Introduction – The capability imperative

In our globalising society the arena in which individuals, organisations and communities interact is rapidly expanding. In these circumstances – such as a proliferation of free trade agreements - the tension between cooperation and competition is likely to increase; and the capacity of ‘capability’ (as described here) is both a survival and growth imperative.

In accord with the John Stephenson view (Stephenson & Yorke 1998; Cairns & Stephenson 2009) ‘capability’ – as embraced by the Australian Capability Network - is that quality of an individual or organisation which supports effective functioning in circumstances of unfamiliar problems and/or unfamiliar contexts – as illustrated in Figure 1. That is, a step beyond just being competent to function in familiar circumstances. Further, in this paper, it is held that this notion of capability can be applied to communities.

The extrapolation in Figure 1 is that, whereas Stephenson and Yorke (1998 p. 5) identify position ‘Y’ as dependent capability and position ‘Z’ as independent capability, here they are respectively identified as ‘Competency Domain’ and ‘Capability Domain’. For Stephenson and Yorke, dependent capability accrues through a process of passing on other peoples’ experience knowledge and solutions – i.e. the traditional teacher/student engagement and, in comparison, independent capability is exhibited when a person has confidence in drawing from their own life experience beyond what they are just taught or trained to do.

The rationale – in this paper – for referring to ‘Y’ as the competency domain is to do with making a clearer distinction between capability and just competency. This is done to distinguish between competency outcomes of knowledge and skill which may be the goal of vocational education and training (VET) when little (if any) attention is given to the “E” in VET and capability outcomes which accrue under circumstances of attention to the “E” through the nurturing influence of an educationalist VET teacher as reported in Hughes and Hughes (2013). Also, for a similar reason in
encouraging Australian VET to overtly reach beyond just graduating competent students Hughes and Cairns (2013) advocate having a goal of graduating capably competent students – the difference being that capable graduates do have the self-confidence and commitment to draw upon the full stock of what they know and can do consequent upon having the embedded attribute of being a consciously active lifelong learner.

The above said, the goal of graduating capable students requires a more expansive approach to education than what is the case in circumstances where delivery in the classroom and/or online learning is the boundary of the learning experience. In an ‘educationalist’ environment – be it in school or training in industry (for example) - the learner is awakened to valuing what they bring as outcomes of their life’s experience thus far and what they will further acquire throughout life as a consequence of being a conscious lifelong learner. Similarly, awakening an organisation or a community to the value of what is brought to the ‘capability’ seeking table and what is to be potentially added throughout organisational/community life has resonance with the notion of being educationalist orientated. It should be noted that the trend toward online learning requires ‘educationalist’ inclusion in some manner if we are to preserve the potential for capability outcomes.

Notwithstanding whether it’s an individual, an organisation, or a community which is striving for capability, and hence achievement, the foundation upon which this quality is constructed is drawing upon of the outcomes of lifelong learning of individuals – it is this amalgam of what individuals bring and acquire which is the bedrock of their own and organisational and community capability. Accordingly, conscious pursuit of lifelong learning by individuals is both a personal and organisational (broadly defined) capability imperative and evidenced in the Hughes (2007) exploration of the connection between lifelong learning and organisational achievement. In this respect, in the absence of an already embedded predisposition to nurture ‘capability’ attributes, leadership is required; and this leadership has much to do with universal valuing of lifelong learning.

**Lifelong learning leadership – the notion of being ‘learning leaderful’**

In essence, beyond applied government influence through policy and legislation, there are two categories of leadership which potentially motivate and support lifelong learning – i.e.

- An individual as a leader encouraging others and supporting their lifelong learning – i.e. being learning leaderful as posited by Hughes (2015 – forthcoming). For example, leadership may be in the role of mentor (workplace, family, community, etc.), teacher, role model.
- An organisation exhibiting learning leaderful character at the organisational level which, in turn, encourages and supports individuals to be learning leaderful. Such an organisation may be, for example, a commercial or non-commercial enterprise, a teaching institution, a community strengthening organisation such as a community welfare agency.

Extrapolating from Raelin (2003), the presence of a learning leaderful environment is held to be of much advantage to an individual and/or an organisation (broadly defined) seeking capability (Hughes 2015 - forthcoming). As depicted in Figure 2, a learning leaderful environment is one in which the culture is overtly valuing and supporting lifelong learning and displays leadership in this regard. In such an environment, all are motivated to be leaders (including self-leading) in respect of awakening
awareness of lifelong learning outcomes brought to the capability seeking table, and what is progressively acquired within the environment and beyond in terms of both place and time. Accordingly, for an individual to be leaderful in a lifelong learning sense, it is helpful that the prevailing culture of the environment is positively pre-disposed toward valuing lifelong learning. It should be noted that learning leaderful environments potentially exist across a broad spectrum - ranging from the family, to the community, to education institutions, to organisations, and more.

