GME System Capacity Check

A Practical Tool for Evaluating Sustainability

Companion Resource | PME Insight: Can This Be Sustained? Evaluating GME System Capacity

Purpose

A GME function may appear successful while depending on extraordinary individual effort, informal workarounds, or knowledge concentrated in a few people.

This tool helps GME professionals and institutional leaders examine whether an essential function can be performed reliably, supported appropriately, and sustained when circumstances change.

Select one GME function to evaluate. Consider how the work actually happens—not simply how it is described in policies or organizational charts.

GME function being evaluated:	
Who is involved in performing or supporting this work?	

1. Recognize the Warning Signs

Consider the selected function. Which conditions are currently present?

- ☐ Work is completed primarily because someone consistently goes above and beyond.
- ☐ Important knowledge or processes depend heavily on one individual.
- ☐ Delays or bottlenecks are common, even when deadlines are ultimately met.
- ☐ Staff routinely compensate for unclear responsibilities or unreliable processes.
- ☐ Essential work frequently displaces improvement or development activities.
- ☐ Additional responsibilities have been assigned without corresponding changes in resources or priorities.
- ☐ The function would be difficult to sustain during an unexpected absence or increased demand.

Where do you see the greatest friction or vulnerability?

Remember: A warning sign identifies something worth investigating. It does not establish the cause.

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2. Examine the Sources of Capacity

Consider the six dimensions of organizational capacity.

Dimension	Diagnostic question
People	Are workload, responsibilities, and expertise distributed sustainably?
Knowledge	Can essential information be accessed and understood by others when needed?
Processes	Are workflows reliable, understood, and sufficiently documented?
Leadership	Can necessary decisions be made without avoidable delays or dependence on one individual?
Infrastructure	Do technology, administrative support, and resources adequately support the work?
Change	Can this function continue reliably when demands increase or circumstances change?

Which dimension or combination of dimensions appears to need closer examination?

What evidence or examples support that assessment?

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3. Test the System's Resilience

Imagine that a key individual becomes unexpectedly unavailable for several weeks.

What would become difficult to:

Find	Understand	Decide	Continue

Now consider an additional demand, such as a new program, accreditation concern, or significant institutional initiative.

What existing work would be delayed, displaced, or placed at risk?

What does this reveal about the system's ability to absorb change?

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4. Identify What Needs to Change

Not every capacity problem requires additional staffing. Some require better processes, clearer authority, accessible knowledge, or different institutional priorities.

What action would most improve this function's sustainability?

- Clarify roles, responsibilities, or decision-making authority
- Improve or document workflows
- Distribute essential knowledge or develop additional expertise
- Improve technology, tools, or administrative support
- Redistribute responsibilities or adjust workload
- Provide additional resources
- Reconsider, sequence, or defer competing priorities
- Other: _____

What is one practical next step?

Who has the authority to make or support the necessary change?

What time, resources, or decisions are needed to move forward?

The Leadership Question

Are we asking individuals to sustain work that the organization has not adequately equipped them to sustain?

Identifying a capacity problem is not the same as having the authority to resolve it. Sustainable improvement requires alignment among organizational expectations, available resources, and decision-making responsibility.

A sustainable GME system does more than handle today's responsibilities. It retains the capacity to absorb what comes next.

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