# Readiness Reflection Quick Tool

Leader,

This tool was designed to offer you the opportunity to reflect on your organization prior to beginning continuous improvement work. Although no one will ask to see your score sheet or know the intimate details of your discussions, it is our hope and expectation that you will be able to share key points, decisions, and knowledge gained during discussions with your fellow continuous improvement effort participants. Work teams that get the most out of this exercise will be those that engage in honest self-evaluation and work to identify both organizational strengths and current barriers to success.

Directions: Review as a team the specified descriptions of the readiness components listed within each of the four major areas of readiness: organizational readiness, leadership readiness, staff readiness, and general capacity readiness. As you review each component, note your team’s rating and key discussion points. After your review of the individual components of readiness is complete, determine for each of the four areas the statement that best describes your agency as either:

* stuck or moving backwards;
* slow progress or intermittent movement; or,
* positive momentum moving consistently.

After the exercise is complete, ask your team the following questions:

1. Are you willing and able to commit the staff time and other resources needed to complete your continuous improvement work? Are you willing to make the kinds of changes in roles, policies, procedures, management tools and techniques, and resource allocation that continuous improvement work generally involves?
2. As you enter into your continuous improvement work, what readiness areas do you see as most supportive of a successful experience? Why is that? What examples from your organization’s experience support this view?
3. Which of the four major areas of readiness (organizational, leadership, staff, or general capacity) do you see as most in need of addressing before starting a continuous improvement effort? Why does this readiness gap exist? What examples from your organization’s experience support this view?
4. Based on why (your “root causes”) you believe you have your current readiness levels, what are some ways to address the readiness issues that you have?
5. Are there any of the specific areas listed on the tool that you will want to address as a team at the institute prior to beginning continuous improvement work?

This readiness “quick tool” is accompanied by another, more detailed version that further defines the listed readiness areas. Please refer to this more detailed version if team discussion indicates a need for further explanation.

|  | **A Relative Gap** | **Moving from Gap to Strength** | **A Relative Strength** |
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| **Organizational Readiness** |
| **Performance history** | Implementation of new programs historically has not been well planned, and has not had intended impact. | Some new programs are well planned; some are not. Results are mixed in terms of achieving intended outcomes. | Implementation of new programs is consistently well planned and usually achieves intended outcomes. |
| **Momentum for system improvement** | More pressure to keep the “status quo” than to improve.  | Forward momentum followed by stops and starts.  | Strong, sustained forward momentum, based on strategic principles and priorities. |
| **Organizational climate** | Chaos, moving from crisis to crisis and functioning solely to achieve compliance with regulatory requirements.  | Both chaos and calm feeling in respective pockets and silos. Staff feels unsure of organizational climate day to day.  | Calm, dynamic, consistent message of continuous improvement has permeated the organization over time.  |
| **Organizational posture related to CI**  | Denial of need for continuous improvement (“if it ain’t broke don’t fix it” mentality). | Continuous improvement efforts occur only after a legislative mandate, system audit, or in response to a public crisis. | Continuous improvement is viewed as healthy and invigorating. |
| **Clarity of roles and responsibilities** | Roles and responsibilities are unclear throughout the organization.  | Roles and responsibilities are clear in pockets/silos within the organization. | Staff members at all levels of the organization perform within role boundaries.  |
| **Leadership Readiness** |
| **Expectations of the organization from leadership**  | Failure to achieve desired outcomes is expected.  | Some success is expected, mostly from particular pockets or silos of the organization.  | Sustained success is expected; occasional failure/set-backs are viewed as learning experiences. |
| **Posture towards obstacles** | Organizational leaders seem to ignore obstacles with an assumption that most issues will work themselves out.  | General recognition that obstacles can and need to be overcome through planning.  | Recognition across the organization that challenges can be good things that lead to better agency performance. |
| **Posture towards feedback** | Feedback from clients, staff, or stakeholders is not sought out.  | Some consideration is given to feedback received.  | Feedback is embraced as healthy and analyzed systematically for CI |
| **Decision making**  | Decisions are not strategic and are not communicated effectively across programs or down through the organization.  | Decisions in pockets or silos are strategic and are communicated fairly and effectively across programs or down throughout the organization. | Decisions are generally made strategically and are communicated fairly and effectively across programs and down throughout the organization.  |
| **Time for CI efforts** | Organizational leaders do not have time available to participate in planning sessions. | Organizational leaders have limited time to commit to continuous improvement. | Leadership sees continuous improvement work as a key element of their work time. |
| **Leadership stability** | Organizational leadership is constantly changing.  | Organizational leadership is tenured, but organizational knowledge is held by few leaving vulnerability to change.  | Organizational leadership is stable. Knowledge is shared among many capable of leading.  |
| Staff Readiness |
| **Expectations of the organization from staff** | Staff is not concerned with overall agency outcomes, only individual accountabilities.  | Staff expects some successful continuous improvement and positive outcomes from the organization. | Communication has increased buy-in and expectations for system improvements in a positive way.  |
| **Employee attitudes toward their work and clients** | Operations level staff members consistently feel powerless to effectively perform their jobs.  | Attitudes are mixed; some employees feel a sense of purpose while others feel skeptical.  | Excitement, a sense of purpose, determination, and urgency to perform permeate the organization.  |
| **Teamwork**  | There is no sense of “team” or team members are more concerned with personal responsibilities and tasks than team goals.  | Teamwork occurs within programmatic silos or organizational pockets.  | Teamwork occurs naturally in a high-functioning manner throughout the organization. |
| General Capacity to Improve and Innovate Readiness |
| **Strategy** | There is no written strategy or there’s a written strategy with little to no impact on the organization.  | There is a written strategy that is evident in silos/pockets and overall connection to organizational strategy is often not considered when planning new initiatives. | There is a clear written strategy that is embedded within the agency. The strategy supports decision making regarding how the organization is structured, how key processes are designed, and how frontline practice is conducted. |
| **Data** | Little to no data and/or the wrong data are used for strategic decision making | Data are used for strategic decision making in silos/pockets.  | Data are used routinely for strategic decision making. |
| **Communication** | There is consistent avoidance of open and honest dialogue within the organization.  | A growing number of leaders recognize the need for and have begun practicing open and honest dialogue. | Communication is open and honest both inside the organization and with external stakeholders |
| **Strategic support functions (training, HR, policy, QA…)**  | Struggle to add value in basic service delivery  | Provide basic services with occasional mistakes and are starting to design some processes that staff recognize as adding value.  | Consistently provide basic services, design processes that are seen to add value, and act as strategic consultants to leadership.  |
| **Resources**  | Organization will not commit any significant resources to continuous improvement effort | Organization seeks third party funding to support continuous improvement efforts but is unlikely to spend its own funds. | Organization is committed to continuous improvement effort and is willing and able to shift or develop resources for these efforts.  |
| **Notes/Priority Areas for Improvement:** |