In terms of an environment becoming learning leaderful, Figure 3 is a generic representation of the LCM Achievement Model (Hughes 2007). The model has as its focus a specific organisation goal – the sweet spot - as applies from time to time. The sweet spot being pursued by three valuings - i.e.

- valuing the outcomes of lifelong learning;
- valuing a culture which nurtures lifelong learning and drawing from it; and
- valuing the motivations which variously apply in respect of lifelong learning accrual and application.

In this instance of seeking to create and/or sustain a learning leaderful environment (the sweet spot), the strategic approaches to valuing the “L”, the “C”, and the “M” are constructed in terms of awakening, empowering, and applauding people with respect to drawing upon the relevant outcomes of their lifelong learning, and then doing likewise in leading others in these respects.
Noting that this leading may be of a formal or informal nature, and may not be evident to an observer or even “the led”. In a learning leaderful environment, people become learning leaderful in respect of themselves and of others.

**Drawing from lifelong learning**

Notwithstanding nuances of what is meant by lifelong learning, there is a general understanding that this refers to a person learning throughout life with some degree of consciousness regarding progressive acquisition of knowledge; and consequent expanding of capability. Across time and across cultures, learning throughout life has been a significant component of the foundation upon which our societies have been constructed and evolve. Presumably, our early ancestors took to the caves upon learning that there lay protection from the weather and marauding animals, thus raising the question of *What was the process and how might this universally apply in today’s society?*

In pursuit of the process and contemporary relevance question, it seems reasonable to suggest that the manner of leaning has expanded from taking note of experience in earlier times to now embracing a spectrum ranging from shades of informal learning (including unconscious and consciously survival driven) to shades of formal learning (including structured education and training). The logic in this proposition is that the knowing and action of long-ago ancestors was in the context of much simpler times – less to be known and less to be acted upon – than is now the case in much of contemporary society. For example, in current times, the complex needs of developed country society, and countries aspiring to ‘developed’ status, require people drawing upon a wide range of technical competencies and fitting-in skills which progress through primary, secondary and tertiary education. Further, in today’s developed/developing environments, effectively drawing upon such formal learning requires integration with the outcomes of a wide diversity of less formal learning; and, especially in a globalising society, appropriate respect for socio-economic norms which variously apply – as illustrated in Figure 3.

![Figure 3: From lifelong learning foundation to acting](image-url)
Figure 3 illustrates a process of constructing a foundation of lifelong learning outcomes and drawing upon this to personal and community advantage in socio-economic terms. Whilst this process is somewhat self-evident, it is offered as a reminder framework bringing knowledge into the realm of action – as follows.

In Figure 3 –

- The foundation element is a reminder that a person’s stock of knowledge and skill accrues from formal learning such as is accrued through schooling/education & training and from informal learning which is sometimes referred to as the university-of-life. Also, not all of what a person knows and can do is actually front of their mind and/or in the mind of others - as was found to be the case in the circumstance of the Country Fire Authority (CFA) of Victoria retaining volunteers (Hughes 2007).

  The CFA research was the major component of research (2002-2005) into the potential for lifelong learning to aid organisational achievement as generically illustrated in Figure 2. The reference to ‘potential ’ is an alerting to the reality that there are factors which aid and/or inhibit actually drawing upon the outcomes of learning. For example, being learning leaderful aids and a culture which suppresses self-valuing inhibits.

  Of course, reflection upon the ‘foundation’ element raises the issue of ways and means to embed the attribute of being a lifelong learner within people. Accordingly, the notion of being learning leaderful has been introduced; and the LCM Achievement Model offered as a strategic planning and action device to nurture this status and expand the foundation base.

- The respectful alertness element is a reminder to have clarity in understanding of the socio-economic context and having empathy. For example, in the Hughes and Hughes (2013) research into the motivations and practices of educationalist orientated vocational education and training (VET) teachers the context was VET being well taught. The well taught context, strengthening the social capital attributes of the learner and its connection to the entwining of economic productivity and social cohesion. Also, the double headed arrows indicate that there is a going forwards and backwards cycle between identifying helpful outcomes of lifelong learning and having clarity regarding the task.

