

Developing a Capability Framework

Welcome

Developing a Capability Framework



- ┐ Why most frameworks fail
- ┐ Translating strategy into capabilities
- ┐ Designing a usable architecture
- ┐ Writing clean, scalable capability definitions
- ┐ Embedding into hiring, performance and development
- ┐ Avoiding the common traps
- ┐ ****Aim to break at the 1-hour 15-minute mark***

Who am I?

Corporate Experience



Head of Capabilities @ Acorn

6 years with Acorn, 18+ years relevant corporate experience

Tertiary Education



IT, Technology & Business BSc from the University of Surrey

Training Journal Magazine



Regular contributor

Continuing Education Certificates



Industrial Psychology from Illinois Tech



Organisational Analysis from Stanford University



HR Analytics certification from the University of California, Irvine



Defining Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in Organisations certification from Rice University



Leading Transformation: Managing Changes from Macquarie University



Learning Transfer and Lifelong Learning (3L) from the University of California, Irvine

Learning Objectives

Preparation

Prepare the organisation for future growth or change through creating and applying a customised capability framework.

Collaborate

Sharpen stakeholder engagement skills to drive collaborative development of capability frameworks.

Build

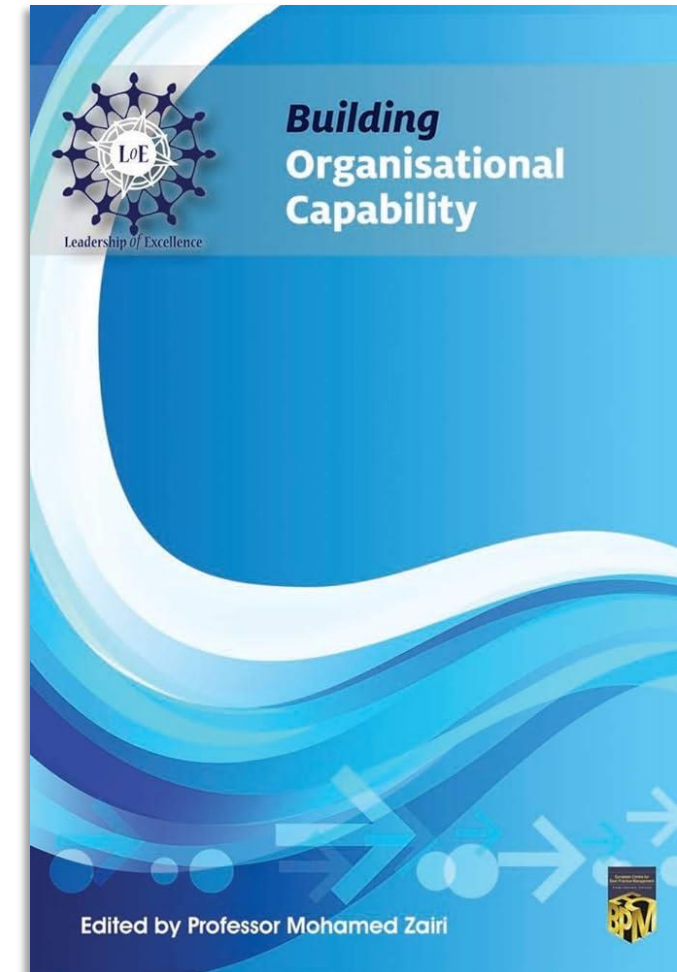
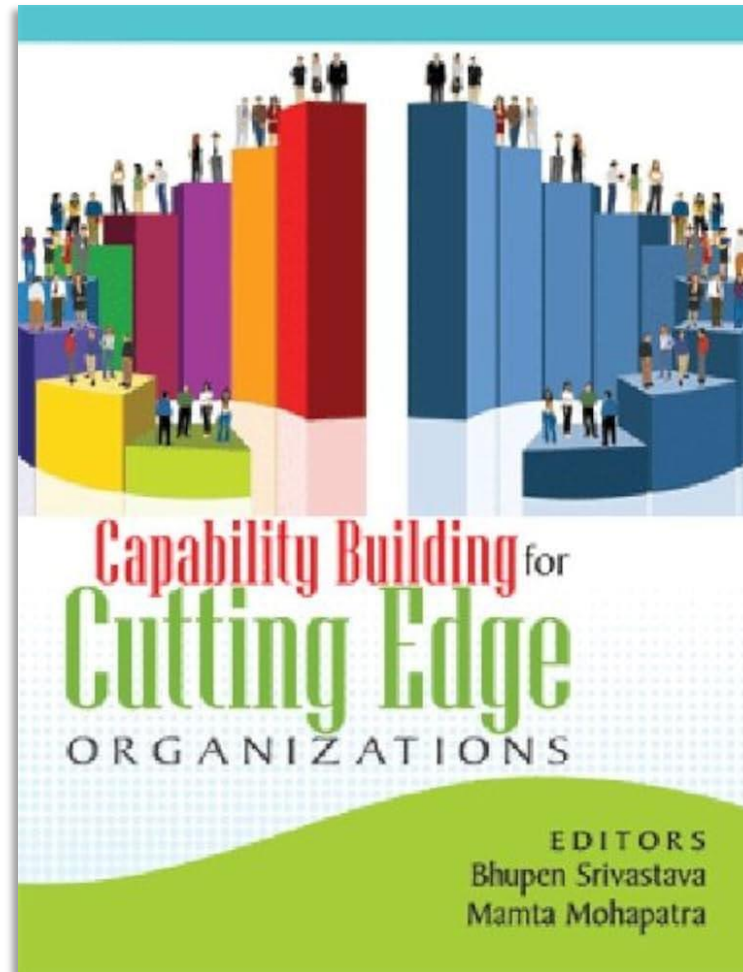
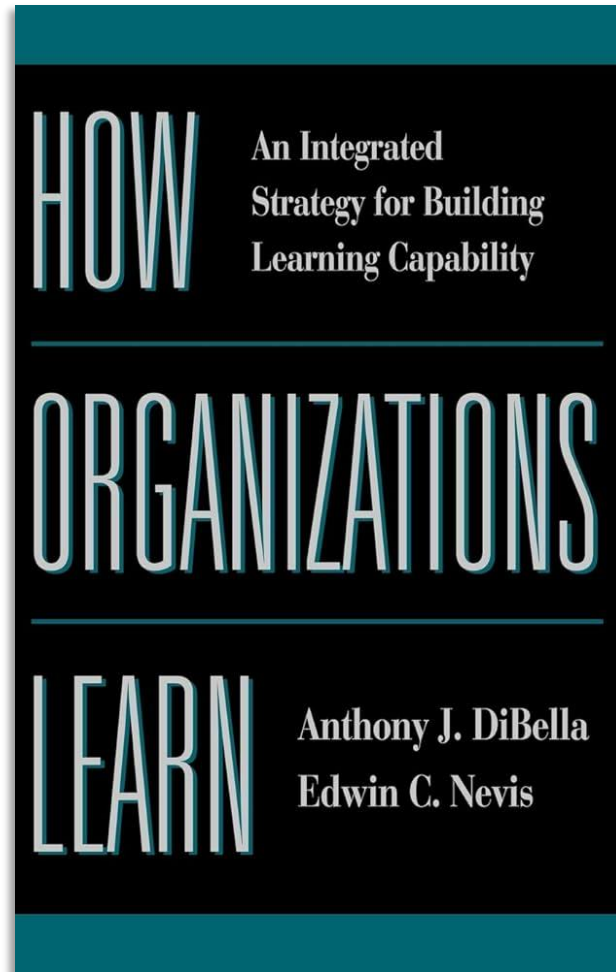
Use focused research and analysis to align your organisation's capabilities with its goals and values.

Implement

Drive your team to execute the benefits of a capability framework.

Expand

Develop the skill to integrate the capability framework seamlessly into your organisation's HR processes.



the same advantages of conglomeration that are present in emerging markets.) Japanese managers and workers get their training largely within companies. Managers

IDEAS WITH IMPACT

Harvard Business Review ON Corporate Strategy



Creating Corporate Advantage

David J. Collis and Cynthia A. Montgomery

Competing on Resources: Strategy in the 1990s

David J. Collis and Cynthia A. Montgomery

Desperately Seeking Synergy

Michael Goolbsy and Andrew Campbell

The End of Corporate Imperialism

C.K. Prahalad and Kenneth Lieberthal

Beyond Greening: Strategies for a Sustainable World

Stuart L. Hart

Why Focused Strategies May Be Wrong for Emerging Markets

Tarun Khanna and Krishna Palepu

Competing on Capabilities: The New Rules of Corporate Strategy

George Stalk, Philip Evans, and Lawrence E. Shulman

Corporate Strategy: The Quest for Parenting Advantage

Andrew Campbell, Michael Goolbsy, and Marcus Alexander

HARVARD BUSINESS SCHOOL PRESS

Competing on Capabilities

The New Rules of Corporate Strategy

GEORGE STALK, PHILIP EVANS, AND
LAWRENCE E. SHULMAN

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them centrally, and invest in them heavily, looking for a long-term payback.

Take the example of cross-docking at Wal-Mart. Cross-docking is not the cheapest or the easiest way to run a warehouse. But seen in the broader context of Wal-Mart's inventory-replenishment capability, it is an essential part of the overall process of keeping retail shelves filled while also minimizing inventory and purchasing in truckload quantities.

What transforms a set of individual business processes like cross-docking into a strategic capability? The key is to connect them to real customer needs. A capability is strategic only when it begins and ends with the customer.

Of course, just about every company these days claims to be "close to the customer." But there is a qualitative difference in the customer focus of capabilities-driven competitors. These companies conceive of the organization as a giant feedback loop that begins with identifying the needs of the customer and ends with satisfying them.

As managers have grasped the importance of time-based competition, for example, they have increasingly focused on the speed of new product development. But as a unit of analysis, new product development is too narrow. It is only part of what is necessary to satisfy a customer and, therefore, to build an organizational capability. Better to think in terms of new product *realization*, a capability that includes the way a product is not only developed but also marketed and serviced. The longer and more complex the string of business processes, the harder it is to transform them into a capability—but the greater the value of that capability once

built because co-ordinating it.

Weaving business capabilities into a vertical integration of pushing many of the activities, capabilities, vertically to ensure control, the Remember Wal-Mart fleet in control.

A CEO's success in building capabilities will be the chief test of managerial skill in the 1990s.

more responsive they get far better they do from an average "days per invoice from At Kmart, it is

Another attribute of capabilities is that they are collective and cross-functional—a small part of many people's jobs, not a large part of a few. This helps explain why most companies underexploit capabilities-based competition. Because a capability is "everywhere and nowhere," no one executive controls it entirely. More-

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teams that made the actual recommendations, but it was the CEO who oversaw the change process, evaluated their proposals, and made the final decision. His leading role ensured senior management's commitment to the recommended changes.

This top-down change process has the paradoxical result of driving business decision making down to those directly participating in key processes—for example, Medequip's sales and service staff. This leads to a high measure of operational flexibility and an almost reflex-like responsiveness to external change.

A New Logic of Growth: The Capabilities Predator

Once managers reshape the company in terms of its underlying capabilities, they can use these capabilities to define a growth path for the corporation. At the center of capabilities-based competition is a new logic of growth.

In the 1960s, most managers assumed that when growth in a company's basic business slowed, the company should turn to diversification. This was the age of the multibusiness conglomerate. In the 1970s and 1980s, however, it became clear that growth through diversification was difficult. And so, the pendulum of management thinking swung once again. Companies were urged to "stick to their knitting"—that is, to focus on their core business, identify where the profit was, and get rid of everything else. The idea of the corporation became increasingly narrow.

Competing on capabilities provides a way for companies to gain the benefits of both focus and diversifica-

Competing on Capabilities 193

tion. Put another way, a company that focuses on its strategic capabilities can compete in a remarkable diversity of regions, products, and businesses and do it far more coherently than the typical conglomerate can. Such a company is a "capabilities predator"—able to come out of nowhere and move rapidly from nonparticipant to major player and even to industry leader.

Capabilities-based companies grow by transferring their essential business processes—first to new geographic areas and then to new businesses. Wal-Mart CEO David Glass alludes to this method of growth when he characterizes Wal-Mart as "always pushing the inside out; we never jump and backfill."

Strategic advantages built on capabilities are easier to transfer geographically than more traditional competitive advantages. Honda, for example, has become a manufacturer in Europe and the United States with relatively few problems. The quality of its cars made in the United States is so good that the company is exporting some of them back to Japan.

In many respects, Wal-Mart's move from small towns in the South to large, urban, northern cities spans as great a cultural gap as Honda's move beyond Japan. And yet, Wal-Mart has done it with barely a hiccup. While the stores are much bigger and the product lines different, the capabilities are exactly the same. Wal-Mart simply replicates its system as soon as the required people are trained. The company estimates that it can train enough new employees to grow about 25% a year.

But the big payoff for capabilities-led growth comes not through geographical expansion but through rapid entry into whole new businesses. Capabilities-based companies do this in at least two ways. The first is by

Harvard
Business
Review

Corporate Strategy

Capitalizing on Capabilities

by Norm Smallwood and Dave Ulrich

From the Magazine (June 2004)

Summary. Reprint: R0406J By making the most of org employees' collective skills and fields of expertise—you your company's market value. Although there is no mag every organization needs in... [more](#)

If you ask them which companies they admi point to organizations like General Electric, Nordstrom, or Microsoft. Ask how many laye these companies have, though, or how they s discover that few know or care. What people companies is not how they are structured or approaches to management, but their capab innovate, for example, or to respond to chan Such *organizational capabilities*, as we call t intangible assets. You can't see or touch the

Dynamic Capabilities and Strategic Management

David J. Teece; Gary Pisano; Amy Shuen

Strategic Management Journal, Vol. 18, No. 7. (Aug., 1997), pp. 509-533.

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The Core Competence of the Corporation

C.K. Prahalad and Gary Hamel



Harvard Business Review

90311

Quick poll.

Where are you in your
framework journey?

Group Discussion.

Why are you building
(or refreshing)
a framework?



Part 1:

Reframing the Problem

Why Are We Really Here?

Capability frameworks are **not HR checklists**

They are statements about what an organisation must be able to do *systemically* to succeed; **not just perform**

Capability is about potential and repeatable outcomes, **not past outputs**

Most Capability Frameworks Quietly Fail

They fail because they:



Confuse performance
with potential
(capability ≠ what's
already been done)



Treat skills lists or task
lists as frameworks
(~skill pile-up)



Lack clarity on the
role of capability
vs competency vs
skills



Are overly broad and
unusable



Are not embedded into
hiring, development
and systems

Difference between a capability framework and a competency framework

Capability frameworks and competency frameworks are related but distinct.

Dimension	Capability Framework	Competency Framework
Core focus	Capacity and potential	Observable performance
Time orientation	Future-facing	Present-focused
Stability	Relatively durable	Role-specific
Design question	What must someone be able to do?	How well must they perform?
Typical use	Workforce design and development	Performance management

Capability frameworks define capacity.

Competency frameworks define performance standards applied to roles.

The Only Question That Matters.

**For our strategy to
succeed, what must our people
be **capable** of doing?**

Part 2:

Strategy Before Architecture

Frameworks Don't Start With Behaviours

They start with:

