing perspectives, uncover blind spots, and challenge the status quo, all while adopting a constructive, respectful approach to communication and prioritizing caring about relationships with others
- 3.3 The capacity to anticipate the long-term consequences of one's actions





# 4

## Navigating Power Dynamics



### Navigating power dynamics

- 4.1 The capacity to identify and recognize the specific interests, power dynamics and potential asymmetries inherent within oneself, a group, or an organization
- 4.2 The capacity to assess and clarify how power dynamics affect decision-making and/or can exclude others and/or maintain the status quo
- 4.3 The capacity to recognize where it is possible to act and to activate the proper leverage points based on the current situation and context



# 5

## Communicating With Empathy



Communicating with empathy

- 5.1 The capacity for introspection: inquiring inside oneself; accepting one's state of being, feelings and emotions; and recognizing how they affect one's self-perception and interactions with others
- 5.2 The capacity to actively listen without imposing personal filters and biases
- 5.3 The capacity to communicate authentically and without violence



# 6

## Learning Collectively



### Learning collectively

- 6.1 The capacity to step back and provide feedback to foster learnings and adjust the course of action
- 6.2 The capacity to build upon and collectively make sense of knowledge from various sources and contexts, drawn from different methods, viewpoints, and analysis types
- 6.3 The capacity to create a safe, respectful environment that fosters trust, sharing and risk-taking



# 7

## Acting in an Ecosystemic Way



### Acting in a ecosystemic way

- 7.1 The capacity to implement generative strategies that mutually benefit other stakeholders, current structures, and the overall health of the ecosystem (win-win-win)
- 7.2 The capacity to better align internal management with the needs of the ecosystem in which one operates
- 7.3 The capacity to synthesize and collectively make sense of knowledge from various sources, methods and contexts



# 8

## Dialoguing in Complex Situations



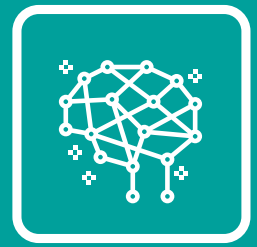
### Dialoguing in complex situations

- 8.1 The capacity to promote the expression of divergent viewpoints
- 8.2 The capacity to navigate tension and polarization
- 8.3 The capacity to solve conflict in a peaceful, prosocial manner
- 8.4 The capacity to recognize the effects of one's personal experience and move forward despite tensions and differences (psychological flexibility)



# 9

## Mobilizing Knowledge

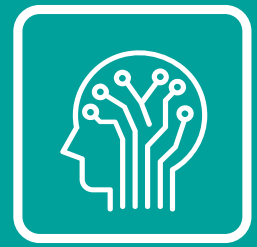


### Mobilizing knowledge

- 9.1 The capacity to clearly communicate knowledge from different sources to different audiences
- 9.2 The capacity to promote and make use of scientific and experiential knowledge that leads to a better understanding of the targeted systemic challenges or the leverage points to activate
- 9.3 The capacity to develop tools enabling knowledge appropriation by targeted audiences



# 10 Developing Systems Awareness



## Developing systems awareness

- 10.1 The analytical capacity to consider different influential sources that are interacting with one another and affecting a particular situation
- 10.2 The capacity to know and recognize one's role and contribution as an individual or organization within a system and the systems adjoining (broader ecosystem)
- 10.3 The intellectual and socio-affective capacity to consider one's own perspective and that of others to foster and develop a new understanding of an issue



# Conclusion

With these 10 key capacities, individuals and organizations are invited to develop a more conscious, sensitive approach to addressing systemic challenges. They provide a simple, meaningful entry point: transforming human systems, starting with oneself, through collaborative capacity building to allow everyone to move forward together.

We hope that putting these capacities in motion will broaden all types of conversations, whether in personal, professional, or public spaces, and become a critical component in creating a future that is more just, equitable and sustainable for all.



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