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PRH Consulting Inc.

Building Capability

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THE CAPABILITY FRAMEWORK—PART 2

Greetings!

We're Back!

It has been a busy year so far but it looks like there might be a little breathing room coming up in the next couple of months. (A little would be nice. Too much is never good though.)

We clearly missed the window on the first two issues but we're back on track, schedule-wise. Our newsletter is a priority but, when push comes to shove, client deadlines come first.

What have we been doing? Lately we've been doing quite a bit of content development. In addition, we had to prepare for three presentations in two conferences. That kind of work is very time-intensive. We've also been refining our rapid, object and capability-based solution design and development process and toolset. (For the record, no, that won't be the name of it if/when we decide to market it.)

One thing I really enjoyed was writing a chapter for a book on testing being produced by ISPI. It was a great opportunity to sort of consolidate some of the things I've learned over the past several years building performance tests and performance-based qualification systems.

Overall, we've had our corporate hands full. I'm not complaining though!

Capabilities

In this issue we are picking up where we left off in the last issue—discussing the "capabilities" model we have been using to organize our project thinking (i.e., analysis, design, and development decisions).

The capabilities model simply organizes all the decisions about the capabilities your people need in order to perform. Some of those capabilities are related to doing actual work tasks. Others are supporting skills they need in order to do the work.

Capabilities may be similar to competencies, but we think they provide more granular information that can drive specific planning and development of solutions, employee recruiting and assessment, and long term content sharing and management.

Capacity

This is the time of year to think about work planning for 2009. If you are looking for creative and effective analysis, design, development, or general consulting related to building employee capability, please give us a call—there is no charge for planning meetings.

Please call if you would like to talk over some ideas.

Pete

Peter R. Hybert
Principal Consultant

The Capability Framework, Part 2

Capability Framework

In the last issue (back in 2007) we started an article on a construct we have been developing called the "capability framework." The core premise is that businesses need capable people—people able to do certain work and apply skills and knowledge appropriately in various situations. All the related human performance support elements, such as training, technical documentation, job aids, tools, and even software are geared to achieve that end. Yet, most companies do not have a clear definition of the capabilities they need for each role.

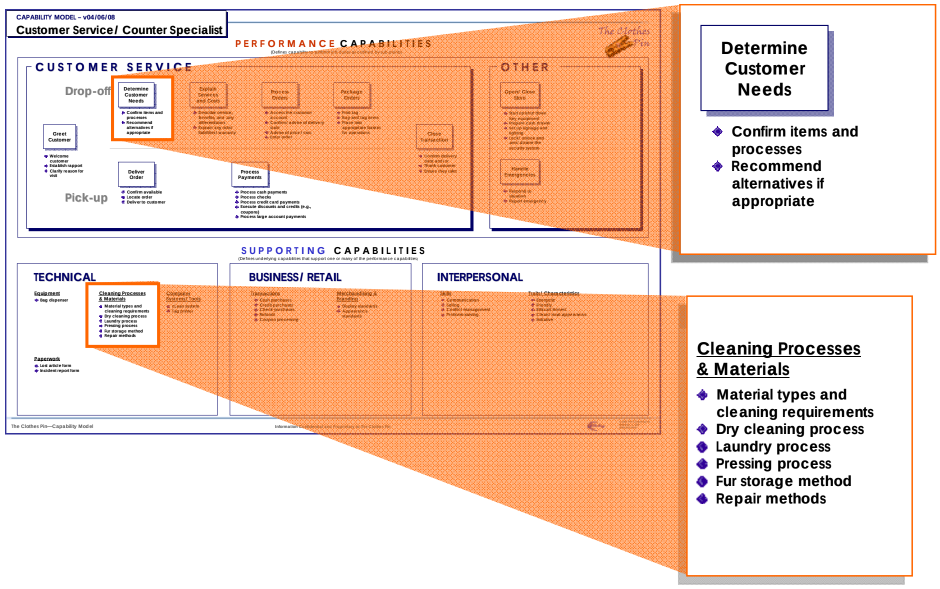
Sure there are competency models but they are not the same thing. But even companies that use a competency model framework are unlikely to connect it to the various components of the human performance support system enough to use it to drive decisions about what content (e.g., information, concepts, skills) should be placed in which components.

Given that capabilities can be shared between many (or sometimes all roles) or unique to

Inside this issue:

The Capability Framework, Part 2 continued

a given role, companies need an overall inventory framework that allows people to use it across roles and across various human performance support provider departments. In other words, the training department should be working on building the same capabilities as the technical publications department if they are supporting the same role(s). In fact, they should coordinate their support efforts to avoid duplication or worse (e.g., contradictory information). Coordinating, in addition to avoiding waste and cost, will allow the company to do more with the same resources, something that is important these days of over-stretched staff.



What Would it Look Like?

