

WORKING ON THE WORK CONFERENCE 2009–2010

PRE-CONFERENCE WORK

Pre-conference work for ALL participants:

1. Interview students.
2. Interview your principal or the leader who asked you to attend.
3. Read the article about capacity.
4. Bring ONE piece of student work. Student work may be defined as a product, project, presentation, or any work you have asked students to complete.

Each participant will interview two different students. Please feel comfortable reframing the questions for your students—or, if your students are adults, feel free to change the questions to meet your needs.

Student One:

1. Describe yourself as a learner. What are your unique learning abilities? How do you learn best? What challenges do you face when learning new things?
2. How do you like to learn new things? What school activities in the past have you enjoyed? What do you least enjoy?
3. How do you use technology when learning new things? What type of technology do you use outside of school? What about inside school?
4. What are your interests? What do you learn about outside of school? What is your favorite activity outside of school?

Student Two:

1. Describe yourself as a learner. What are your unique learning abilities? How do you learn best? What challenges do you face when learning new things?

2. How do you like to learn new things? What school activities in the past have you enjoyed? What do you least enjoy?

3. How do you use technology when learning new things? What type of technology do you use outside of school? What about inside school?

4. What are your interests? What do you learn about outside of school? What is your favorite activity outside of school?

Principal or other leader:

1. Why do you think it is important for me to attend the Schlechty Center's Working on the Work Conference?

2. What do you hope I learn at the conference?

3. What are your expectations when I return from the conference?

4. What are some possible changes in the school that could increase everyone's ability to focus on students and the work teachers design for them?

5. How do you let others know what is most important at your school? In other words, how do you communicate your school's focus?

CREATING THE CAPACITY TO SUPPORT INNOVATION

Getting Clear About Capacity vs. Performance

Phil Schlechty explains the meaning of capacity and its implications for educators:

In the most generic sense, the word *capacity* has to do with potentials and limitations: what a person, group, or organization is capable of doing if called on to act. It also has to do with the limits beyond which performance should not be expected. To say that a jar has a one-quart capacity is to say that the jar can hold up to one quart of a liquid but no more than that.

The word *capacity* is meaningless without some referent. The question to ask about capacity is, "The capacity to do what?" The most critical capacities in organizational life are those needed to innovate on a continuous basis and to adjust critical systems in ways that are supportive of the innovations that are installed.

*Leading for Learning:
How to Transform Schools into Learning Organizations*
Phillip C. Schlechty
2009
pp. 223–224

A jar may have a one-quart capacity but may remain empty for days on end until it is required to perform—to hold—up to a quart of liquid. A marathon runner builds her capacity for a long distance race by adjusting calorie intake, doing wind sprints and endurance runs, investing in physical conditioning—including weight-training in the gym—and taking other readiness measures. The athlete's capacity to run a marathon on any given day is distinctly different from that runner's actual performance on a given day. Developing the physical capacity to run long distances is a necessary part of being a marathon runner and increases the possibility of a successful performance; to take stock of the athlete's capacity involves looking at data other than the times an athlete achieves in a given race.

Likewise, a school's achievement of its goals—its performance—is related to but distinct from its capacity to perform at the level outlined in its goals. Assessing a school's capacity requires examining a range of information separate from, but contributing to, its actual performance.

Why Does Capacity Matter?

The Schlechty Center's Working on the Work framework requires system capacity to support innovation at the district level, in the schoolhouse, and in the classroom. If a single teacher learns about engagement, embraces the significance of designing work for his students, assesses student engagement, and redesigns work accordingly, that teacher's students will reap the benefits of increased engagement and, most likely, deepened learning of important content. However, unless the schoolhouse and the school district develop the capacity to sustain the work of such a teacher, it is likely that at some juncture the tendencies of a rigid organization will thwart that teacher's efforts, and it is very likely that when the current leader's tacit or explicit support for a focus on

engagement disappears, so will that teacher's opportunity to use all that he has learned about engagement and the design of work for students.

