

MAY 2016 · NUMBER 2016/04

# FACT SHEET



### 1. INTRODUCTION

The concept of "Organisational Capabilities" is integrated with areas of employee engagement, career management, performance management, skills development, productivity and talent management. Its definition varies yet it is always complimented with developmental areas in HR like "skills, capabilities or competence" a company owns; or can build and retain to give them the competitive edge within the business arena.

The responsibility to develop and customise the practice of building organisational capabilities lies inherently in the hands of HR. Companies and organisations rely heavily on the skills and competencies to develop products and services that keep them ahead of their competitors, and sustain their presence within their market sector. Building organisational capabilities is an important area of attention when building that strategy and to ensure the best skill sets to meet the demands of that strategy.

It brings to the point of understanding the importance and benefits of building organisational capabilities, by strategically aligning the capabilities required to ensure a successful business. HR is at the heart of that alignment. Leaders in business have been quick to recognise the importance in capabilities and have advocated the need to promote it. Local and global companies have been quick to approach this area utilising their Human Resource portfolios.



"As your dreams grow, you realise that you need more capabilities in terms of human capital."

William Egbe: President, the South African Business Unit, Coca-Cola

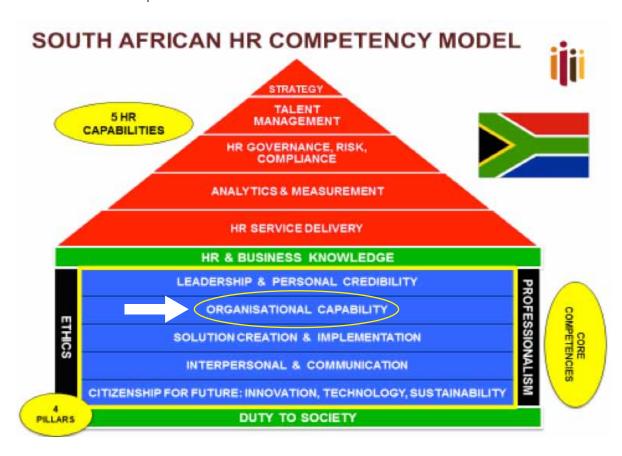
This factsheet provides the various theories and practices that are applied within the HR profession, and a case study has been provided to assist in the understanding of building organisational capabilities within your organisation. It will cover key areas that create the canvas of building organisational capabilities, and how it is integrated within the company's HR Strategy.

### 2. DEFINING ORGANISATIONAL CAPABILITIES

The SA Board for People Practices (SABPP) have included HR Capabilities within their HR Competency Model launched in May 2012, and has defined organisational capability as:

"Understanding what makes the organisation successful now and in the future and how to build and sustain those features of the organisation that make for success."

Thus, organisational capabilities is about developing and sustaining the enabling factors or features driving success. In essence, it highlights the key success factors that need to be embedded in ensuring the organisation continues to perform. With reference to the model below, organisational capability forms part of the 5 core competencies that enable the HR professional to be effective in the workplace.



Source: SA Board for People Practices (SABPP)

As with many areas in HR, definitions are many with regards to the school of thought it comes from, however most share a common thread of output. Below are a few definitions on organisational capability and the mention of what it can achieve in organisations.

Organisational Capability according to Leonard-Barton (1992, p. 113-4) "is the knowledge set that distinguishes and provides competitive advantage". This suggests that pursuit of greater organisational knowledge is a central motivator for organisations seeking to develop their OC. Nonaka (2002) defines knowledge as 'justified true belief'. Delahaye (forthcoming) suggests a four tier hierarchy of knowledge that reinforces the significance of the individual in the building of knowledge in organisations.

His hierarchy builds from data with no meaning on its own; information having simple messages (for example, within the manual of procedures of an organisation); inert knowledge giving considered opinion (for example, within textbooks); through to embodied knowledge, held within the minds of individuals, that can be accessed at various times depending on conscious and sub-conscious cues.

Source: Building Organisational Capability: Your Future, Your Business, Gil and Delhave



"The mismatch between the worlds of education and work has forced future capability concerns to the top of employer's strategic agendas."