Where we will compete

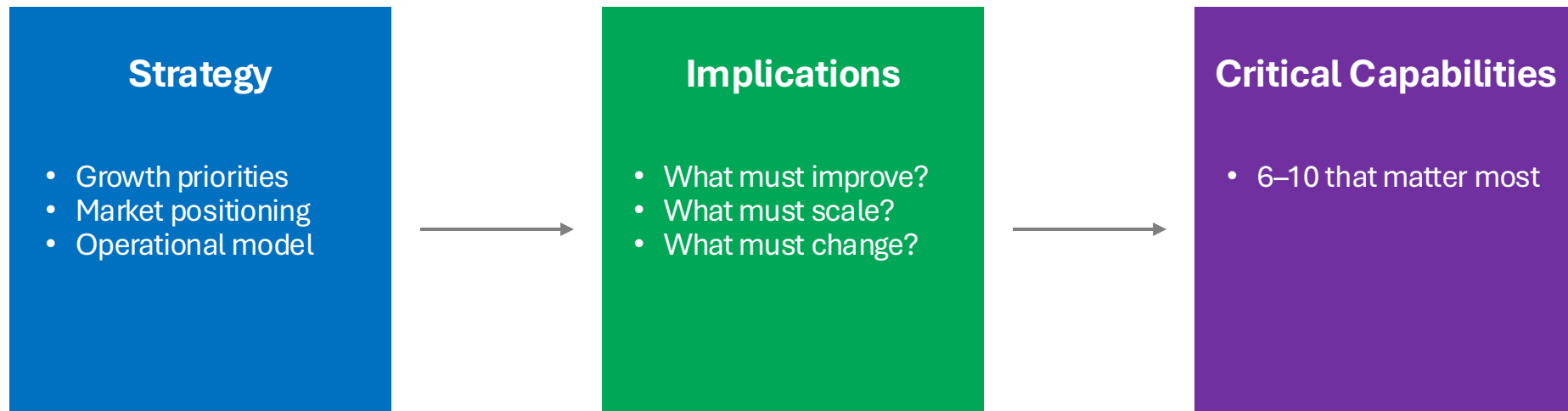
How we will win

What must differentiate us

What we must stop investing in

**Strategy defines capability.
Not the other way around.**

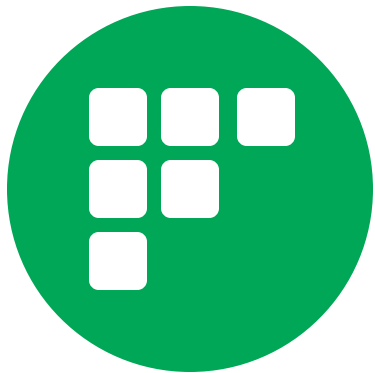
From Strategy to Capability



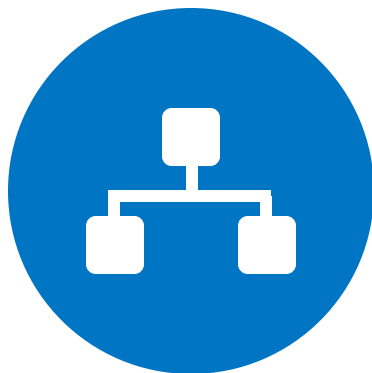
Enterprise vs Functional vs Role



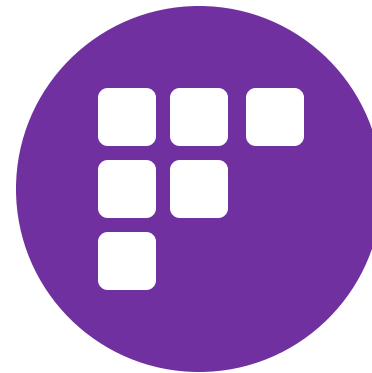
Scope Is a Strategic Decision



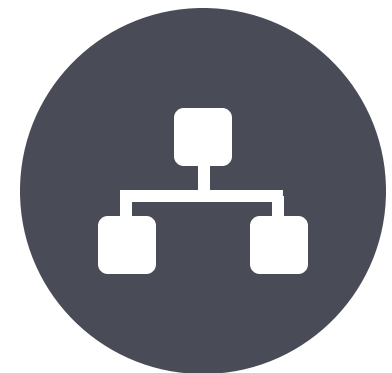
Replace
or overlay?



Organisation-wide
or pilot?



12 months or 3-year
horizon?



Incremental or full
redesign?



Breakout Exercise

- In groups of 3–4:
- You are given a strategy statement.
- Identify the 6–8 capabilities required for success.
- Ask yourselves:
- What must we become better at?
- What must scale?
- What must fundamentally change?
- What would failure look like if we lacked this capability?
- What are we deliberately not including?
- Be ready to share:
- Your 6–8 capabilities
- One capability you debated
- One capability you excluded

GROUP 1: Operational Excellence

Strategy Statement

We will improve margin by 8% through operational efficiency, automation and process standardisation. We will reduce duplication, streamline decision-making, and increase productivity across all business units while maintaining service quality.

GROUP 2 : Digital Transformation

Strategy Statement

We will transition from a traditional service model to a digitally enabled, data-driven organisation. Over the next 24 months, we will modernise legacy systems, embed AI-enabled decision support, and build internal digital capability rather than relying on external vendors.

GROUP 3 : Talent & Culture Renewal

Strategy Statement

Following rapid growth and leadership turnover, we will stabilise the organisation by strengthening leadership capability, clarifying accountability, improving performance discipline, and rebuilding trust and engagement across the workforce.

Part 3:

Stakeholders & Politics

Capability Frameworks Are Political

They redistribute:



Power



Accountability



Decision
rights



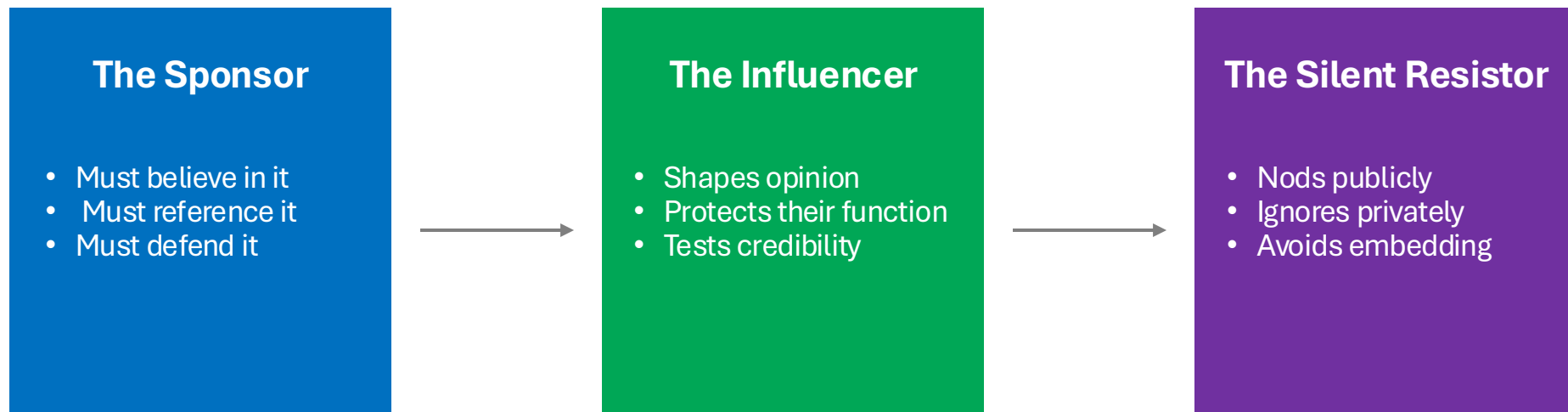
Development
investment



Performance
expectations

If no one resists it, it probably changes nothing.

Who Can Derail This?



Mapping stakeholders is risk management.

Executive Ownership or HR Project?

If the CEO never references it, it will not embed.

If leaders are not assessed against it, it is symbolic.

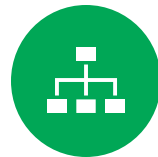
If managers don't use it in hiring or performance, it is optional.

Embedding determines legitimacy.

Common Barriers to Adoption



“We already have a framework.”



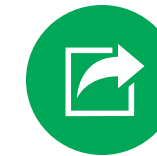
Too complex to use.



Too generic to matter.



Competes with existing initiatives.



Not aligned to daily work.

Group Discussion.

Where
will **resistance**
show up in your
organisation?



Part 4:

Designing the Architecture

The Four Architecture Decisions

Building a capability framework involves four design decisions. Get these right and everything else follows. Get them wrong and no amount of good writing will save it.

These are design decisions, not style choices. Each one has a right answer for your context.

Scope

Organisation-wide, function-level, or role cluster? Your strategy brief determines this

Depth

How many tiers? A flat list, or capability sets that group them?

Granularity

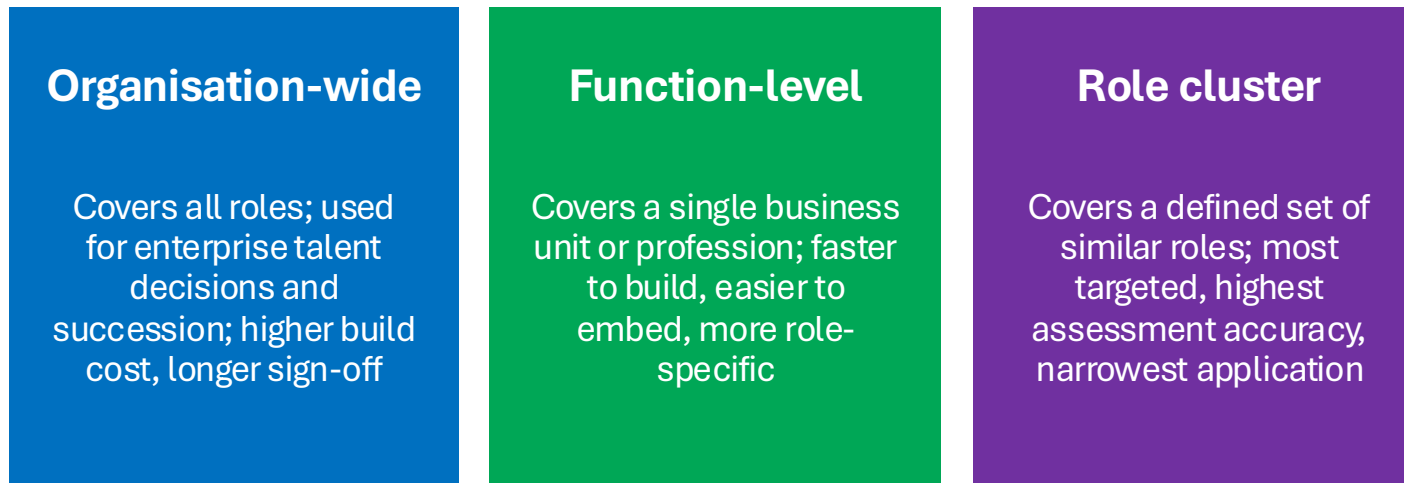
How many capabilities?
Enough to be meaningful; few enough to be usable.

Proficiency scale

How many levels?
Determined by role complexity, not preference.