Frameworks and Tools in Support of Capacity

The Center describes three general capacities required of schools and districts that want to be successful at supporting and sustaining systemic changes and introducing disruptive innovations:

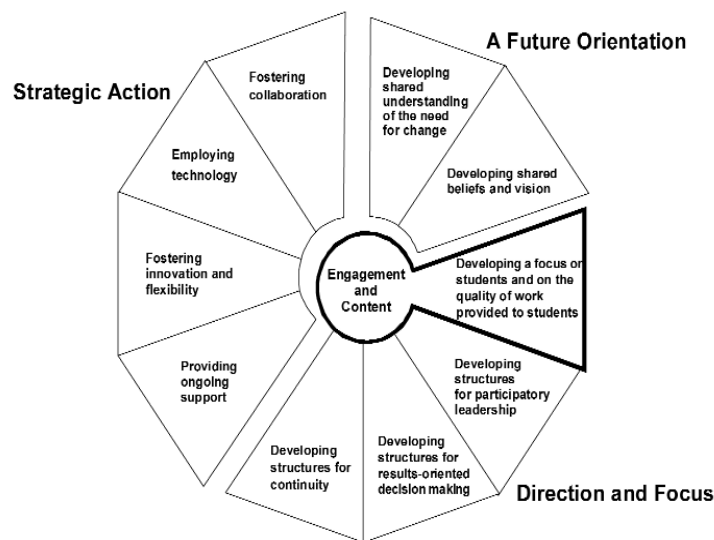
- ❖ The capacity to establish and maintain a focus on the future
- ❖ The capacity to maintain direction once a clear focus has been established
- ❖ The capacity to act strategically by reallocating existing resources, seizing opportunities, and creating a new future

The Center provides a series of tools related to System Capacity Standards organized around the three general capacities.

Unlike standards which are used *on* schools to reward and punish them, these System Capacity Standards are descriptions intended to be used by schools and school districts to better understand how well, or poorly, they are positioned not only to introduce Working on the Work but also to sustain it and other disruptive changes. Also, unlike many types of standards in vogue these days, these standards are not intended to assess *performance*. Capacity refers to an organization's readiness, its potential to perform in desired ways and at desired levels, but it is distinctly different from performance.

Developing System Capacity to Support Innovation

System Capacity Standards



Use of System Capacity Standards

The 10 System Capacity Standards outlined below are meant to be used as part of a self-assessment of a school or district, as tools for guiding future action, and as a discipline for thinking about the "state of the organization" relative to its capacity. The Schlechty Center has much experience helping school districts use the System Capacity Standards. More recently, the Center has begun advocating that principals and teachers think about the capacity of schoolhouses and classrooms.

THE CAPACITY TO ESTABLISH AND MAINTAIN A FOCUS ON THE FUTURE

Standard 1: Developing a Shared Understanding of the Need for Change

The members of the board of education, the superintendent, central office staff, principals, teacher leaders, leaders of parent organizations, and key community leaders (e.g., civic leaders, business leaders) have a common understanding of the nature of the problems and opportunities that confront the school district and base their discussions of these issues on a common body of fact and information.

Standard 2: Developing Shared Beliefs and Vision

The school district and its community develop within the local context a compelling vision of what schools can be and how schools can be related to the community—a vision capable of earning wide support in the school district and in the community and consistent with a set of well-articulated beliefs regarding the nature of schools and the schooling enterprise.

THE CAPACITY TO MAINTAIN DIRECTION ONCE A CLEAR FOCUS HAS BEEN ESTABLISHED

Standard 3: Developing a Focus on Students and on the Quality of Work Provided to Students

Throughout the school district there is a clear focus on students and on the quality of the work provided to students—work that students find interesting, challenging, and satisfying and that results in their learning what is expected by schools, parents, and the community.

Standard 4: Developing Structures for Participatory Leadership

The school district develops patterns of leadership and a structure of relationships such that teachers are leaders, principals are leaders of leaders, and all school district-level activity is focused on providing direction and support for schools.

Standard 5: Developing Structures for Results-Oriented Decision Making

The school district develops a results-oriented management system and a quality-focused decision-making process that are consistent with the beliefs that guide the system and that ensure that the measures of quality conform with the requirements of those who provide support to students and the schools.

Standard 6: Developing Structures for Continuity

The school district provides for stability in leadership, structure, and culture over time, including support for innovative efforts that produce desired results.

