

Seeds to Trees

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September, 2018

In this first Act, we consider the concept of persistence and understand the ABCs of persistence: Ability, Belonging and Control. Participants will reflect their own experiences, where they felt a strong sense of the ABCs and a weak sense of the ABCs.

1. Remember: we all got into this work for a reason other than profit. Our organizations are committed to making a difference in the world (drop hints to the NCCS Challenging Poverty Manual as evidence that the organization is driving for something big).

- BUT. Every organization or group is made up of people.
- People have their own challenges, perspectives and motivations.
- People form relationships with other people, and also with their organization.
- And then, to complicate matters **even more**, no group or organization operates in isolation. So you have to work with other organizations that are struggling with their **own** people and systems.
- There are three issues to understand in order to maximize your impact:
 - The motivations of individuals
 - The factors that contribute to strong interpersonal relationships
 - The ways we understand and improve organizations.
- What if the same factors were driving success at all three levels?
 - What if we could understand how people, relationships and nonprofit organizations thrive?
 - We could understand each other, improve relationships and strengthen our organizations using the same concepts. We could all grow. Together.

2. *To be alive is to grow and change. To be alive is to persist.*

- Redwoods, the largest living organisms on earth, are models of persistence.
 - Redwoods flourish under specific conditions (e.g., soil, humidity, temp, rainfall, wind). A redwood cannot grow from sheer will. This is why Redwoods only exist in certain places. *Conditions create persistence.*
- *Under what conditions will people, relationships and organizations persist?*
 - The ABCs of persistence. Each of us needs a sense of Ability, Belonging and Control to thrive. We need to feel capable, connected to others or a

larger mission, and also that we have some personal choice in what we do and how we do it.

This table is a nice summary of the ABCs:

Table 1. Ability, Belonging and Control

Need	How do I feel?	How do I behave?	What is the opposite of this?
Ability	<i>I got this.</i> I can do this well without thinking it through or worrying about getting it wrong.	I look forward to my work. I am more creative and innovative because I already have the basics down. I am interested in self-improvement because I see that it is possible.	Helplessness. Every time I try, I fail. I am not improving, and have no sense of how I could improve. I will avoid this as much as I can; it makes me feel awful about myself.
Belonging	<i>I belong here.</i> I have something in common with the people around me; we appreciate and accept each other as individuals. I care about this work; it aligns with my beliefs and goals.	I am more cooperative and open with others. I can handle challenges because I believe someone has my back.	Exclusion. These are not my people, and this is not my place. Every challenge or setback reminds me that I don't belong and leaves me feeling even more isolated.
Control	<i>I own this.</i> I have choice and freedom in this situation. I care about what happens because I feel some ownership in this. I am invested, but not completely alone.	I am more thoughtful. I think more carefully before I act, because I know my actions are my own. I take	Powerlessness. Someone other than me is deciding what I do, and how I do it. I may become resentful and frustrated; I certainly do not feel a sense of ownership.

- *Turn and talk: personal experiences with Ability, Belonging and Control.*
 - How do we think, feel and act when we have the ABCs? What happens when we do not have them? What about special circumstances?

3. *Sometimes our habits and history can inhibit persistence.*

- High-stakes thinking (*If this doesn't work out, then...*)
- Crusading (*I/We can do it alone*)
- Score-keeping (*Why can't you/we be more like...I still haven't forgotten about...*)
- Painting with one color (*This one thing is what we do/who we are*)
- Kiln-drying (*Now that everything is "perfect", there is no need to change*)

4. *Stop, reflect, share*

- Think about some or all the habits in terms self, relationships or chapters
 - How have these habits created stress or inhibited persistence?

In this Second Act, we learn about habits that promote persistence. We learn how each habit supports and sustains persistence by fostering Ability, Belonging and/or Control.

Here is a full description of the 5 habits that cultivate persistence:

MAKE IT SAFE

Safety is a critical foundation for persistence and growth. When we feel safe, we have more energy to invest in learning, without worrying about the consequences of failure. Safety comes from knowing what is expected, understanding how to meet those expectations, and reducing the fear of failure. We make it safe for ourselves when we accept that we do not have to be perfect. We make it safe for others when we establish expectations, and when we share examples and pathways to success.

Safety protects our current sense of Ability and creates opportunities for Ability to grow.
[watch out for high-stakes thinking]

GROW THE COLLECTIVE

Collectives are places where individuals with a shared identity, history or commitment work toward a common goal. Collectives are different from groups. Groups of people have similar characteristics, but do not always have shared beliefs or goals. Members of a collective have a deeper connection. Collectives are joined by choice rather than circumstance. Women are a group; a women's service society that provides clothing and support for homeless families is a collective. African Americans are a group; the

NAACP is a collective. Residents of a neighborhood are a group; the neighborhood block party committee is a collective. Collectives can be very diverse, because what unites members of a collective is greater than what divides them as members of separate groups. [Watch out for crusading]

Collectives foster a sense of Belonging and are inclusive.

PAUSE THE GAME

We pause the game when we avoid forced comparisons, competition or scorekeeping. Games are zero-sum, where there are a few winners and many losers. Games can be beneficial only when all competitors *choose* to play. There is no such thing as healthy *forced* competition. Pausing the game personalizes success and allows people to learn from their mistakes without being constantly reminded of them. We pause the game by focusing less on external comparisons or public perception, and more on where we are now, our goals for the future, and the best steps we can take to reach them. [watch out for comparative thinking and exceptional standards]

Pausing the game increases Ability, Belonging and Control. We feel more able because success is personalized. We feel a greater sense of Belonging because membership in the organization and our sense of self-worth are not contingent on winning against other. Finally, when competition is no longer forced, we feel a greater sense of Control over how and when we choose to join the game.

BUILD A MOSAIC

A mosaic is a work of art made of smaller, distinct pieces. Each piece in a mosaic is complete in itself, but its placement and purpose is dependent on all the other pieces. The beauty of a mosaic lies in the complex and intricate arrangement of all those independent pieces. The more pieces a mosaic has, the more detailed and beautiful it can be. People and organizations have identities, like a mosaic. We do not always work to add new pieces to our identities, choosing to believe that we can only be one thing or function in one way. This limits not only the beauty of our identities, but also our capacity to adapt to changing conditions. Sometimes, we add new pieces to our mosaic

without considering their placement relative to existing pieces. This creates a disjointed, incomprehensible identity that cannot be sustained. [watch out for one-dimensional thinking]

Building a mosaic increases our sense of Ability and Control. We focus on improving one aspect of our identity at a time, while consciously deciding how we will integrate this new aspect into our existing identity.

KEEP THE CLAY WET

Dry clay is rigid and inflexible, vulnerable to external forces and prone to cracking. Wet clay can be shaped and reshaped an infinite number of times. Wet clay can absorb new clay. Wet clay can take on new forms or refine its existing form. Wet clay can adapt. Individuals, relationships and organizations can allow their clay to dry, which limits their ability to grow and adapt to changing conditions. When we keep the clay wet, we believe Ability, Belonging and Control can grow and change over time. Our words, actions, habits and policies reinforce this belief. We focus on self-improvement, seek out and strengthen new relationships with others, and take ownership over how we choose to act and react in given situations. Keep the clay wet is ultimate for this work, *or any work focused on sustainable growth*. Wet clay can persist.

Keep the clay wet leads to an increased sense of Ability, Belonging and Control in individuals, relationships and organizations, as there is a cultural shift in focus from what is to what can be.

- Examples and scenarios from the field and how to think about NCCS resources from this new perspective.
- *Stop, reflect, share*
 - Think about some or all the habits in terms self, relationships or chapters
 - During this time, every participant will identify one habit in the paradigm to integrate into their chapter work, and will be able to articulate how applying this change will strengthen one of the ABCs.

- Questions, feedback, etc.

- *Sometimes our habits and history can inhibit persistence.*
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