Professional and Graduate Capability Framework

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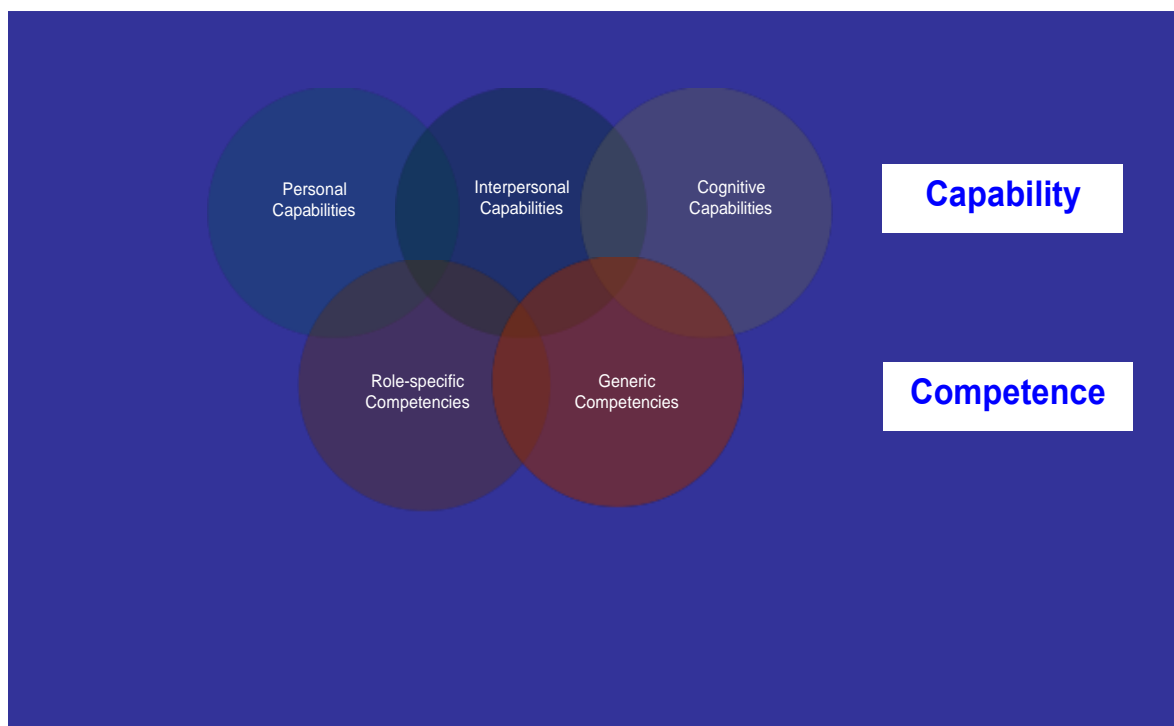**OLT Senior National Teaching Fellow 2014-5**

One of the challenges faced when seeking to ensure that higher education programs focus on the capabilities that count (Impact Dimension of the Academic Standards and Quality Framework for L&T) is the absence of a validated, proven capability framework to ensure that input and feedback from successful practitioners, employers and other key stakeholders is comprehensive.

Below is a professional capability framework validated in studies of successful graduates in nine professions along with studies of educational leaders in schools, VET and Higher Education. It distinguishes between capabilities and competencies.

It can be used when seeking to identify, validate and cluster the program-level learning outcomes deemed relevant in each degree or diploma, using peer review and taking into account the input from a wide range of university and external reference points.

In the tables which follow the diagram the specific capabilities validated in all these studies are presented as a series of factor analysed sub-scales. Every study undertaken to date identifies generic and role-specific competencies (skills and knowledge) as being necessary but not sufficient for effective early career performance.

Professional & graduate capability framework

University of Western Sydney

Personal Capabilities · Interpersonal Capabilities · Cognitive Capabilities — **Capability**

Role-specific Competencies · Generic Competencies — **Competence**

Personal capabilities

Table 1 presents the scales and items developed to provide measurement of the domain of personal capability. This aspect of the practitioner's capability is made up of three interlocked components: Self-awareness, Decisiveness and Commitment.

Table 1   Personal capability scales and items

Scale	Item
Self Awareness	Deferring judgment and not jumping in too quickly to resolve a problem
	Understanding my personal strengths and limitations
	Being willing to face and learn from my errors
	Bouncing back from adversity
	Maintaining a good work/life balance and keeping things in perspective
	Remaining calm under pressure or when things take an unexpected turn
Decisiveness	Being willing to take a hard decision
	Being confident to take calculated risks
	Tolerating ambiguity and uncertainty
	Being true to one's personal values and ethics
Commitment	Having energy, passion and enthusiasm for my profession and role
	Wanting to produce as good a job as possible
	Being willing to take responsibility for projects and how they turn out
	PA willingness to persevere when things are not working out as anticipated
	Pitching in and undertaking menial tasks when needed

Interpersonal capabilities

Table 2 presents the scales and items developed to provide measurement of the practitioner's interpersonal capabilities. This has been distinguished into two subscales: Influencing and Empathising with others.