> **"Coordinating...will allow the company to do more with the same resources—something that is important these days of over-stretched staff."**

Last time we offered to show an example of what a capability framework would look like for a common role. To fit the space, we will look at a specific output of this process called a capability model—a "one-pager" that sums up the requirements for a given role. One of our clients challenged us to fit it on one page so they could talk to employees about the entire role in a one-on-one setting. We had to go to 11x17...but it worked. The key was to embed some of the information in the actual layout.

Example Role—Customer Service (Dry Cleaner)

We've done this work for a number of roles but because the information is proprietary to those clients, we will use a simplified fictional example to illustrate the concept.

For example, there are two halves to the model. The top half shows the "Performance Capabilities." The bottom half shows "Supporting Capabilities." (This distinction is critical—Pete learned this while working as a consultant with SWI in the early 90's.) Performance Capabilities are unique to a given role. But Supporting Capabilities are often shared at different levels and by different roles.

The other structural element is the organization into sections. For example, the lower Supporting Capability half of this example has a section for each of three categories of capabilities (technical, business/retail, and interpersonal). Other roles might require more, less, the same, or different groupings—use what makes sense for that role.

As an Employee, How Could You Use This Tool?

Employees can use this tool to scan the overall requirements of the role and decide where they most need development. They might look at the model for a new role and figure out what the "delta" would be. Of course, there are other tools (paper and electronic) that we have built to facilitate these and other purposes.

As a "Provider," How Could You Use This Tool?

As a provider, you can build your information, tools, processes, etc. to support the shared capabilities. In this example, maybe counter personnel and "cleaning technicians" require some of the same knowledge about what methods to use for which fabrics. You could build this information once and share it between the audiences. Less development time and effort...and less maintenance time downstream. More importantly, this provides a consistent message for both audiences. What if the cleaning technician needs more detail? They probably would—but you can still share the common overview information.

How Can an Organization Use this Information?

When we've done these models for multiple audiences, in addition to shareability, they yield information about where to recruit from and what to expect. Usually, one of the supporting capability sections contains requirements that can be met by other employees in the company but not from outside. Others may be met by employees coming in from the outside but from the same industry. This type of analysis can guide planning on recruiting, selection, and development if used in a systematic way and shared between the various internal provider organizations.

The capability model is only one tool of many that can be derived and used to manage the capability of your employees. We have been informing our analysis, solution design, and development work with this thinking since we started in business. We think it can help you meet your business goals.

Top 5 aka "The List"—Five Time Management Blunders

Time management (or maybe a better term is "personal productivity" management) is always a hot topic. We want to get more done faster. Yet, with all the gurus, tools, and techniques, we see a lot of people making what we consider to be time management mistakes.

- ***Worrying about the details before the big picture***—When you are doing anything creative (e.g., building a presentation or creating a document), you have to frame it or sketch it before you fill in the details. Too often, people spend too much time at the front end tweaking details and not enough on the overall plan. Once the overall plan is nailed down, the details can follow quickly.
- ***Letting the urgent outrank the important***—We all know that the big presentation due next month is more important than getting your dry cleaning picked up. But without a concerted effort to prevent it, all those little "to do's" can trick us into procrastinating the big "to do's."
- ***Too much efficiency***—We are big believers in avoiding waste, including wasted effort. But it is possible to be too focused on efficiency. If you spend too much time planning an efficient way to get things done, or saving up tasks to do later, or organizing your lists, maybe you just need to roll up your sleeves and get going.
- ***Not enough "batching"***—The previous point not-withstanding, there is time to be saved by avoiding changing tasks frequently. Collecting edits from a number of reviewers and then making all the changes at once in a concentrated work session is a better use of time than doing them as they arrive.
- ***Not knowing your "productive zone"***—We have a concept called "Big Block" tasks. Those are tasks that take a big block of time...you can't just fit them in so you have to plan for them. We schedule big block tasks to be done during our most productive time of day. Whatever it is, figure out when you are at the top of your game and then do your "big block" tasks then.

Project Profile: **Using Capabilities for a Leadership Audience**

The Situation

The client was charged with developing a leadership curriculum for the manufacturing function. Their business was growing but there was a shortage of capable performers. Hiring from outside was problematic—everything was complex, including the organization, regulatory environment, production processes, and supply chain. Anyone coming in from the outside would have a steep learning curve.

First, we analyzed the performance to determine what capabilities were needed at each of four levels of leadership.

- First Line Supervisor: Someone who supervises non-exempt employees or other individual contributors
- Second Level Leader: Someone who supervises First Line Supervisors
- Functional Leader: Someone who leads a function or department (e.g., a manufacturing line, a lab)
- Plant or Site Leader: Someone who leads an entire plant or site—this role has P & L responsibility

The Approach

We first looked at each role separately to identify their performance and supporting capabilities. Then, we looked across all four roles and created a common structure for the leadership capability model.