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| **Full Readiness Model** |
|  | **A Relative Gap** | **Moving from Gap to Strength** | **A Relative Strength** |
| **Organizational Readiness** |
| **Performance history** | * Implementation of new programs historically has not been well planned, and has not had intended impact.
* Disciplined root cause analysis and after action reviews are rare or non-existent causing action plans to be ineffective.
* Supervision issues are not considered when implementing new initiatives.
* Staff development and capacity issues are not addressed when planning change.
* Poor performers in regard to new initiatives are tolerated.
* Improvement programs that have been launched but did not lead to lasting organizational improvements “died on the vine” and were therefore discontinued vs. monitored, revised and improved.
 | * Some new programs are well planned; some are not.
* Disciplined root cause. analysis and after action reviews may be starting in pockets but are likely “blind spots” that keep initiatives from reaching potential impact.
* Supervision recognized as key to success and a priority for continuous improvement but not always addressed in planning.
* Staff development and capacity issues are considered but often not funded as part of new initiatives.
* Poor performers are beginning to be managed out but system limitations make this difficult.
* Staff can point to a few successful improvement programs as models for future, as well as failures that should be learning points.
* A growing number of managers and leaders recognize the importance of planned out implementation efforts and want to be part of that work.
 | * Implementation of new programs is consistently well planned.
* Disciplined root cause analysis and after action reviews are routine and support continuous improvement of initiatives after initial implementation.
* Supervision is coaching-oriented and an organizational strength that is leveraged during implementation.
* Staff development and capacity issues are always considered when new initiatives are planned.
* Initiative “champions” are identified and developed in an ongoing, systematic way supporting implementation.
* Poor performers are routinely managed out.
* Improvement programs generally lead to lasting organizational improvements that achieve desired impact.
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| **Momentum for system improvement** | * Generally non-constructive resistance to change across the organization. More pressure to keep the “status quo” than to improve.
 | * Forward momentum followed by stops and starts. Change is motivated as a reaction to crisis not proactive efforts based on strategy, so momentum is lost as time passes.
 | * Strong, sustained forward momentum, based on strategic principles and priorities, buy-in from staff, and solid planning/ implementation efforts.
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| **Organizational posture related to continuous improvement**  | * Denial of need for Continuous improvement (“if it ain’t broke don’t fix it” mentality).
* No confidence that meaningful change is possible.
* New initiatives are met with skepticism across levels of the organization.
* Staff members suffer from “change fatigue” and wait out new proposals or initiatives expecting them to fail or leadership to change.
* Little or no confidence that staff is capable of leading continuous improvement efforts.
 | * Continuous improvement efforts occur only after a legislative mandate, system audit, or in response to a public crisis requiring response.
* Continuous improvement is driven in “fits and starts” by time-limited programs.
* Some organizational leaders and mid-level employees are motivated to participate in the agency’s improvement plans while some are frustrated expecting a lack of progress or outcome to the effort.
 | * Continuous improvement is viewed as healthy, continuous, and invigorating.
* Continuous improvement efforts are done proactively, by leadership monitoring data from outputs and outcomes and listening to stakeholders.
* Continuous improvement efforts are strategic, connected to an overall agency strategy and using resources in alignment with the strategy.
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| **Organizational climate** | * Chaos, moving from crisis to crisis and functioning solely to achieve compliance with regulatory requirements. Resistant to change. Behavioral norms are not plan-full or systematic and do not make sense to those outside the organization.
 | * Feels like chaos in pockets or silos and calm in other areas of the organization. Staff members are unsure what the climate will feel like day to day.
* Interested in being more strategic and proactive with little expertise, readiness, or sponsorship to advance strategic or continuous improvement efforts.
 | * Calm, dynamic, consistent message of continuous improvement has permeated the organization over time.
* Organization is seen by outsiders as always wanting to improve and serve the community.
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| **Clarity of roles and responsibilities** | * Roles and responsibilities are unclear throughout the organization causing confusion, duplication of efforts, and gaps in productivity.
* Senior level staff members frequently perform operations level tasks as a form of “unconscious demotion”.
 | * Roles and responsibilities are clear in pockets/silos within the organization and unclear in other areas.
* Roles and responsibilities are clear for front line practice/operations level staff, but higher up within the organization there is a lot of ambiguity and role confusion.
 | * Staff members at all levels of the organization are aware of their specified roles and responsibilities and perform within those boundaries.
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| **Leadership Readiness** |
| **Expectations of the organization from leadership**  | * Low: Failure is expected; failures/setbacks are viewed as confirmation that the situation is hopeless.