Table 2   Interpersonal capability scales and items

Scale	Item
Influencing	Influencing people's behaviour and decisions in effective ways
	Understanding how the different groups that make up my university operate and influence different situations
	Being able to work with senior staff within and beyond my organisation without being intimidated
	Motivating others to achieve positive outcomes
	Working constructively with people who are 'resistors' or are over-enthusiastic
	Being able to develop and use networks of colleagues to solve key workplace problems
	Giving and receiving constructive feedback to/from work colleagues and others
Empathising	Empathising and working productively with people from a wide range of backgrounds
	Listening to different points of view before coming to a decision
	The ability to empathise and work productively with people from a wide range of backgrounds

	Being able to develop and contribute positively to team-based programs
	Being transparent and honest in dealings with others

Cognitive capabilities

Table 3 presents the scales and items developed to provide measurement of the domain of cognitive capability. This aspect of the practitioner's capability is made up of attributes that fit into three interlocked subscales: Diagnosis, Strategy and Flexibility & Responsiveness.

Table 3   **Cognitive capability scales and items**

Scale	Item
Diagnosis	Diagnosing the underlying causes of a problem and taking appropriate action to address it
	Recognising how seemingly unconnected activities are linked
	Recognising patterns in a complex situation
	Being able to identify the core issue from a mass of detail in any situation
Strategy	Seeing and then acting on an opportunity for a new direction
	Tracing out and assessing the likely consequences of alternative courses of action
	Using previous experience to figure out what's going on when a current situation takes an unexpected turn
	Thinking creatively and laterally
	Having a clear, justified and achievable direction in my area of responsibility
	Seeing the best way to respond to a perplexing situation
	Setting and justifying priorities for my daily work
Flexibility & Responsiveness	Adjusting a plan of action in response to problems that are identified during its imple
	Making sense of and learning from experience
	Knowing that there is never a fixed set of steps for solving workplace problems

Aggregated results of studies of successful early career graduates in nine professions

Table 4 presents (in rank order) the 12 items attracting the highest importance ratings in the successful graduates' research out of the full list of capabilities identified in tables 1-3.

What is noteworthy is that only one of the top 12 ranked items concerns generic or role specific competencies. The other 11 are made up of 5 specific capabilities from the personal domain; 4 from the Interpersonal domain and 2 from the cognitive domain. Our research has demonstrated that each of these is both assessable and learnable, especially if directly given focus in work-based placements, simulations and in dilemma based tasks.

Table 4

Top ranking capabilities from studies of successful graduates in 9 professions (top 12/38 in rank order)

1. Being able to organise work and manage time effectively (GSK)

2. Wanting to produce as good a job as possible (P-C)

3. Setting and justifying priorities for my daily work (C-S)

4. Being able to remain calm under pressure or when things take an unexpected turn (P-SA)

5. Being willing to face and learn from errors and listen openly to feedback (P-SA)

6. Being able to identify the core issue from a mass of detail in any situation (C-D)

7. Being able to work with senior staff without being intimidated (IP-I)

8. Being willing to take responsibility for projects & how they turn out (P-C)

9. Being able to develop and contribute positively to team-based projects (IP-E)

10. A willingness to persevere when things are not working out as anticipated (P-C)

11. The ability to empathise and work productively with people from a wide rang of backgrounds (IP-E)

12. Being able to develop and use networks of colleagues to help solve key workplace problems (IP-I)

Code

P-SA: personal–self awareness; P-D: personal-decisiveness; P-C: personal-commitment
IP-I: interpersonal-influencing; IP-E: interpersonal-emphathising;
C-D: cognitive-diagnosis; C-S: cognitive-strategy; C-F/R: cognitive-flexibility & responsiveness

Distinguishing between 'capability' and 'competence'
A brief distinction between capability and competence (which aligns with the 'five circle' framework and the scales above) is given in my article in the South African Journal of Higher Education, Vol 27, no 2, 2013: 283-4

'It is important to distinguish between the terms 'capability' and 'competence', as they are often used interchangeably but incorrectly:

Whereas being competent is about delivery of specific tasks in relatively predictable circumstances, capability is more about responsiveness, creativity, contingent thinking and growth in relatively uncertain ones. What distinguishes the most effective (performers) ... is their capability -- in particular their emotional intelligence ... and a distinctive, contingent capacity to work with and figure out what is going on in troubling situations, to determine which of the hundreds of problems and unexpected situations they encounter each week are worth attending to and which are not, and then the ability to identify and trace out the consequences of potentially relevant ways of responding to the ones they decide need to be addressed ... While competencies are often fragmented into discrete parcels or lists, capability is a much more holistic, integrating, creative, multidimensional and fluid phenomenon. Whereas most conceptions of competence concentrate on assessing demonstrated behaviours

and performance, capability is more about what is going on inside the person's head' (Scott, Coates and Anderson 2008, 12).

And, as Stephenson (1992, 1) concluded some 20 years ago, capability depends '... much more on our confidence that we can effectively use and develop our skills in complex and changing circumstances than on our mere possession of these skills'.