Scoping the Framework

The most common architecture mistake is building an organisation-wide framework when a functional one was needed : or vice versa.



How to decide: Go back to your strategy brief. What decision does this framework need to support? Start with the smallest scope that answers that question. You can always expand.

Over-scoping is the single biggest cause of frameworks that never get finished.

How Many Capabilities

The evidence and practice consistently point to the same range: 8–15 capabilities per framework.

**Below
8**

Too abstract to assess meaningfully;
people can't self-assess against
something that broad

8-15

Assessable, memorable, actionable;
managers can hold this many in a
conversation

16-20

Manageable if grouped well into
capability sets; assessment fatigue
becomes a risk

**Over
20**

almost always signals scope creep or a
competency list masquerading as a
capability framework

The question is not “how many capabilities does this organisation have?” It is “how many can people actually use?”

Number of Capabilities	Pros	Cons
1-5	- Simplifies framework management - Provides clear focus for development efforts - Easier to track individual progress	- May oversimplify employee roles and responsibilities - Limited scope for capability diversity and specialisation
6-10	- Allows for more comprehensive coverage - Provides greater depth in capability development - Encourages cross-functional collaboration	- Potential for increased complexity in management - Can be overwhelming for employees to navigate
11-15	- Enables deeper specialisation in roles - Facilitates alignment with business objectives - Enhances adaptability to evolving needs	- Requires more resources for development and tracking - Risk of redundancy or overlap in capabilities
16-20	- Provides robust coverage across various domains - Supports talent retention and career progression - Allows for more nuanced capability assessment	- Requires significant time and effort for development - Potential for information overload for employees
21-30	- Offers extensive capability diversity - Supports innovation and creativity - Enables scalability as the company grows	- Complexity in mapping capabilities to job roles - Increased administrative overhead
30+	- Accommodates highly specialised roles - Flexibility to adapt to various job functions - Provides comprehensive coverage across the organisation	- Risk of overwhelming employees with too many options - Challenges in maintaining relevance and coherence

Proficiency Levels : The Right Number

3 levels

Use when roles are relatively similar in complexity; simpler to assess, easier for managers to apply

4 levels

The most common choice; enough differentiation for performance and development without overcomplicating assessment

5 levels

use when roles span a wide complexity range (e.g. graduate to expert); requires more rigorous descriptor writing

What drives the choice:

Role differentiation: how different is a junior from a senior in this capability?

Assessment burden: more levels = more calibration effort for managers

System constraints: does your platform support the number of levels you're planning?

Proficiency Level	Pros	Cons
Level 3	- Offers a moderate level of proficiency. - Provides a balanced middle ground. - Simplicity may aid in easy understanding.	- May lack granularity for a detailed assessment. - Distinctions between individuals might be limited.
Level 4	- Represents a high level of proficiency. - Allows for a more detailed evaluation. - Strikes a balance between simplicity and detail.	- Still limited in granularity compared to higher levels. - Complexity might increase in the assessment process.
Level 5	- Indicates a mastery or near-mastery level. - Enables a comprehensive and detailed assessment. - Suitable for roles requiring expert-level skills.	- May be challenging to differentiate the very top performers. - Can be time-consuming for evaluators.
Level 6	- Offers finer distinctions in proficiency. - More nuanced evaluation of capabilities. - Useful for roles where subtle differences matter.	- Increased complexity in assessment and interpretation. - Requires a higher level of expertise in assessment.
Level 7	- Provides a highly detailed assessment. - Enables a thorough understanding of capabilities. - Suitable for roles demanding exceptional skills.	- May be overwhelming for some evaluators. - Requires a robust assessment and feedback system.

Hierarchy and Grouping

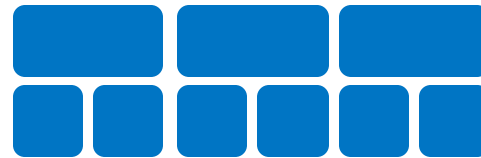
A flat list of 12 capabilities and a grouped framework with 3 sets of 4 contain the same content. They signal very different things.

Flat list



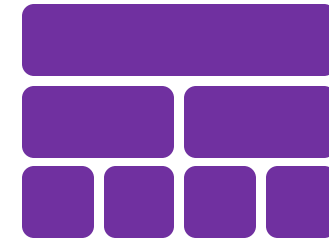
works for small frameworks (under 10);
easy to navigate; no structural priority
signalled

Two-tier (sets + capabilities)



The standard for most frameworks; sets
group by domain and signal where the
organisation is investing

Three-tier



Use only for complex technical
frameworks where granularity
genuinely matters; high build and
maintenance cost

Grouping rule: capability sets should reflect strategic priorities, not org chart structure. If your sets map perfectly to your business units, that's a warning sign.

Common Architecture Mistakes

Most framework failures are architecture failures dressed up as adoption problems.

Too many capabilities: becomes a catalogue; no one can remember it or meaningfully assess against it

No grouping : 25 capabilities in a flat list signals no strategic thinking and overwhelms users

Levels that don't differentiate: if Level 2 and Level 3 descriptors read nearly the same, the scale is broken

Scope creep mid-build: starting with one function and expanding to three mid-project produces incoherent frameworks

Architecture by committee : every stakeholder adds their priorities; the result reflects everyone's concerns and no one's strategy

Diagnose the architecture before you diagnose the writing.

Part 5:

Writing Capabilities Properly

The Writing Problem

Most capability descriptions fail in one of three ways:



They describe tasks, not abilities

“Conducts performance reviews”



They restate the name

Stakeholder Engagement: *“The ability to engage stakeholders...”*



They smuggle in proficiency language

“...effectively”, “at a high level”, “consistently”

The result: descriptions that could mean anything: or nothing.

What You Are Actually Writing

There are two distinct writing tasks in any capability framework.

Layer 1 : Capability or Competency Description (what it is)

A 1–2 sentence statement defining the ability itself. It applies at every level and never references how well something is done. This is the *what*.

Layer 2 : Proficiency Descriptor (how well, at each level)

An observable, behavioural statement describing what this looks like in practice at a specific proficiency level. This is the *how well*.

These are different jobs. Mixing them creates frameworks that collapse under scrutiny.



The Name Rule

Capability and competency names follow one rule: **compound noun, 2–4 words, title case, no verbs.**

The test: can you put “*The ability to...*” in front of it and have it make sense?

Also watch for: names that are a single generic word (*Leadership, Communication*) : these often belong as a Set, not an individual Capability.

✓ Stakeholder Engagement	✗ Engaging Stakeholders
✓ Commercial Acumen	✗ Being Commercially Aware
✓ Data-Informed Decision Making	✗ Uses Data Well
✓ Risk Management	✗ Managing Risk

The Description Rule

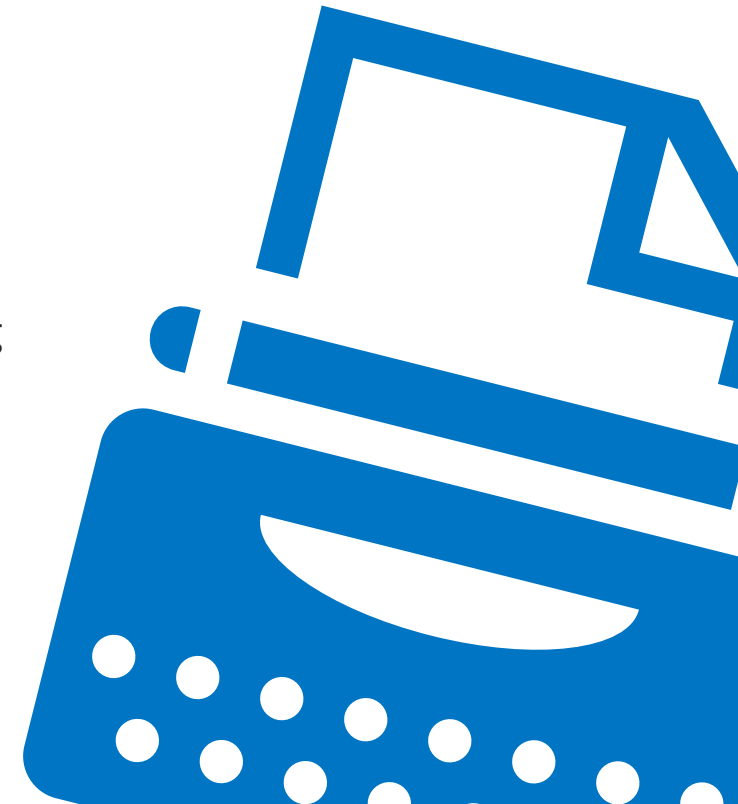
Every capability and competency description opens with the same three words:

“The ability to...”

Then it does three things:

1. **Captures what the ability enables** : not just what it is called
2. **Stays outcome-oriented** (capability) or **performance-oriented** (competency)
3. **Contains no proficiency language** : *effectively, expertly, at a high level, consistently* belong in the proficiency descriptors

The description defines the ability. The descriptor defines the performance standard.