Jim Carrick-Birtwell, The Training Journal

The definitions mentioned in this fact sheet have been offered to HR professionals as a basis of not only understanding organisational capabilities, but to highlight the critical part it plays in HR and the business as a whole. Capabilities drive the business performance and it will continue to drive the business performance in all areas.

### 3. THE ROLE OF ORGANISATIONAL CAPABILITIES

The role of building organisational capabilities inter-leads from its definition. Experts in the field have linked it to the internal (organisation) and external (customer, stakeholder) influence and its role impacting those links. The idea of organisation- individual capability becomes evident when looking at the defined roles below and the support to implement organisational capability building.

- Increasing competitive advantage through basing strategy on an understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the workforce (Barney 1991; Grant 1991).
- Establishing the Human Resources Development function as a strategic partner. In this way OC acts as a linchpin between strategy and human resources (HR), therefore HR becomes a proactive source of competitive advantage, rather than reactive in focusing on performance gaps (Ulrick and Lake 1991; Luoma 2000).
- Driving organisational outcomes, such as stakeholder satisfaction and customer satisfaction (Ulrick and Lake 1991; Yeung and Berman 1997).
- Improving person-organisation fit from selection processes, more favourable employee attitudes, and reinforcement of appropriate organisational design (Bowen, Ledfor et al. 1991).
- Communicating valued behaviours, raising competency levels and reinforcing positive values (Finegold, Lawler III et al. 1998).

Source: Building Organisational Capability: Your Future, Your Business

By: Leanne Gill & Brian Delhave

By further understanding the role of organisational capability, the chain of thought leads to the value and importance organisational capabilities have within an organisation. Keeping the business objectives in clear sight, the role of organisational capabilities becomes a priority that should be cascaded top-down through the structure of management levels. This must be the leadership responsibility of the CEO and HR.

# 4. CAPITALISING ON ORGANISATIONAL CAPABILITIES: ORGANISATION AND INDIVIDUAL

The idea to capitalise on capabilities are tied into the idea of "competitive advantage". Any company drives their business to achieve profitability, sustainability; growth and market leader presence. Capitalising on the organisational capabilities and the role it plays in driving the business performance tends to be a competitive strategy in itself. Companies that understand their capabilities currently, the capabilities they require and for the purpose they require them are successful in their industry.

It also collaborates the idea of integrating individual capability with actual organisational capability. This angle of organisational capability capitalises on both individual and company. Norm Smallwood and Dave Ulrich (2004) clearly explains capitalisation below.

"While people often use the words "ability," "competence," and "capability" interchangeably, we make some distinctions. In technical areas, we refer to an individual's functional competence or to an organization's core competencies; on social issues, we refer to an individual's leadership ability or to an organization's capabilities."

Smallwood and Ulrich (2004) went on to further unpacking their explanation by incorporating the organisations responsibility in building organisational capability by understanding what people respect about companies. "What people respect about the companies is not how they are structured or their specific approaches to management, but their capabilities—an ability to innovate, for example, or to respond to changing customer needs. Such *organizational capabilities*, as we call them, are key intangible assets. You can't see or touch them, yet they can make all the difference in the world when it comes to market value."

The approach by Smallwood and Ulrich expands their thinking on organisational capabilities into a table that compares individual and organisational competencies as well as technical and social skills.

	INDIVIDUAL	ORGANISATIONAL
7	1	2
N C	An individual's functional competence	An organisation's core competencies
TECHNICA		
	3	4
SOCIAL	An Individual's leadership ability	An organisation's capabilities

Source: Smallwood and Ulrich (2004) Capitalising on Capabilities

The table clearly explains the integration of the individual within the organisation. It links the relationship between individual and organisation with regards to capabilities. The table is clearly explained below.

"The individual-technical cell (1) represents a person's functional competence, such as technical expertise in marketing, finance, or manufacturing. The individual-social cell (2) refers to a person's leadership ability—for instance, to set direction, to communicate a vision, or to motivate people. The organizational-technical cell (3) comprises a company's core technical competencies. For example, a financial services firm must know how to manage risk. The organizational-social cell (4) represents an organization's underlying DNA, culture, and personality."

Source: Smallwood and Ulrich (2004), Capitalising on Capabilities

In view of why organisational capabilities are important, it links the entire company business plan to the capabilities required to achieve business success. These organisational capabilities are integrated in the company's ability to deliver on combined competencies and abilities of its employees. Smallwood and Ulrich made a clear argument that there is no "magic list" of capabilities that is generic to all companies, however they have identified 11 capabilities that well managed companies tend to have.