OR* Unrealistically High: Constant success is expected; failures/setbacks are viewed as evidence of incompetence.
 | * Moderate: some success is expected; failures/set-backs are expected but trigger fears of backsliding or losing momentum. Organization has a history of incomplete or poorly implemented initiatives that keep expectations moderate at best.
 | * High: Sustained success is expected; occasional failure/set-backs are expected and viewed as learning experiences.
* Communication has increased buy-in and expectations for system improvements in a positive way.
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| **Posture towards obstacles** | * Due to denial that they exist or a resignation and feeling that they cannot be overcome, organizational leaders seem to ignore obstacles with a laissez faire attitude and an assumption that most issues will work themselves out.
 | * General recognition that obstacles can and need to be overcome but little strategic planning or action steps in place to address obstacles.
* Attempts are made to address obstacles through staff training or policy changes that may not fully address the issue or that are not related to the root causes of the obstacle.
* Tendency to put in place one-time programs to overcome them “once and for all” without sufficient funding or sustainability for change management.
 | * General recognition that obstacles are challenges that can and need to be overcome.
* Recognition across the organization that these challenges can be good things that stimulate creative thinking and highlight areas that require improvement leading to better agency performance.
* Recognition that challenges are a fact of life and overcoming them demonstrates commitment and resilience.
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| **Time for continuous improvement efforts** | * Organizational leaders do not have time available to participate in planning session or do not see their participation as needed for the work to advance.
 | * Organizational leaders have limited time to commit to continuous improvement efforts but attend when possible and are able to designate appropriate staff to stand in, speak for them, and manage communication with them.
 | * Leadership sees continuous improvement work as a key element of their work time and plan to fully participate as needed and appropriate in meetings and discussions.
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| **Posture towards feedback** | * Feedback is not sought out and not acted upon as there are no formal mechanisms in place to share opinions constructively.
* Organizational leadership views negative feedback as disloyal or destructive and seeks to sanctions those who criticize the organization.
 | * Feedback is considered an annoyance that has to be tolerated but minimized.
* Formal mechanisms to share both positive and dissenting views constructively are beginning to be put in place in pockets/silos.
* Some consideration is given to feedback received.
 | * Feedback is embraced as healthy and analyzed systematically for continuous improvement.
* Constructive feedback is routinely sought out and acted upon.
* Formal mechanisms to share both positive and dissenting views constructively are in place and used routinely.
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| **Decision making** | * Leaders do not routinely differentiate between different kinds of decisions and frequently fall into a comfort zone of autocratic decision making.
* Decisions are not generally made strategically or communicated effectively across programs or down throughout the organization.
* Decisions are not based on organizational values or connected to strategy and often appear to be in conflict with previous decisions.
 | * Leaders in silos/pockets are beginning to use various kinds of decision making models including seeking group input and good consensus.
* Decisions in silos or pockets are made and communicated strategically and effectively across programs or down throughout the organization.
* Decision makers occasionally but not consistently consider organizational values or strategy when making or communicating decisions.
 | * Leaders routinely differentiate between different kinds of decisions and understand when to seek expert consultation, group input or group consensus of staff and external stakeholders.
* Decisions are generally made and communicated strategically and effectively across programs and down throughout the organization.
* Decisions reflect organizational values and support strategic initiatives.
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| **Leadership stability** | * Organizational leadership is constantly changing with leaders frequently leaving before initiatives are fully implemented, resulting in strategic plans that are ineffective or simply not-completed.
 | * Organizational leadership is stable, but organizational knowledge is held by few with no succession plan in place, leaving the organization vulnerable to change.
 | * Organizational leadership is stable. Knowledge is shared among upper management assuring that current initiatives can be maintained even through leadership changes.
