

7 Feb 2018

## Capabilities



On the 24<sup>th</sup> Jan 2018 a LinkedIn member Anders W. Tell wrote [a post](#) in which he stated “*Capabilities are simple ... A capability is not a mythical being from an alternative business universe. Capability is a simple idea*”.

On the 31<sup>st</sup> Jan 2018 a colleague of mine Winston Suchor drew my attention to the post by ‘liking’ it and I responded “*I have just posted a challenge that will test your ability to address this issue. Are you up for the challenge?*”

My challenge was to see whether the eminent LinkedIn members could use their ‘capabilities’ to explicitly categories 33 business statements, 3 business rules and a ‘paraprosdokian’ which highlighted the difference between ‘wisdom’ and ‘knowledge’.

It seemed that everyone was far too busy to take up my challenge instead they decided to have a go at defining what a ‘capability’ ought to be. I have added an appendix to this article in which I summarise their explanation as to what they think a capability is.

The important thing to notice is that only 1 member of LinkedIn (a colleague of mine Michael Poulin) decided to accept my challenge and in the interim asked me if I had read his book “*Business Capabilities for a Dynamic Market*”. As I had not heard of his book I managed to find Michael’s [YouTube presentation](#) on the subject and watched it instead. I was hoping to discover what Michael (through the auspices of 4 eminent people) defined what a capability was and possibly how anyone went about acquiring it.

On the 3<sup>rd</sup> Feb 2018, Michael cited he was not able to complete my challenge as he did not have the time. Fair enough.

Getting back to Michael’s presentation, I watched 7.5 minutes of a presentation where he cited 4 ‘eminent’ peoples’ interpretation of his concept of capabilities (as per his presentation):

- 1) Prof. D. Teece, 1995 – 1997
- 2) Prof. D. Teece again in 2013
- 3) Prof. D. Teece, in collaboration with Prof H. Schreuder, Prof S. Douma and Amy Shuen 2009 – 2013

I decided not to watch the rest of the presentation as I had heard and seen sufficient to draw my conclusions.

## 1. Prof. D. Teece

Between 1995 and 1997, Prof. D. Teece declared a ‘capability’ to be: “The firm’s ability to integrate and reconfigure internal and external competencies to address rapidly changing environments”.

My diagnosis of this sentence:

I used key words to help me diagnose his sentence in order to make sense of it. My findings were as follows:

Key word	Definition	Explanation	
Firms	the enterprise made up of groups of people	Every person is an individual with their own set of capabilities. See “ <a href="#">Mind map protocol</a> ” 2001 to read my understanding as to how these capabilities are used and how they interact	
Competencies	The quality of being adequately or well qualified physically and intellectually	All well and good but there are 3 key words in this definition that relates to the real world	
	Intellectually	The capacity for rational thought or inference or discrimination	A capacity having its domain in the conceptual world as these are still part of the real world as this is the ‘stuff’ that dreams are made of
	Adequately	Sufficient for the purpose.	A capacity having its domain in the logical world as these are effectively the plans that need to be carried out
	Physically	Concerned with material things	A capacity having its domain in the physical world as these are the results of all the planning enabling the ‘dreamer’ to experience the reality of the dream

This proved to me that capabilities span across the 3 domains, that the domain of discourse is a singularity, require different levels of understanding but have to be integrated in order to form a holistic body of the 3 domains, namely ‘information’.

## 2. Prof. D. Teece

In 2013 Prof. D. Teece changed his view as he stated the following: “A capability is a set of learned process and activities that enable a company to produce a particular outcome. Dynamic capabilities unlike ordinary capabilities are idiosyncratic. They are the way things are done”

My diagnosis of this sentence:

I used key words to help me diagnose his sentence in order to make sense of it. My findings were as follows:

Key word	Definition	Explanation
Company	the enterprise made up of groups of people	See definition of firm' in point 1
Capability	An aptitude that may be developed	As 'aptitude' and 'capability' are synonymous and competencies can be directly related to ability therefore I can draw the conclusion that capability and competency are synonymous. See definition of 'competencies' in point 1
Dynamic	An efficient incentive	Needs to be addressed under 3 groups – Conceptual, Logical and Physical
Ordinary	Not exceptional in any way especially in quality or ability or size or degree	Why differentiate? What makes a capability ordinary or exceptional
Learn	Gain knowledge or skills	Needs to be addressed under 3 groups – Conceptual, Logical and Physical
Process	A particular course of action intended to achieve a result	A process is synonymous for 'activity'. An activity can be carried out in the 3 domains mentioned above and requires a different set of skills
Activity	Any specific behaviour	See process
Idiosyncratic	Peculiar to the individual	Needs to be addressed under 3 groups – Conceptual, Logical and Physical