"When an organization falls below the norm in any of the 11 capabilities, dysfunction and competitive disadvantage will likely ensue."

Smallwood and Ulrich (2004)

## The 11 Capabilities:

- **Talent:** this capability looks at the organisational ability to attract, motivate and retain competent and committed people. It looks at the competence that is acquired through leadership decision making for business needs of today and future. Leadership competence is required to "buy (acquire new talent), build (develop existing talent), borrow (access thought leaders through alliances or partnerships), bounce (remove poor performers), and bind (keep the best talent)."
- **Speed:** applies to the organisation's capability and ability to recognise opportunities and react with agility to make important changes rapidly. Speed can be tracked from idea inception to actual commercialization.
- Shared mindset and Brand Identity: couples the alignment between internal and external mind-sets, mainly the employees and customers. The alignment can be tracked with questioning the employees in the line of "What are the top three things we want to be known for in the future by our best customers?". The shared mind-set and brand identity requires a response from customers and their feedback to the area.
- Accountability: Performance accountability becomes an organisational capability when
  integrated in obtaining high employee performance. The organisational capability is further
  stretched to the level that failure to perform or achieve goals would be unacceptable to the
  company.

- **Collaboration:** Shared services or pooling of services or technologies become a collaborative organisational capability, as the company becomes good at working across boundaries. This ensures a higher level of efficiency and leverage.
- **Learning:** "We are good at generating and generalising ideas with impact. Organisations generate new ideas through benchmarking (that is, by looking at what other companies are doing), experimentation, competence acquisition (hiring or developing people with new skills and ideas), and continuous improvement. Such ideas are generalised when they move across a boundary of time (from one leader to the next), space (from one geographic location to another), or division (from one structural entity to another). For individuals, learning means letting go of old practices and adopting new ones."<sup>2</sup>
- **Leadership:** Do companies track their leadership brand? How can this be done? It is found that companies who have a reputation to consistently produce effective leaders have a clear and defined leadership brand. This practice creates a common understanding of what leaders should "know, be and do". By monitoring the pool of future leaders, you can track the organisation's leadership brand.
- **Customer Connectivity:** This area focuses on building enduring relationships of trust with targeted customers. Companies use dedicated account teams or databases that track preferences to build customer connectivity.
- **Strategic Unity:** Companies should always ensure that they are articulating and sharing a strategic view point effectively. The three levels that create strategic unity is intellectual, behavioural and procedural. Monitoring this unity at an intellectual level is to maintain that employees are communicated the strategy from top to bottom. The unity is further monitored in terms of behavioural and processes by linking it to the time employees spend on strategy and the continual investment in procedures that are essential to the strategy.
- **Innovation:** "We are good at doing something new in both content and process. Innovation—whether in products, administrative processes, business strategies, channel strategies, geographic reach, brand identity, or customer service—focuses on the future rather than on past successes".
- **Efficiency:** This capability is focuses on the company's ability to manage costs well. If leaders do not manage costs with efficiency, then the opportunity to grow the top line may be lost. "Efficiency may be the easiest capability to track. Inventories, direct and indirect labour, capital employed, and costs of goods sold can all be viewed on balance sheets and income statements."

Smallwood and Ulrich were clear in the 11 capabilities above and its commonality across companies in different countries. The benchmark is closer to home than we think and it is evident in the South African landscape of HR strategic areas. Organisational capabilities alignment lifts organisational performance. The organisation must have the ability to develop the right skills and competencies, with the understanding of the long-term strategy of the business. The success of this type of strategy leverages on the organisation's culture to support excellence. Figure 1³ below provides an understanding of strategic alignment of developing skills development to leverage organisational performance which a South African model that echoes the sentiments of Smallwood and Ulrich.