Good vs Weak : Examples

Capability: Stakeholder Engagement



Weak: “The ability to engage stakeholders effectively across the organisation.”

Restates the name. Contains proficiency language (*effectively*). Rewrite.



Strong: “The ability to identify, influence, and build productive relationships with individuals and groups whose support is critical to achieving shared organisational outcomes.”

Competency: Commercial Awareness



Weak: “The ability to be commercially aware in your role.”

Restates name. No content.



Strong: “The ability to understand how the business generates value, interpret commercial signals, and factor business considerations into day-to-day decisions.”

Writing Proficiency Descriptors

A proficiency descriptor answers: *“What does this look like in practice, at this level?”*

Three rules:

Observable: actions and outputs, not knowledge states or attitudes

Present tense, third person: *Applies..., Leads..., Shapes...*

Positively framed: what someone does, never what they can't do



“Understands the importance of stakeholder relationships”

Knowledge state. Not observable. Cannot be assessed.



“Identifies key stakeholders and engages with them in a professional and timely manner, seeking guidance when navigating unfamiliar relationships.”

Observable. Behavioural. Assessable.

What Escalates Across Levels

Descriptors must be meaningfully distinct. Use these dimensions to drive escalation:

Scope: task / self → team / organisation

Complexity: routine / defined → ambiguous / novel

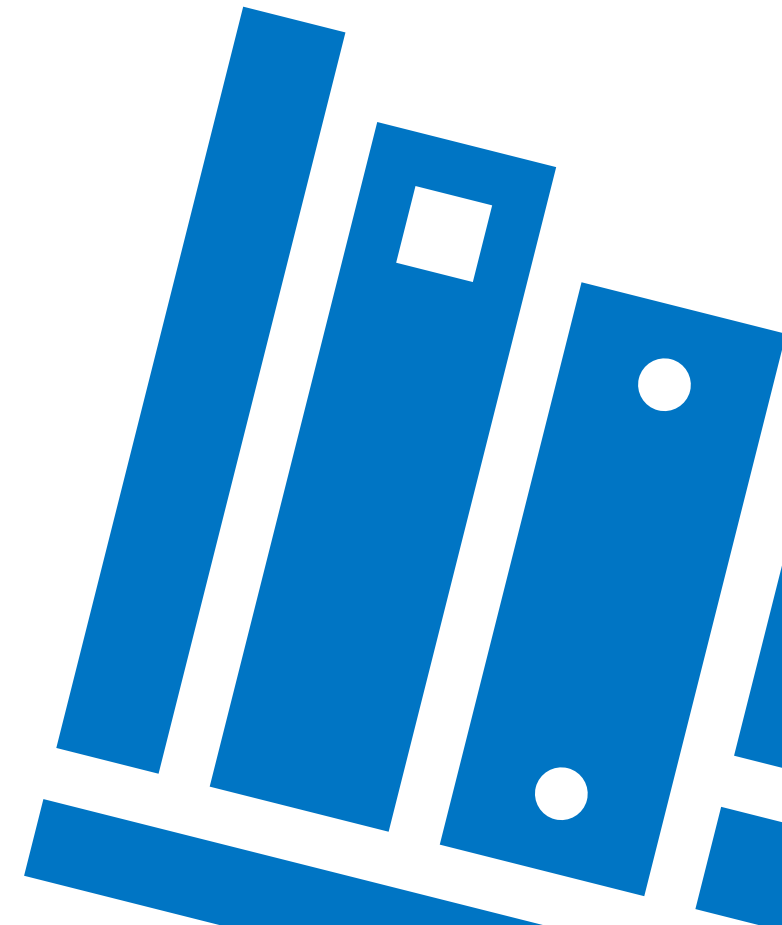
Autonomy: with guidance → independently / proactively

Influence: applies → coaches / shapes / leads

Impact: activity output → strategic or organisational value

At least one dimension must shift clearly between every adjacent level.

If two adjacent descriptors read nearly identically, they are not sufficiently differentiated.





Bloom's Verb Ladder

Match the verb to the level: not the other way around. A weak verb at a high level signals a weak descriptor.

Foundational: Applies, follows, identifies, supports, assists, describes

Developing: Adapts, analyses, contributes, coordinates, manages, interprets

Proficient: Evaluates, coaches, leads, facilitates, drives, integrates

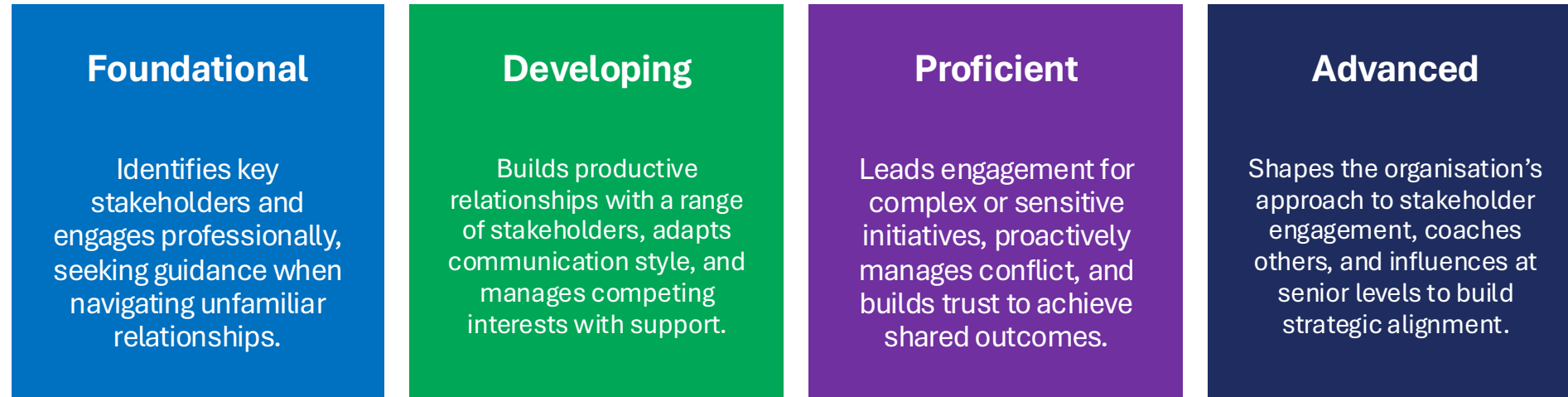
Advanced: Shapes, influences, designs, champions, advises, enables

Expert: Defines, transforms, sets direction, builds capability, establishes

Watch for descriptors that start with “***Understands***” or “***Knows***” : these are knowledge states, not observable behaviours. Always rewrite as a behavioural action.

Live Example : Full Progression

Stakeholder Engagement (4 levels):



*Note how each level shifts on: **autonomy** (guidance → independently → proactively → shaping others), **scope** (own work → range → complex → organisation-wide) and **influence** (applies → manages → leads → coaches).*

Example (not so good)

Capability name



Managing employee relations with retired or phased-out employees

Managing employee relations with retired or phased-out employees involves creating and implementing strategies to maintain positive relationships between the organization and former employees who have retired or phased-out of their roles. This includes developing and administering policies and programs related to retired or phased-out employees, providing support and resources to retired or phased-out employees, addressing issues related to retired or phased-out employee relations, and continuously improving retired or phased-out employee management processes to enhance employee well-being and organizational performance. It also involves promoting a culture of respect and professionalism, and maintaining positive relationships with retired or phased-out employees.

Capability definition

Competency levels

Beginner

At the beginner level, individuals understand the basic principles of retired or phased-out employee management and the company's policies and programs. They are able to participate in administering retired or phased-out employee programs, communicate effectively with retired or phased-out employees and stakeholders, and follow established protocols and procedures related to retired or phased-out employee relations.

Intermediate

At the intermediate level, individuals have a deeper understanding of retired or phased-out employee management strategies and their application to the company's needs. They are able to lead efforts to develop and administer policies and programs related to retired or phased-out employees that align with the company's overall business goals and values. They can provide support and resources to retired or phased-out employees, address issues related to retired or phased-out employee relations, and communicate effectively with retired or phased-out employees and stakeholders. Intermediate professionals also have the skills to train and coach others on retired or phased-out employee management strategies and policies.

Advanced

At the advanced level, individuals have a comprehensive understanding of retired or phased-out employee management strategies and their application in complex, global organizations. They are able to design and implement retired or phased-out employee management programs that comply with legal and regulatory requirements, promote employee well-being and organizational performance, and align with the company's overall business goals and values. They can use advanced techniques such as workforce planning and knowledge transfer to analyze and interpret retired or phased-out employee data, identify trends and patterns, and develop strategies to improve organizational performance. They also have strong leadership skills, with the ability to inspire and motivate teams to achieve retired or phased-out employee management goals and drive continuous improvement throughout the organization.