### 3. Collaborative work

Between 2009 – 2013 the 4 eminent people Prof. D. Teece, Prof H. Schreuder, Prof S. Douma and Amy Shuen combined their views and produced the following statement:

“A dynamic capability framework focuses on the firm’s ability to quickly orchestrate and reconfigure externally sourced competencies”

My diagnosis of this sentence:

I used key words to help me diagnose his sentence in order to make sense of it. My findings were as follows:

Key word	Definition	Explanation
Dynamic	See definition in point 2	
Capability	See definition in point 2	
Firms	See definition in point 1	
Framework	A hypothetical description of a complex entity or process	Needs to be addressed under 3 groups – Conceptual, Logical and Physical
Orchestrate	Plan and direct (a complex undertaking)	
Competencies	See definition in point 1	

The single message that came through is that I could not find a single reference to what the actual capability/skill was that was needed in order to address a further implicit object called a firm or company or enterprise.

In 1994 I wrote my book “Breaking the systems barrier” and in Book 1, Part 1, Chapter 1 I discussed the major differences between business operative’s capabilities (which I called business-ese or perhaps business-speak) and technologist’s (which I called ‘computer-ese’ or computer-speak). I used graphical images to help my explanation.

In Nov 2001 I published my article “[Mind map protocol](#)” in which I developed the reasons why business operatives and technologists were unable to ‘speak the same language’, why they needed translators with the capability to ‘bridge the gap’, the capabilities that the translators needed and the order in which the translators needed to follow in using their capabilities.

24 years has elapsed and the failure rate of information technology projects has hardly improved, despite the introduction of the ‘best practices’. The:

- 1) 32+ years using the USA DoD ‘Technical Architecture Framework for Information Management (TAFIM)’
- 2) 30+ years of using The Zachman Framework and
- 3) 25+ years of using The Open Group’s Architecture Framework (TOGAF)

Charles Meyer Richter  
Principal information architect and diagnostician  
Ripose Pty Limited  
[charles.richter@ripose.com](mailto:charles.richter@ripose.com)

## Appendix

LinkedIn member's explanation as to what a capability is:

Member name	Statement	Members definition of capability
Michael Poulin	<a href="#">Agile Business Capability</a>	1) the ability of employees to learn quickly and to build new strategic assets
		2) the integration of these new strategic assets, including technology and customer feedback, into company processes,
		3) the transformation or reuse of existing assets which have depreciated"
Doug McDavid	Capability may stand for the universe of abilities, but where it gets interesting is when we need to differentiate those abilities from each other, and integrate them into our services (sometimes AKA 'products')	It's not what a business does as what it is able to do, in whatever time frame we're discussing
Anders W. Tell	Capabilities are simple ... A capability is not a mythical being from an alternative business universe. Capability is a simple idea.	It is something important to talk about and agree on
		Something that needs Capacity to achieve some Result
		Maybe something to invest in, to be different and sustain competitive advantage
Tom Graves	<a href="#">Fractals, naming and enterprise-architecture</a>	The ability to do something
		Rules
		Algorithms
		Guidelines
		Principals
Johan Svensson	I have a gut-feeling what a business capability is, but putting words on it has been a long journey indeed	The know-how and capacity to achieve an outcome (or set of values)
Alexander Samarin	This is a "functional" viewpoint on capabilities.	1) Capability is what an organisation should do to fulfill its mission. Capability is a unit-of-mission. It is a "reference" viewpoint on capabilities
		2) But, to achieve its vision, the organisation must think about its performance. Thus capability is what an organisation should do to fulfil its mission and how-well to achieve its vision. This is a "demand" viewpoint on capabilities
		3) The organisation, depending on requested performance of requested capabilities may take various options about capabilities. some capabilities are implemented as functions within the organisation, some capabilities are outsourced to via B2B, some capabilities are acquired as commodities and some capabilities are ignored (presuming for good reasons)

Member name	Statement	Members definition of capability
JD B.	Capabilities are in danger of becoming EA's 'Emperor's new clothes'.	There are 3 different views/usages of capability within EA: 1. Strategic; 2. Resource; 3. Rebranded. JD B. then goes on to define these
Ben Gray	It is some thing's ability AND capacity to do OR achieve something	Capability = f(Ability, Capacity)

Perhaps anyone reading all the comments may have noticed that Anders never acknowledged any of my comments. Perhaps I am just not worth the effort.

If anyone is truly interested in my viewpoint of 'capabilities' you need only look at how my technique (Ripose) and its artificial intelligent (ai) software product ([Caspar](#)) divides them into a set of processes that can be then be implemented.