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| **Staff Readiness** |
| **Expectations of the organization from staff** | * Staff is not concerned with overall agency outcomes, only individual accountabilities.
* Failure of new initiatives is expected by staff so they do not easily accept change; failures/setbacks are viewed as confirmation that the situation is hopeless.
 | * Some success from continuous improvement initiatives is expected but staff members hesitate to commit to changes as failures/set-backs are also expected.
* New initiatives trigger fears of backsliding or causing workers to look bad in the eyes of clients or the community.
* Organization has a history of incomplete or poorly implemented initiatives that keep expectations moderate at best.
 | * Sustained success is expected; occasional failure/set-backs occur occasionally but are viewed as learning experiences.
* New initiatives are met with enthusiasm for potential positive outcomes and new resources for staff members.
* Communication has increased buy-in and expectations for system improvements in a positive way.
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| **Employee attitudes toward their work and clients** | * Operations level staff members consistently feel powerless to effectively perform their jobs leaving them angry or bitter towards the organization or resigned and complacent about their work.
* Supervisors and mid-level managers are not able to address staff morale issues or have low morale/little motivation to perform beyond compliance within their department.
* Performance evaluations are seen as punitive.
 | * Attitudes are mixed: some employees feel excitement, sense of purpose, determination, and urgency while others feel suspicion, burned out, or skeptical that they are really having impact in their community.
* Some resistance to work processes is constructive while some resistance reflects unwillingness to try new things, complete work tasks, or attempt system improvements.
 | * Excitement, a sense of purpose, determination, and urgency to perform permeate the organization.
* Energy is high for new initiatives and the staff appreciates opportunities to develop their skills and achieve positive client outcomes.
* Performance evaluation of staff is seen as a development opportunity.
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| **Teamwork**  | * There is no sense of team or team members are more concerned with personal responsibilities and tasks than team goals.
* There is no teamwork across organizational silos causing lapses in service to clients.
* When teamwork is planned it seems dysfunctional and team goals are rarely accomplished.
 | * Teamwork occurs within programmatic silos or organizational pockets.
* Some levels within the organization perform well as a team while others do not.
* Teamwork can be high-functioning when structured, planned, and well led, but does not occur naturally throughout the organization.
 | * Teamwork occurs naturally in a high-functioning manner throughout the organization, across programs, and at all levels.
* The organization has many staff members capable of leading team efforts.
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| **General Capacity to Improve and Innovate Readiness** |
| **Communication** | * There is consistent avoidance of open and honest dialogue within the organization. Most agency wide communications are considered “spin”, “non-specific”, or “non-transparent.”
* Organizational communication tends to be bureaucratic/jargon-heavy language unable to be understood by the community or stakeholders.
* Communication method is always “top down” with little communication up within the organization.
* Communication tends to be compliance-focused and defensive
* Communication with stakeholders, partners, staff, and the community is infrequent and/or poorly planned.
 | * Movement toward openness and honesty (“transparency”) both inside the organization and with external stakeholders.
* Mix of general and specific communication points are shared in plain language
* Various communication methods and language are beginning to be adapted and used for different audiences.
* Communications include innovation ideas seeking feedback and have a focus of performance improvement.
* Communication is frequent, routine, and well planned in silos/pockets.
* A growing number of managers/leaders recognize the need for and have begun practicing open and honest dialogue.
 | * Communication is open and honest (“transparent”) both inside the organization and with external stakeholders.
* Communication is specific and presented in plain, straight-forward language.
* Communication methods and language are routinely adapted for different audiences.
* Communications with stakeholders are comfortably about finding innovations and improving organizational performance.
* Communications can be described as: frequent, routine, and well planned (e.g., using written communication plans).
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| **Strategy** | * There is no written strategy, e.g.,