Competency level definitions

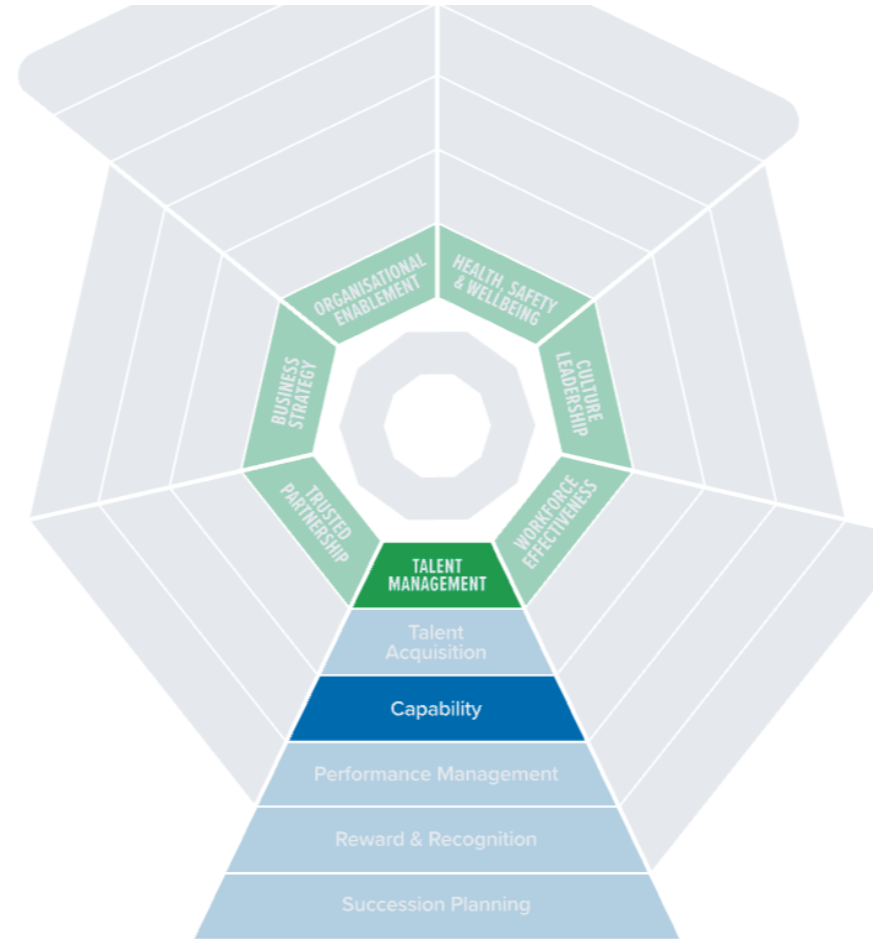
Example (good)

THE AUSTRALIAN HR CAPABILITY FRAMEWORK

 CAPABILITIES – I DO

 SKILLS & KNOWLEDGE – I CAN

 BEHAVIOURS – I AM



STUDENT / EARLY CAREER	MID CAREER	EMERGING LEADER	SENIOR LEADER / EXECUTIVE
Capability Strategically plans and executes organisational capability development initiatives, ensuring alignment with business objectives and anticipated workforce needs. Champions a culture of continuous learning and development, integrating capability building with talent management strategies. Analyses risk factors associated with organisational capabilities, implementing proactive strategies to mitigate potential impacts on business objectives.			



Writing Exercise

10 minutes.

Pick a capability name from your Part 2 strategy exercise. Draft:

- 1. A capability description** : 1–2 sentences, opens with “The ability to...”
- 2. A Foundational descriptor** : what does this look like at entry level?
- 3. An Advanced descriptor** : what does this look like at near-mastery?

Test your work:

- Does the description avoid restating the capability name?
- Do the descriptors use action verbs, not knowledge states?
- Does something meaningfully escalate between Foundational and Advanced?

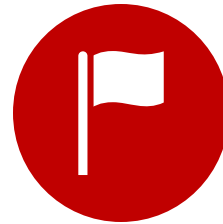
Share back: one description + one thing you had to rewrite and why.

The Three Red Flags

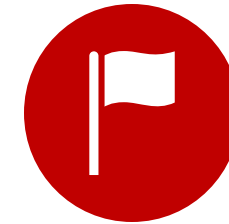
If you spot any of these in a framework, it needs rework:



Two adjacent proficiency descriptors read nearly identically : swap one word and they reverse.
If they're not clearly distinct, the levels cannot be assessed. Rewrite both.



Description opens with anything other than “*The ability to...*”



Descriptor starts with “*Understands...*” or “*Knows...*” : not observable behaviour.
Always rewrite as a behavioural action that can be observed and assessed

Always rewrite as a behavioural action that can be observed and assessed.

Part 6:

Adoption & Iteration

Why Frameworks Stall



Most capability frameworks don't fail because they were badly written.

They fail because they were never properly embedded.

The adoption gap looks like this:

"We built it."

"People know about it."

"It's used in hiring. It's in performance reviews. Managers reference it."

Most organisations get to step two. Very few reach step three.

That gap is an embedding problem, not a quality problem.



The Adoption Gap

Between “we built it” and “it’s actually used” sits a predictable set of failure points:

No executive sponsorship: No one is accountable for making it land

Not embedded in processes: It lives in a document, not in hiring or performance

Manager bypass: Managers don’t know how to use it, so they don’t

No review cadence: It goes stale and loses credibility

Language drift: People use the names but redefine them informally

The framework doesn’t need to be perfect to succeed. It needs to be used.

The 4 Embedding Moves

These are the non-negotiables for a framework that sticks

Miss any one of these and the framework stays a document.

Executive ownership

a named sponsor who holds others accountable and uses the language visibly

HR process integration

recruitment, performance, development and succession all reference the framework

Manager activation

managers need a “how to use this” briefing, not just access to the document

Review cadence

a scheduled date (12–18 months) to review relevance as strategy evolves

Refresh vs Rebuild

Iteration doesn't mean starting over. Know which one you need:

Refresh

Update 1–3 capabilities, adjust descriptor language, add a new group. Triggered by role evolution, team restructure, strategy update.

Rebuild

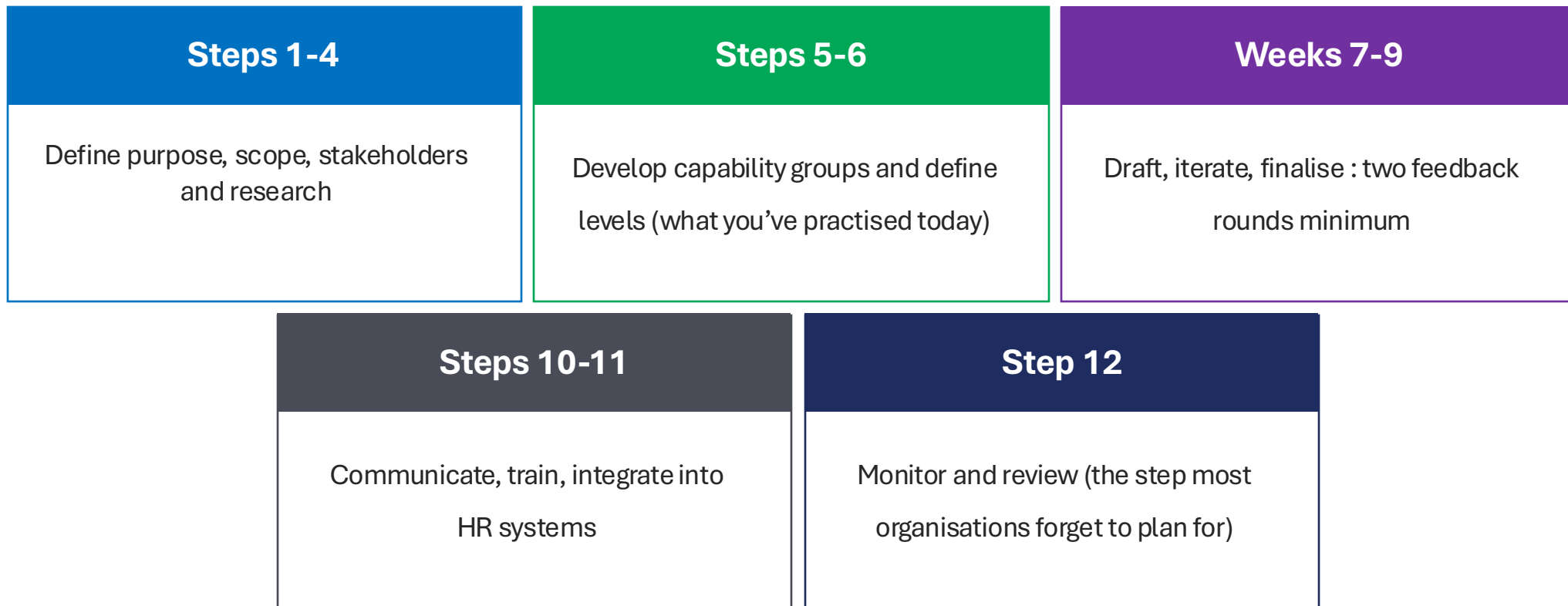
The framework no longer reflects what the organisation does. Triggered by strategic pivot, M&A, or major workforce transformation.