<sup>2</sup> https://hbr.org/2004/06/capitalizing-on-capabilities

<sup>3</sup> Building Human Capital: South African Perspective

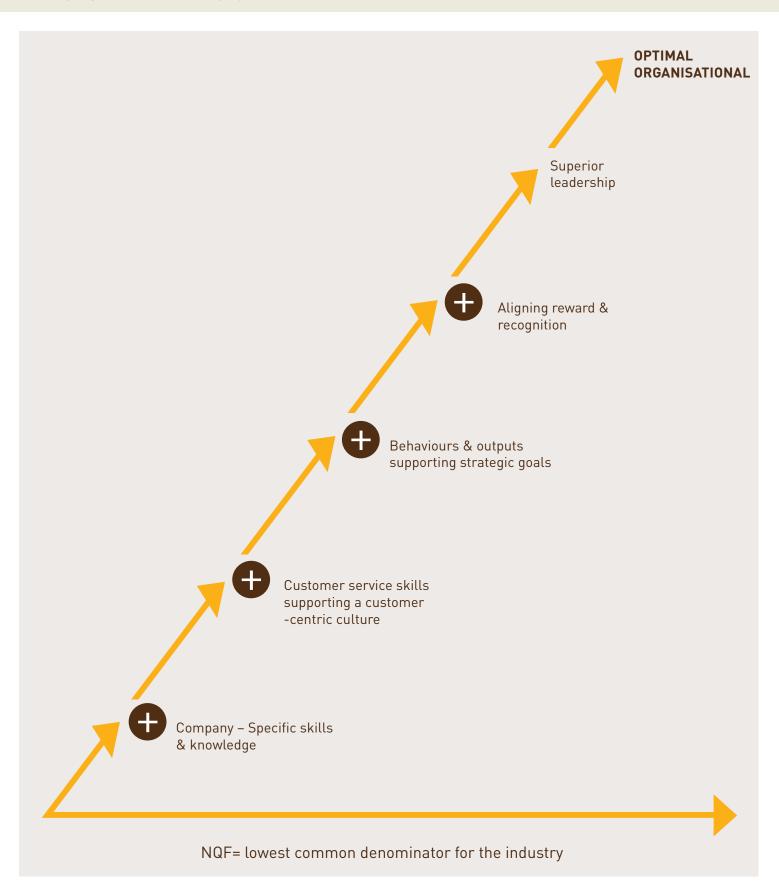


Figure 1: Aligning skills development to leverage organisational performance

# 5. THE SOUTH AFRICAN PERSPECTIVE ON BUILDING ORGANISATIONAL CAPABILITIES

Many South African companies are focusing on primary and secondary skills but more so company-specific skills and knowledge that support and enhance organisational performance. These skills and knowledge are relevant to:

- Specific product knowledge or knowledge of marketing plans.
- Knowledge and skills relating to internal systems and procedures.
- Knowledge of competitors, their products and practices.
- Specific customer data.
- Knowledge and skills not in the public domain.

Source: Building Human Capital: South African Perspective

There is a line of thinking that drives home the importance of building organisational capabilities through various experts from a South African perspective. HR professionals require a world view narrowed into the South African approach on the subject. The valuable points from the case study below creates a good outline of how to implement and build organisational capability.

## "The Blueprint for Growing Tomorrow's HR Leaders" by Italia Boninelli and Terry Meyer

This fictional article was written by Boninelli and Meyer (2004) to be a proactive approach in stimulating the debate and serious soul -searching within the HR profession into its role in organisations and its future in the context of a South African and the global economy. Though fictional, it represents the needs facing many South African companies who are planning to grow into global markets and are restructuring their organisations. In light of the South African climate HR leadership is in great need yet also perceived as being less relevant and less influential. Three reasons are listed as contributors to the decreasing relevance of HR in South Africa:

- 1. Many South African HR practitioners spend most of their time in transactional processing tasks or reactive operational issues. This equates to little real value-add to the long term strategy.
- 2. There is an absence of top-level HR qualifications and programmes in South Africa.
- 3. HR professional institutions in South Africa do not appear to have provided the leadership required of a robust and dynamic profession.

The area of focus is around the idea of building HR capacity and strategic HR capability that will eliminate its decreasing relevance and grow its value-add and position.