**THE CAPACITY TO ACT STRATEGICALLY BY REALLOCATING EXISTING RESOURCES,
SEIZING OPPORTUNITIES, AND CREATING A NEW FUTURE****Standard 7: Providing Ongoing Support**

The school district provides systems of training and development, incentives, and social and political support for those who are committed to the district's beliefs and vision and widens support for the pursuit of the beliefs and vision among all members of the community.

Standard 8: Fostering Innovation and Flexibility

The district develops a policy environment and management system that foster flexibility and rapid response; that encourage innovative use of time, technology, and space; that encourage novel and improved staffing patterns; and that create forms of curriculum organization that are responsive to the needs of students.

Standard 9: Employing Technology

The school district and community display a common understanding of the transformational nature of changes in information-processing technologies, and the district provides all students and adults who work in the schools the tools required for quality work.

Standard 10: Fostering Collaboration

The school district encourages and supports the creation of relationships within the school district, between schools and parents, and among those agencies and groups that provide service to children and youth, in order to ensure that each child has the support needed to succeed in school and in the community.

Phil Schlechty talks about the importance of persistence of effort and gives guidance regarding ways educators might think about persistence of effort as an organizational issue:

One of the most fundamental problems confronting those who would transform schools from organizations that produce compliance to organizations that nurture and develop engagement is that of persistence of effort. As Rosabeth Moss Kanter has observed, "To convert imagination into useful ideas requires persistence, which is also helped or hindered by the organization."

Competent leaders who display courage and strength of will are essential to the transformation of schools. But competent, courageous, and strong-willed leaders will fail if the schools and school districts they are trying to transform do not have the systems in place that are needed to support and sustain innovations over time. For example, school districts that do not create the means to protect developmental activity will not be able to sustain efforts at continuous improvement because the needs of the maintenance systems will overwhelm developmental needs and lead to the co-optation of developmental resources. Persistence of effort is an organizational capacity issue as much as a question of competence, courage, and will.

Thus, leaders must work first on those things that enhance the capacity of the schools they are leading. This enhanced capacity will make it possible to invent schools where nearly every child learns at high levels and no child will be left behind—because every child will have a genuine opportunity to get ahead.

Leading for Learning
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Designing the Future

Desired Results

- ✧ Participants will analyze their current organizational structure (classroom, school, or district) and determine their current capacity to design the future.
- ✧ Participants will develop the strategies and skills necessary to fulfill their capabilities to design the future.

Guiding Questions

- ✧ How do we develop the capacity to design the future?
- ✧ What is our commitment to designing the future?
- ✧ What is the relationship between designing the future and becoming engagement-centered?

Key Concepts

- ✧ Teacher as leader, designer, and guide to instruction
- ✧ Capacity
- ✧ Leaders who think in terms of the future
- ✧ Working on the Work as a systems change
- ✧ Classrooms and schools as social systems having normative order and critical systems:
 - ◆ Directional
 - ◆ Knowledge Development and Transmission
 - ◆ Recruitment and Induction
- ✧ Developing individual and organizational capacity to design the future
- ✧ Transforming into a learning platform and learning organization

Day 1

- 4:00 p.m. Registration
- 5:00 p.m. Opening Session
Introductions and Welcome
- General Session I
George Thompson, President
Schlechty Center
- Table-Group Activity
- Conference Logistics

Day 2

- 7:15 a.m. Continental Breakfast
- 8:00 a.m. General Session II
Phillip C. Schlechty, Founder and CEO
Schlechty Center
- 9:00 a.m. Concurrent Sessions
- 11:30 a.m. Lunch
- 12:30 p.m. Concurrent Sessions (continued)
- 3:00 p.m. Break
- 3:15 p.m. School/District Team Session (see handout for locations)
- 4:00 p.m. Adjournment

Day 3

- 7:15 a.m. Continental Breakfast
- 8:00 a.m. Concurrent Sessions (continued)
- 11:30 a.m. Lunch
- 12:30 p.m. Concurrent Sessions (continued)
- 3:00 p.m. Break
- 3:15 p.m. School/District Team Session (see handout for locations)
- 4:00 p.m. Adjournment

Day 4

- 7:15 a.m. Full Breakfast
- 8:00 a.m. Concurrent Sessions (continued)
- 10:00 a.m. Break
- 10:15 a.m. General Session III
Phillip Schlechty/George Thompson
- 11:30 a.m. Adjournment