A common model, we reasoned, would enable us to both reinforce the core elements and identify where the differences were. It would create the picture of the desired role and what employees would need to develop in order to move up.

Key Insights

Transportability is Key

An early insight from the role analysis was that certain capabilities are "transportable" and others are less so. The ability to "coach employees" or "interpret financial metrics" are more likely to have a use in many higher-level roles than less transportable capabilities like "how to improve throughput on the XYZ line" or "how to get the ABC machine working after a breakdown." So, the higher in the organization you go, the more you need skills that are transportable. Also, the people the company really couldn't function without on a daily basis are paid much less than those with skills that are more available on the market!

Requirements Flow Downhill

We also saw that requirements flow downhill. First line supervisors have production quotas to meet, employees that are the least connected to company results, and policies from headquarters' support organizations (e.g., quality) which may make the production quotas even more difficult to meet! We had sympathy for them. An unintentional consequence is that people want to get out of first line supervision roles as fast as they can.

Things Get Complex Quickly

There are lots of dimensions to these roles. There are technical things you needed to know that are related to the specific division (e.g., the process, the chemistry, the manufacturing process and equipment, etc.). You need a good organization scheme to manage the complexity. You can't ignore it.

"the actual performers were more concerned about management—the tasks leaders do to run their business"

Leadership and Management are Different...But Related

The project initially targeted leadership but the actual performers were more concerned with management—the tasks leaders do to run their business. To them, leadership was either a personal trait (not very trainable) or simply the appropriate application of management skills. Our approach was to try to break things down to components that were clearly either "learnable" or not. Those that were not were addressed by assessment and selection tests and tools.

It was a great project and the client team was fun to work with. The core analysis and design work was solid. The capabilities still seem appropriate, though the strategies and solutions for managing them can evolve over time. That is really what we hope for from a framework.

News and Events...

Conferences and Publications

In addition to our client work, we have been doing some general industry work as well. We were on the program for a couple of conferences and Pete presented on a couple of our favorite topics.

At ISPI, Pete presented a session called "Beyond Competencies: Managing Organization and Individual Capability" focused on the same subject as our lead story.

And, he presented on Performance Testing as well. (He was scheduled to present a version of this for ASTD in June but was unable to attend for personal reasons.)

Performance testing is also the subject of a chapter Pete is authoring for an ISPI-sponsored book to be published by Jossey-Bass in 2009.

Pete also co-facilitated an interactive session with Becky Lucas for the Chicago Chapter of ISPI which was a lot of fun. We basically facilitated different groups of participants through a problem-solving discussion. Pretty easy to prepare and execute but the discussion was interesting. Participants loved it. (Becky's idea, by the way.)

Visit "the library" on our website for past presentation hand-outs and related articles!

What's New on the Blog?

Our first half deluge of work has hampered our blogging but we have been trying to get back into it. Lately, we have been exploring the concepts of time management and personal productivity. We hope our thoughts are practical and not entirely just more of the same time management tips.

To read our posts, please visit www.prhconsulting.com/blog or just go to our website and click on the link on the home page.

For Fun

Check out Google! Everyone knows about Google search by now but there are other Google on-line tools. Our favorites are Google Calendar and Google Docs. Both are very simple ways of collaborating and sharing content over the web.

Google Calendar is great because you can set up a separate calendar for separate areas of activity. For example, each business project, kid's sports team, social network, etc. can have a separate calendar that you can share at will. And, you can look at them all at once to make sure you don't double-book. Already use Outlook? They sync!

Google Docs allows you to post documents, presentations, and spreadsheets online. We are currently using Google Docs for an ISPI team Pete is co-chairing. Pete even used it to plan a family vacation to DC once...but maybe he shouldn't admit that.

One cool feature is the ability to work offline and "sync" later. Check it out!

We design and develop systems and tools that improve and support performance!

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Rant: Content Display for Usability

We don't do a lot of work in the area of product documentation or instructions. But, we would like to. Over the years, we have had the opportunity to work on new product teams in which we collaborated with the people doing the documentation, instruction, and packaging.

Several years ago (1994 to be exact) Pete published an article in Quality Progress about integrating training and documentation. He even advocated doing a single analysis of the human performance components and then designing them to work as a system.

But even without a master plan, at least companies could structure information layout and display to make it easier to interact with a given product.

Case in point. Pete went shopping for dog food the other day. Usually, when he does this, he is in a hurry. He always gets the same kind. But invariably, he

has to stand in front of the shelf for five minutes to make sure he gets the right kind. (Even then, it doesn't always work out.)

Why? Is it his glasses? Possibly. But more likely it is poor packaging.

Basically, they don't put the same ***type*** of information in the same ***place*** on each bag. In the picture above, the indicated area sometimes lists the dog size but in other cases the type of food.

Of course, in spite of the aggravation, Pete still buys it—the dog and the vet both like it!