This article formulates a proposal that focuses on building of HR capacity intertwined with building HR capabilities within an organisation. Due to the new people challenges companies face, the old model of HR is not efficient to deliver the required results. It further incorporates the idea of when an organisation builds capacity it is coupled with the development of capabilities. Boninelli and Meyer share detailed insights and pointers in this area which can assist HR practitioners in their journey to build capabilities. More so the article expands on how organisational capabilities are interlinked within key and strategic HR areas. In summary this fact sheet does aim to capture the important points and models related to building organisational capabilities. The case study is as follows:

#### **Proposal for HR Capacity Building**

"It is our understanding that your organisation requires a capacity-building programme for your HR professionals. There are a number of reasons for this:

The company acknowledges that its competitive edge lies in its people and not just in its products and services. One of the most significant challenges facing the company is to build the human capital of the organisation and to create a learning culture within the organisation to improve innovation, speed to market and long-term competitiveness. To achieve this strategic business goal, the company needs an HR function that can effectively partner the business leadership in this initiative, rather than an HR function which is caught up primarily in administrative and legislative compliance roles.

Source: Building Human Capital: South African Perspective p384

The article also proposes a high level process that looks at specifically the development of professional HR competencies. These areas follow into a structured platform that is proposed, and enables the environment to build capacity and capabilities. On a high level of mentioning the process entails the flow of process as follows:

- Design HR structure for new business strategy.
- Determine new HR profiles and competencies. The HR competency model from the case study ensures the HR professionals understanding on how a "business functions to form a general management perspective". Figure 1 below is the detailed model used to express the point.



Fig. 1: HR competency model

- Assess staff by looking at the assessment of the current competence and potential across the dimensions of cognitive capability, personality and emotional intelligence, professional skills and business acumen and personal effectiveness.
- Make appointments.
- Build skills and competencies using various avenues (e-Learning, Coaching, Leadership Development programme to name a few) and the establishment of an HR academy. This avenue would build capacity on an on-going and sustainable basis.
- Manage performance.
- Build knowledge management platforms.

The article above looks at the innovative processes to build organisational capabilities, and it streamlines understanding and implementation of the HR function to build capability. It directs the thinking towards the benefits of HR Capacity Building. Summarised in short as follows:

- The creation of a learning culture by ensuring expert knowledge capacity especially at HR manager and HR practitioner level.
- To ensure strong support of long term objectives of the HR Strategy, there needs to be development of functional/tactical and strategic HR competencies. This support also aligns operational competencies at line management levels. In a nutshell this is building organisational capabilities.
- Upskilling new entrants at different levels. This incorporates the areas in recruitment and succession planning.
- Knowledge management platforms are utilised effectively.
- Development of culture by utilising HR practitioners as facilitators and agents of change.
- HR practitioners are exposed to effective career management and succession planning.

# 6. ANOTHER APPROACH IN BUILDING ORGANISATIONAL CAPABILITY USING THE 20 KEYS

Dr. Dino Petrarolo BSc, MSc(Eng), PhD Manufacturing Development Consultant South African Breweries - Beer Division, looked at benchmarking organisational capabilities using the 20 keys. "The 20 Keys to Workplace Improvement was developed over a dozen years ago by Prof. Iwao Kobayashi. The approach has been implemented in several hundred Japanese companies and eventually spread to the West via South Africa", Prof. Kobayashi states that "Managers need to determine to what degree their companies can rapidly respond to change, and to regard such responsiveness as a standard for evaluating corporate strength. To have such a standard, they must have specific means of evaluation and specific items that can be improved. Managers cannot make their companies stronger unless they know how to improve items that assessment shows require improvement." The 20 keys are used as a benchmarking process for organisational capabilities that assist in improving the capabilities currently available.

<sup>5</sup> "The systemic nature of the 20 Keys is emphasised by Kobayashi using his analogy of bean sprouts growing towards their full potential. Single Focused Initiatives [Kobayashi, p3] Kobayashi states that single bean sprouts grow towards their goals, but if they are not supported by growth in other areas of business, they are not strong and collapse at the first sign of "turbulence". The company may not achieve the intended benefits. In some cases, performance may even deteriorate. The 20 Keys allow the company to evaluate its progress in each of the Keys which support such an initiative in the most appropriate (evolutionary) way. When a multi-factor or coherent package of change is implemented, the fundamental constitution of the company is strengthened and company goals are achieved under most conditions."

According to the benchmark the 20 Keys system defines 20 characteristics companies required to stay flexible and adaptive. A five-point scale is assigned to each category, using level one (1 point) for the most primitive and level five (5 points) for the world's most efficient Many companies have made considerable efforts in certain of these categories, however, no company is yet known to have achieved a perfect score in all the categories.