Mission/Vision/Values, Desired Outcomes,Priority InitiativesOR* There is a written strategy with little to no impact on how the organization is structured, key processes are designed and frontline practice is conducted.

Organizational culture is “reactive to crisis” vs. proactive towards goals and objectives. | * There is a written strategy that is evident in silos/pockets and/or with some impact on how the organization is structured, key processes are designed and frontline practice is conducted.
* Managers/leaders recognize the need for and have begun work on improving the implementation of an organization-wide strategy.
* Overall connection to organizational strategy is often forgotten or not considered when planning new initiatives.
 | * There is a clear written strategy that is embedded within the agency. The strategy supports organizational planning and implementation of how the organization is structured, how key processes are designed, and how frontline practice is conducted.
* The mission of the organization is clear at every level of the organization.
* Strategy is monitored and re-defined based on data (outputs and outcomes) and feedback from the community.
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| **Data** | * Little to no data and/or the wrong data are used for strategic decision- making.
* Data generally focus on outputs and quantity.
* Management reports are long and not generally accompanied by executive summaries or easily understood.
* Information systems “not talking to each other” is a routine complaint with no apparent solution.
* There is a general feeling is that “we have what we need” and aren’t willing to continuously improve data work and therefore there is little to no effort to improve data collection or interpretation.
 | * Data are used for strategic decision making in silos/pockets.
* Some outcomes and quality data are beginning to be used.
* Management reports are starting to be processed into executive summaries.
* Information systems “not talking to each other” is recognized as a challenge to be overcome, not an excuse for ineffective data work.
* Efforts to improve data work may be beginning as part of a one-time, silo-ed program.
* Efforts to understand what the “right” data is are underway.
 | * Data are used routinely for strategic decision making.
* Data generally focus on outputs, outcomes, and quality.
* Management reports are short, easily understood, and generally accompanied by executive summaries.
* Information systems either “talk to each other” or are connected. by workaround solutions
* The organization constantly seeks to improve its data work.
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| **Resources** | * Organization will not commit any significant resources to continuous improvement effort.
 | * Organization is able to shift resources to support continuous improvement efforts including staff time, and minimal costs that can be moved from other line items in the budget.
* Organization seeks third party funding to support continuous improvement efforts but is unlikely to spend its own funds.
 | * Organization is committed to continuous improvement effort and is willing and able to shift or develop resources with an understanding that ultimately there will be either cost savings or better client outcomes as a result of the investment.
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| **Strategic Support Functions** | * Struggle to add value in basic service delivery (“Cannot make the trains run on time”).
* Default answer to questions tends to be “no” versus “let’s discuss what you need and find a way to make it work.”
* Persistent “sore spot” that people complain about.
* Not connected to strategic discussions and considered and afterthought when planning even large system initiatives.
 | * Provide basic services with occasional mistakes and are starting to design some processes that staff recognize as adding value.
* Are starting to answer “let’s discuss what you need and find a way to make it work.”
* Are starting to be recognized as contributors to the organization’s success and may be included in strategy discussions but don’t always have a “seat at the table”.
 | * Consistently provide basic services, design processes that are seen to add value, and act as strategic consultants to leadership.
* Default answer to questions tends to be “let’s discuss what you need and find a way to make it work.”
* Seen as key contributors to the organization’s success.
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| **Notes/Priority areas for Improvement:** |  |