The signal to rebuild: more than 30% of capabilities need rewriting, or the strategic context has fundamentally changed.

Most organisations: refresh every 12–18 months. Rebuild is a 3–5 year event.

Your Implementation Roadmap

The project plan handout maps the full lifecycle across 12 steps:



The most important column in the plan is **Status**. Make it honest.

Monday Commitment

Before you close the laptop today:

What is the one thing you will do in the next two weeks to move your framework forward?

It might be:

- Book a meeting with your executive sponsor
- Identify the two HR processes where the framework should appear first
- Draft your first three capability names and test the name rule
- Share the project plan with your CHRO and agree a milestone

Write it down. Make it specific. Put a date on it.



Part 7: Embedding in HR

The Integration Imperative



A framework that isn't embedded in HR processes is a document, not a system.

The cost of non-embedding:

Build effort wasted: stakeholder time and sign-off produce nothing durable

Credibility erodes: people see it as “another HR initiative” and disengage from the next one

Assessment becomes arbitrary: without shared language, performance judgements drift back to subjectivity

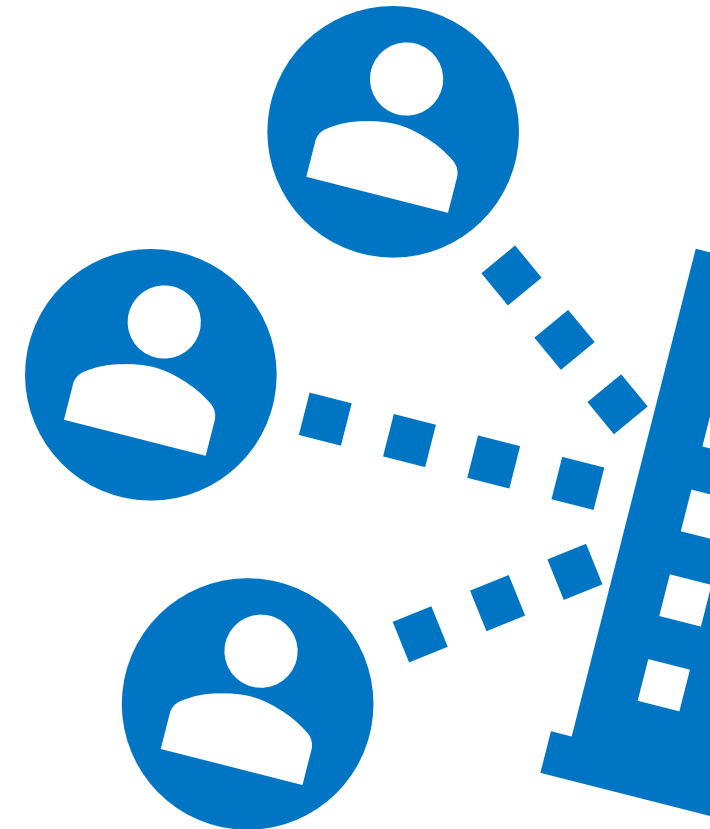
Embedding is not a comms campaign. It is a redesign of how decisions get made.

Embedding in Recruitment

The framework gives recruitment something it usually lacks: consistent, observable criteria.

- **Job advertisements:** Capability names replace generic competency language (“strong communicator” → “Stakeholder Engagement”)
- **Selection criteria:** Foundational/Developing descriptors define the entry bar for the role
- **Interview questions:** Each question maps to a specific capability and proficiency level; assessors score against descriptors, not impressions
- **Hiring decisions** : Gap between candidate level and role requirement becomes visible and discussable

Practical step: build a one-page interview guide per role that lists the 4–6 capabilities being assessed and the descriptor for the expected level.



Embedding in Performance

Performance conversations are where the framework earns trust : or loses it.

Without: ratings reflect manager bias, recency effect and relationship quality

With: ratings are anchored to descriptors; conversations focus on evidence, not opinion

What changes:

Check-in : “Where are you sitting against these three capabilities right now?”

Ratings: “Proficient” means the descriptor, not “meets expectations”

Feedback: tied to specific behaviours in the descriptor, not general impressions

Practical step: add 2–3 capability self-assessments to the performance review template.



Embedding in Development

Development planning without a framework is guesswork. With one, it becomes targeted.

The shift: from “What course would you like?” to “You’re at Developing on Commercial Acumen. Here’s the path to Proficient.”

What this requires:

Gap identification: assessment reveals where individuals sit vs where the role requires them to be

Content mapping: learning content mapped to specific capabilities and levels

Development plan : built against the gap, with a target proficiency level and timeline

Practical step: map your top 10 L&D offerings to the framework before launch.



Embedding in Succession

Succession decisions are where frameworks either become strategic or stay cosmetic.

Common problem: succession pools are built on tenure, visibility and informal advocacy, not capability evidence

Framework solution: readiness is assessed against the Advanced or Expert descriptor for the target role's critical capabilities

In practice:

Talent reviews: each candidate is mapped against 4–6 critical capabilities for the target role

Readiness gaps: identified explicitly (“Proficient on 4 of 6; gap on Strategic Thinking and Commercial Acumen”)

Development actions: targeted at closing specific gaps, not generic leadership programmes

Practical step: define the 5–6 critical capabilities for your top 3 senior roles before the next talent review cycle.



Change Management

The operational changes above will fail if the people expected to use the framework don't know how.

The two highest-risk groups:

HR business partners: need to be confident facilitating capability conversations; if they're uncertain, they avoid it

Line managers: are the primary users in performance and development;

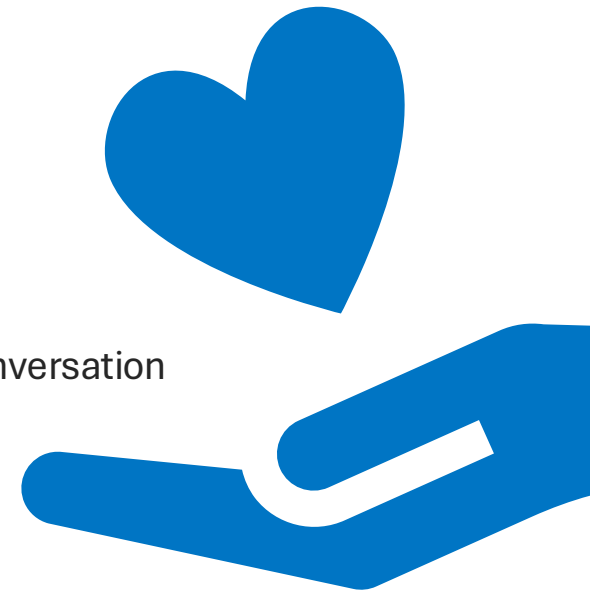
they need a "how to use this" briefing, not just access to the document

What "activating" managers actually requires:

A 60-minute briefing: What the framework is, how to read a proficiency descriptor, how to have the conversation

A conversation guide: 3–4 questions they can use in a check-in, mapped to the framework

One practice round: a team huddle where they try it before it goes live in performance cycles



Common Resistance Patterns

Expect these. Have a response ready.

“We already do this.” : Ask: “Can you show me where the criteria are written down and consistently applied?” Usually exposes the gap

“It’s too complex.” : Start with two processes only (recruitment + performance check-in).
Complexity is a rollout problem, not a framework problem.

“Managers won’t use it.” : They won’t if you email them a PDF. They will if you run a 60-minute briefing and give them a conversation guide.

“We’ll do it after the next restructure.” : A restructure is the best reason to have the framework in place, not to delay it.



The First 90 Days

Launch is not embedding. Here's how to sequence the first 90 days:

Weeks 1-4	Weeks 5-8	Weeks 9-12
Brief HR team and HRBPs. Update recruitment templates for one role. Run first manager briefing session.	Add capability self-assessment to performance check-in template. Map top L&D offerings to framework. Run second manager cohort.	Conduct first capability assessment cycle. Identify top 5 development gaps organisation-wide. Begin succession mapping for senior roles.

By end of month 3 you should have:

At least one process changed (not just communicated)

At least one manager cohort briefed

At least one team with a capability-anchored development plan

Part 8:

Longevity & Governance



Why Frameworks Die

Most frameworks don't die dramatically.

They fade: usage drifts, language shifts, and eventually no one references them in real decisions.

The three structural failure modes:

No owner: everyone assumes someone else is accountable for keeping it alive

No review cycle: built for the organisation as it was, not as it is now

No data connection: no feedback loop between the framework and actual outcomes

Governance fixes all three. Without it, longevity is luck.