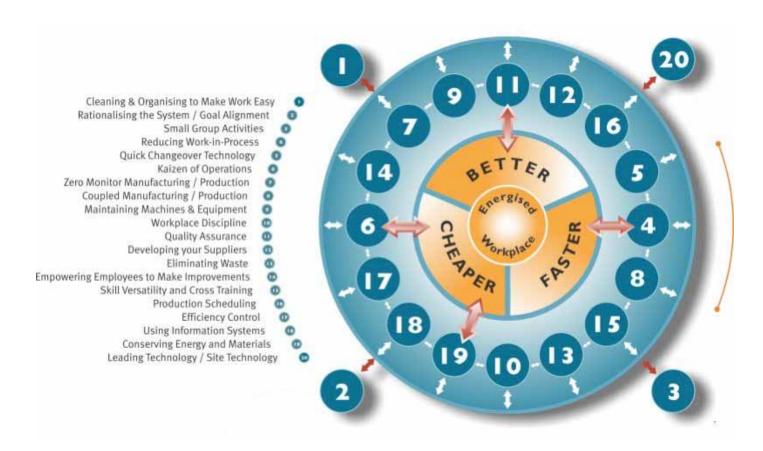
4 Benchmarking Organisational Capabilities using the 20 Keys, Dr Dino Petrarolo

**5** Benchmarking Organisational Capabilities using the 20 Keys, Dr Dino Petrarolo

Organisations which start on a workplace improvement drive usually find that they score between 25 and 35 points, out of a possible 100. [This has 'proved to be true even for well-known Japanese companies who have for years implemented TQM, TPM, QC circles, or other improvement initiatives]. Experience has shown that it is possible to improve by about 20 points over a three-year period resulting in:

- significant productivity gains (usually doubling output per man hour)
- significant quality improvements (two to tenfold)
- reduced cycle times
- improved safety and morale

Petrarolo utilised the 20 keys as a systematic approach to improve organisational capabilities. Areas of performance, systems, processes and the skills that own and function within that space is overlapped and push the individuals to strive for higher goal achievement. This ties into the previous school of thinking that relates to the organisation-individual capability, and the relationship it must forge to create business success. The diagram below is the "20 KEYS to WORKPLACE IMPROVEMENT" by Prof Kobayashi.



## 7. CONDUCT A CAPABILITIES AUDIT

SABPP supports the Smallwood and Ulrich steps to perform a capabilities audit as a guideline. It is an important step to evaluate a capability index and align to the business requirements. As with many audits the intention is to improve the system and function within the ecosystem of the organisation. Their view is that an audit of this nature will boost the organisation's intangible value.

First, select a business unit (plant, division, region, zone, industry). Then, using the following questions as a guide—and keeping in mind your overall business strategy—assess the unit's performance in each organisational capability (0=worst; 10=best), and rank the capabilities in terms of improvement needed (1=highest priority, 2=next highest, and so on).

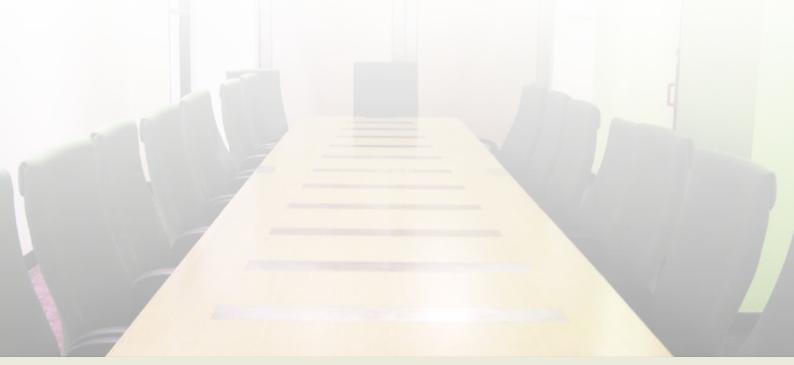
Organisational Capabilities	Questions	Assessments	Ranking
Talent	Do our employees have the competencies and the commitment required to deliver the business strategy in question?		
Speed	Can we move quickly to make important things happen fast?		
Shared mind set & coherent brand identity	Do we have a culture or identity that reflects what we stand for and how we work? Is it shared by both customers and employees?		
Accountability	Does high performance matter to the extent that we can ensure execution of strategy?		
Collaboration	How well do we collaborate to gain both efficiency and leverage?		
Learning	Are we good at generating new ideas with impact and generalising those ideas across boundaries?		
Leadership	Do we have a leadership brand that directs managers on which results to deliver and how to deliver them?		
Customer connectivity	Do we form enduring relationships of trust with targeted customers?		
Strategic Unity	Do our employees share an intellectual, behavioural, and procedural agenda for our strategy?		
Innovation	How well do we innovate in product, strategy, channel, service and administration?		
Efficiency	Do we reduce costs by closely managing processes, people and projects?		

