

### Why did we undertake this study?

Building community capacity to respond to change is integral to reducing vulnerability and achieving sustainable development. Yet scholars lament the divide between adaptive capacity research and uptake in policy and practice. In this commentary, we drew on highly-cited adaptive capacity scholarship to identify gaps in understanding that inhibit policy uptake, and resultingly, efficient and effective capacity building interventions.

### How was it done?

Highly cited peer-reviewed literature addressing adaptive capacity published between 2007 and 2020 was analysed to explore whether the dynamic nature of adaptive capacity was addressed in scholarship. Forty-nine highly-cited papers were incorporated in the review. For each paper, we profiled its: objective, geographic scope, sector, scale, conceptualisation of adaptive capacity, measurement, dynamism, and identified challenges or gaps.

### What did we find?

To date, complexity and dynamism has been incorporated in adaptive capacity scholarship in three ways:

- (i) examining trade-offs between determinants of capacity;
- (ii) acknowledging structures and processes shape capacity; and
- (iii) describing adaptive capacity as a set of dynamic attributes

These approaches acknowledge that: the importance of assets is relative to the adaptation goal; cross-scale interactions influence stocks of capacity; and determinants of adaptive capacity are not static. Yet focus remains on the processes that define an individual’s access to stocks of capacity. The dynamic processes by which collective capacity are enhanced or diminished are neglected.

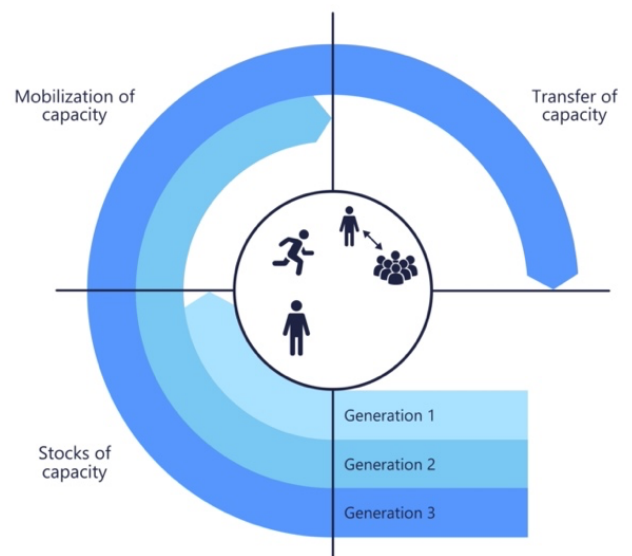


Figure 1: Multigenerational view of adaptive capacity

### What are the implications?

Limits to conceptualisation mean interventions to address shortfalls in capacity involve top down, short term, and ad hoc measures; for example, the provision of financial capital to individuals. Broadening focus beyond assessing the stocks of capacity available to an individual and how those stocks are mobilised, to consider the movement of capacity between individuals and groups, offers an opportunity to modify the processes that define stocks and provide more sustained and enduring capacity benefits.

### Want more information?

The full paper is available from: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/17565529.2022.2117978?journalCode=tcl20>

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## Coastal Governance: Embracing Vulnerability and Change