Governance Essentials

A framework needs four roles filled, not one:

Framework owner: L&D or People capability; owns integrity, language consistency and the review cycle

Executive sponsor: Visibly endorses the framework; escalation point when business units push back

HR operations: Ensures the framework is reflected in systems, templates and process documentation

Review committee: HR + 2–3 business unit heads; meets annually to validate relevance

If one person is doing all four jobs, the framework is one resignation away from collapse.

The Review Cycle

A review cycle is not a rewrite, it is a structured check on whether the framework still fits.

Annual review, what it involves:

Rule of thumb: if the review takes more than two days, you've waited too long.

Inputs

Assessment data, manager feedback, hiring observations, strategy updates

Decisions

Refresh (update language, adjust levels) or flag for rebuild if scope is too large

Questions

are any capabilities obsolete? Have new ones emerged? Are levels calibrated correctly?

Outputs

Updated version, change log, stakeholder comms, updated HR system records

Connecting to Data

A framework disconnected from data is an opinion. Connected to data, it becomes evidence.

The data sources that keep a framework honest:

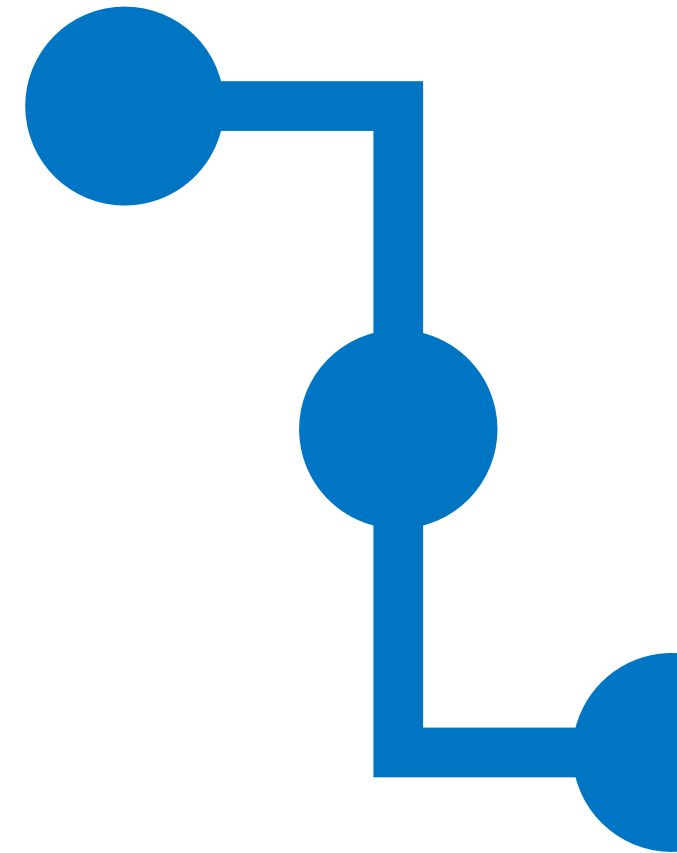
Assessment results: where are consistent gaps? Which capabilities are rated unrealistically high?

Hiring outcomes: do “Proficient” candidates actually perform at that level at 6 months?

Performance trends: are development plans built against the framework actually moving capability scores?

L&D uptake: low engagement on a capability is either a content gap or a descriptor problem

Without systematic data, reviews are based on gut feel.



Signs Your Framework Needs Attention

These are observable signals, no survey required:

Language inconsistency: different teams use the same capability name to mean different things

Low assessment completion: people are skipping or rushing; the framework feels like admin, not insight

Manager avoidance: referenced once at cycle start, then not mentioned again

Descriptor complaints: “This doesn’t describe my role” is said repeatedly about the same capabilities

No escalation: no one has raised a concern since launch; silence is not health

Any two of these together signals a review. Three is a mandate.



What Good Looks Like at 2 Years

Organisations that get this right look like this at the 24-month mark:

- 7 **The language is in the room:** capability names appear in hiring, performance and team conversations without prompting
- 7 **Gaps are known and planned for:** L&D investment is directed by assessed gaps, not by what's popular
- 7 **Succession is evidence-based:** talent reviews reference capability data, not tenure and visibility
- 7 **The framework has been updated:** a framework never revised has never truly been used
- 7 **Ownership is clear:** someone can name the owner, the sponsor and the next review date without hesitating

That is the standard worth building toward.



Closing section

What You Now Have

Across eight parts, you've covered:

- 7 **Foundation:** why frameworks exist and what they're actually for
- 7 **Architecture:** how to structure, scope and write a framework that holds up
- 7 **Proficiency:** how to define levels that mean something and can be assessed
- 7 **Adoption:** how to move from launch to embedded in HR processes
- 7 **Longevity:** how to govern, review and connect to data so it stays alive

*A framework is only as good as what happens after you build it.
You now know what that looks like.*



Questions

What came up for you today?

Some prompts if helpful:

- Where is your current framework strongest? Where is the biggest gap?
- What is the single biggest blocker to embedding it in your organisation right now?
- What would need to be true for your framework to still be in use in two years?

Take the time. These questions are worth answering out loud 😊



Your Monday Commitment

The most common reason capability frameworks stall is that no one does anything differently on Monday.

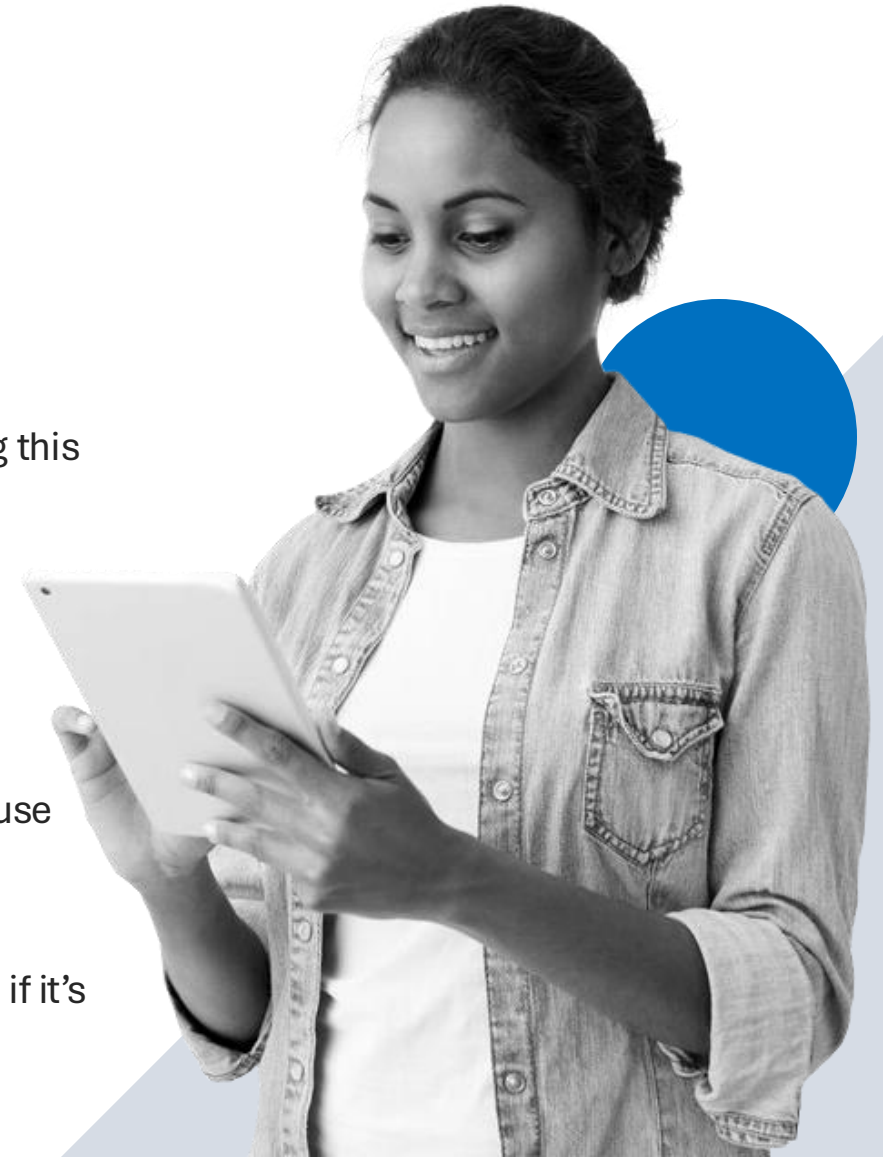
Pick one:

Name the owner: identify (or become) the person accountable for keeping this framework alive

Update one template: add capability language to a job ad, a performance check-in or a hiring guide

Brief one manager: spend 30 minutes walking a manager through how to use the framework in a conversation

Schedule the first review: put a date in the calendar now; it won't happen if it's not scheduled



Thank you

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