The table above can be used as a starting point to conduct an audit, however it should be adapted to the business requirements.

## 8. SABPP POST AUDIT RECOMMENDATIONS

Following through on the above steps from Smallwood and Ulrich, the SABPP recommends the following post audit:

- Leaders should be supportive and involved in the process from the onset. The results of the process should be analysed and an implementation plan should then be developed.
- Understand the strategic-unity gaps and align to business objectives. HR should advise and lead the process.
- Form an overall improvement plan by defining capabilities that are critical to execute the business strategy. This must focus on skills, competencies and ways to develop them.
- Leadership buy-in and commitment to invest in the development of building organisational capabilities. A development timeline must be incorporated with commitment and accountability for it. This should be communicated to relevant employees and included in performance management documents.
- Align the organisational capability plan to grow critical skills within the business.
- Close the loops, develop and integrate areas in HR like succession planning, skills development, talent management and workforce planning.
- Create a leadership brand that drives the expectancy of performance.
- Ensure the model of performance is complimentary to the organisational capabilities plan.
- Create a systematic approach to measure, track and evaluate your organisational capabilities plan.



# 9. CONCLUSION USING THE 3 DOMAINS OF ORGANISATIONAL CAPABILITY

The actual understanding of building organisational capability is imperative in driving business performance and like all business strategies there are always domains of strategic direction. It is common that in any strategy the areas of focus drive the actual implementation. By combining the above audit and post audit points, a strategy to build organisational capability becomes very tangible and the Three Domains of Organisational Capability by Leanne Gill & Brian Delhave can be used to achieve this.



STRATEGIC INTENT DOMAIN

- Explicit Direction
- Qualities of Workforce
- Inform
   Organisational
   Processes
- Inform Future Direction



## ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURES DOMAIN

- Meaningful job roles
- Guided Performance Management



#### INDIVIDUAL KNOWLEDGE DOMAIN

- Clearly defined knowledge, skills, abilities
- Current and future knowledge networks

Three Domains of Organisational Capability by Leanne Gill & Brian Delhave

The 3 domains mentioned above allow for a strategic focus on developing the organisational capabilities, as it unpacks the areas of intent and improvement. The subject of building organisational capabilities is widely discussed and practiced with different approaches or methodology, however the key objective is to always align the capabilities with the business strategy and to ensure that the organisation has the capabilities to drive their competitive edge, the growth, sustainability and profit.

This Fact Sheet was written by Lathasha Subban of the SABPP with acknowledgements to Mr Marius Meyer.



Setting HR standards

MAY 2016 · NUMBER 2016/04

# **FACT SHEET**

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July	6	HR COMPETENCIES
August	7	HR MANAGEMENT STANDARDS
September	8	PAY EQUITY
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November	10	HIV/AIDS IN THE WORKPLACE
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October	9	EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT
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May	4	EMPLOYEE WELLNESS SCREENING
June	5	CHANGING THE EMPLOYMENT EQUITY LANDSCAPE
July	6	EMPLOYEE VOLUNTEERING
August	7	DEPRESSION IN THE WORKPLACE
September	8	EMPLOYEE WELLNESS
October	9	EQUAL PAY AUDITS
November	10	BASICS OF EMPLOYEE COMMUNICATION

#### 2016

February	1	PRODUCTIVITY BASICS
March	2	SERVICE LEVEL AGREEMENTS
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May	4	BUILDING ORGANISATIONAL CAPABILITIES

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