- The integration element is a reminder that, although worthy of explicitly valuing, not all of what one knows and can do (outcomes from lifelong learning) is necessarily appropriate to the task in hand. At this point there is a planning integration of appropriate capabilities accruing from both formal and informal learning. However, this is not to say that there should only be a focus upon what is thought to be relevant at the time. As circumstances change, the previously-put-aside may become highly pertinent; and it is wise to know and value the full pallet of outcomes from lifelong learning.

- The motivation element is a reminder that actually wanting to draw upon what is known and can be done is where the value of lifelong learning resides. Accordingly, ‘valuing motivation’ is coupled with ‘valuing lifelong learning’ and ‘valuing a culture which nurtures lifelong learning’ in the Hughes (2007) approach to organisational achievement via lifelong learning.
Also, the “You Really Oughta Wanna” subtitle of the Mager and Pipe (1970) Analyzing Performance Problems text – although authored 45 years ago – remains highly pertinent today as a salutary caution that weakness in performance may be connected to lack of motivation more so than lack of knowledge and skill.

- The acting element is a reminder that the value in lifelong learning resides in actually acting to draw upon the outcomes of lifelong learning. This is also a reminder that there can be forces at work which aid and/or inhibit taking action. For example, the prevailing culture in an organisation might be highly resistant to change and, hence, a person (or persons) seeking to draw upon their lifelong learning to bring about change will need to be strategically subtle in recruiting resisting key stakeholders to the team – in this case, it may be that influencing people as an outcome from lifelong learning is as important as the technical outcomes from lifelong learning.

**Sustaining capability – continuance of lifelong learning and drawing upon**

As declared in the title to this paper, lifelong learning is seen as a capability imperative. For an individual, their status as a conscious lifelong learner is the foundation upon which they construct personal capability and contribute to the capability of organisations and the like. For and organisation (and the like) capability is derived from the accrual of individual capabilities and the vigour with which they nurture a learning leaderful environment. Accordingly, becoming and then sustaining the attribute of being a lifelong learner is an asset to the individual, to the organisation (broadly defined) and to the community.

![Figure 4: Activity system as supports an individual as a lifelong learner and sustaining this attribute](image-url)

In respect of sustaining capability via continuing commitment to lifelong learning, as for the process which led to the LCM Achievement Model, an activity theory approach to understanding and action
has much utility. Accordingly, Figure 4 is an activity system representation of the ‘what’ the ‘who’ and the ‘how’ of activity leading to sustaining capability as an outcome from lifelong learning. Also, it should be noted that the elements of this activity system have relationship one-to-the-other as indicated by the connectors.

In this instance of lifelong learning sustained capability, the utility of Figure 4 rests in its application of a device to have an overview of the actors and the environment in which this objective is pursued. And, further, to take strengthening action by appropriate party - in this respect, Figure 4 is a framework to be drawn upon by appropriate supporting party as might apply from time-to-time. Examples of an appropriate supporting party are – an employer seeking to strengthen enterprise capability, a university seeking to contribute to alumni capability, a local government authority seeking to enhance community cohesion.

In Figure 4 –

- The **subject** is the individual as a lifelong learner. It should be noted that this activity system will not exist in isolation from other interacting activity systems where the subject is different – e.g. the organisation, the community, work colleagues, etc.
- The **object** is continuing lifelong learning of the individual and, by implication, enthusiasm for drawing upon this. For an appropriate supporting party this is a pathway to the objective.
- The **objective** is the reason for attention to lifelong learning. In all likelihood this is the ultimate focus of the appropriate supporting party drawing upon an activity system as an informing component of their actions in support of the subject.
- The **rules** are substantial factors influencing the environment/culture in which the quest for sustained capability is underway.
- The **community** are those beneficiaries – stakeholders – who’s needs and wants are potentially served by individuals as lifelong learners.
- Those comprising the potential **division of labour** are people to be drawn upon in what might be escribed as a lifelong learning partnership; and, of course, the subject is the central actor in a division of labour. For example, an employer might establish (and fund) lifelong learning collegiate groupings,
- In this case, the **tool** includes the LCM Achievement Model and, potentially, other devices. These other devices might be incentives, access to documents, contact with inspirational people, etc. This invites innovation by the appropriate supporting party in constructing tools and facilitating access (where applicable) to these tools.

**A concluding offering** - For some, participation in an activity to sustain lifelong learning derived capability may be the beginning for them as a conscious lifelong learner. With this in mind, initiatives directed at sustaining capability of individuals and organisations (broadly defined) may be a conscious, with purpose, lifelong learning beginning for many.

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1 Acknowledging the circa 1930s foundation work of Vygotsky(1978) and those who have built upon this from which contemporary articulations of activity theory have evolved – e.g. Daniels, et al. (2010).
References:


