A capability framework for cities: Examining the skills required to shape policy and pioneer meaningful change in our cities

Cities Institute Agenda Setting
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UNSW Cities Institute

ASTROLABE GROUP

UNSW SYDNEY

CITY WELLBEING

Background

Purpose

Cities are not only occupied by urban and city planners. The experiences of planners aren't enough to incorporate the needs of everyone who lives and uses urban spaces. As our cities and communities grow more complex the systems in place need to adapt and become more responsive to these fast changes. A multidisciplinary approach allows for professionals with different expertise to all approach the same problem and can assist in developing a holistic solution.

The benefits of incorporating the expertise of more than just one discipline allows for greater strides in innovative practices.[1] Building a unique multidisciplinary approach uses critical thinking, adaptability, flexibility and high-level problem-solving skills to solve complex issues.[2] The insights from collaboration with stakeholders that operate within different professional fields, can transcend the previously considered boundaries of any complex problem. This leads to more agile solutions which can be implemented in a way that considers the specific needs of the users.

In order for the Cities Institute to realise it's vision for the future through a real world approach, understanding the skills, knowledge and behaviours of all stakeholders working together will support driving its ambitious agenda.

The purpose of this paper is to investigate the value of developing a capability framework to support the Cities Institute research and collaboration agenda. It intends to explore the questions that need to be asked to form the foundation for a capability framework that details the skills, knowledge and practices that city shapers need to have for the benefit of all current future city users and residents. Considerations include:

> Consider gaps in capability resources and how existing resources might be leveraged

> Explore usefulness of a framework as either (or both) an internal development tool or external development tool.

> Identify key stakeholders they want to integrate into their network and possible application of a framework.

> Explore with stakeholders the skills, knowledge and behaviour attributes that would support the Cities Institute vision and direction.

> Consider how CI seeks to advocate across its themes across city performance, wellbeing and infrastructure and what specific skills, knowledge and behaviour can help advance

> Consider how a framework support CI methods of delivery such as:
  – Public panels, discussions, roundtables, workshops, eg generate interest, and co-design frameworks
  – Published research eg help to shape research and teams
  – Graduate, postgraduate and short courses, eg enhance existing offerings through aligning framework knowledge, skills and attributes
  – Professional development eg develop new micro/ short courses for government and industry,
  – Consultancy services eg articulate expertise and ways of working

1   https://opus.lib.uts.edu.au/bitstream/10453/131133/1/Dorst_TIMReview_August2018.pdf
2   https://www.open.edu/openlearn/education-development/multidisciplinary-study-the-value-and-benefits/content-section-7

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Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge the Bidjigal, the Traditional Custodians of the land on which the Cities Institute is located, and pay our respects to Elders, past and present.

Capability Statements

The role of capability statements

Capability statements set the culture of an organisation and provide direction for individuals (Australian Public Service Academy, 2023). A capability framework typically involves identifying and defining skills, knowledge and behaviours in workforce needs and development.

A framework is not designed to prescriptive or exhaustive – it provides guidance.

For an entity like the Cities Institute, a capability statement could provide a framework for partners and collaborators to align with.

Components of a capability framework

A Capability Framework outlines the skills, knowledge and practices that city-shapers need to perform their duties in a way that supports organisation vision and values.

Benefits of a capability statement:

> Provides a common language to describe capabilities
> Identify behaviour attributes in ways of working

An effective Capability Statement will outline how:

> To support employees and leaders
> How it will impact the community it serves
> How it intends to improve outcomes
> To identify and build workforce requirements
> Leadership should use the framework

How HR practitioners use :

> Recruit
> Assess cultural fit
> Develop cultural capability
> Improve workforce planning
> Performance management

There are some consistent attributes of a successful framework: make purpose clearly defined, have a balance of technical and people skills as well as behaviours, provide a growth trajectory (eg emergent, foundation, advance), have learning pathways linked

Who uses capability frameworks and why

Capability Frameworks are used by agencies and corporations as a guideline for all of their staff, and stipulates the behaviours that are expected, and the attributes that staff are expected to have or to work towards.

Some examples of industry and organisations with Capability Frameworks include:

> Public Service: (eg NSW and Victoria)
> NSW Government Capability Framework: describes the core knowledge, behaviours, skills and abilities required of all public sector employees, across all levels and all occupational groups
> Australian Government Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultural Capability Framework - outlines skills, knowledge, and practices that employees need to perform their duties in a culturally informed way and NSW Government Connecting to Country Framework – supporting culturally appropriate planning
> Emerging industries: (NDIS)
> Corporations:
> Research Instructions / Thinktanks / Advocacy Institute
> Brookings Institution Innovation Precincts – including precinct audit across capacity and leadership requirement. Additional resources for governance.
> UQ Capability Framework

Behaviour attributes

The Capability Framework would support city shapers to:

> Align their skills and work with the vision, values and goals of the Cities Institute
> Make informed and strategic decisions in their daily work
> Ensure policies, programmes and service delivery reflects and serves the unique needs of all city users
> Engage with all city users from residents, to street sweepers to politicians
> Foster workplace, and city cultures that are based on respect and equity
> Self-reflect on performance
> Build relationships
> Some behaviours to support ways of working: Communication, Collaboration, Influence and negotiate, build consensus and commitment, Resolve issues and conflict

Vision and Value Setting

The Cities Institute proposes a better future for people by bringing together innovative thinking around people, place and culture.

The purpose of the Cities Institute is to research, design and help deliver better cities. The work of the Cities Institute will impact the lives of city users in direct and indirect ways. During a housing crisis

The Capability Framework should identify key workforce skill and knowledge requirements in order to deliver on the vision and purpose of the Cities Institute. It should also provide benefits beyond the Cities Institute. It should provide other actors in the city-shaping sector to identify skills, practices, and people to deliver on the same overarching goal for great cities of the future.

Global Context

Goal 11 of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals is to "make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable" (UN SDGs, 2023). This goal provides a useful benchmark for a Capability Framework.

Each of the targets under Goal 11 can be used to inform the capabilities required to deliver on the themes and core elements of the Cities Institute:

> 11.1 Affordable housing
> 11.2 safe and affordable transport
> 11.3 inclusive and sustainable urbanization and planning
> 11.4 protect cultural and natural heritage
> 11.5 reduce deaths and victims of disasters
> 11.6 reduce environmental impact especially air quality and waste management
> 11.7 universal access to green and public spaces
> 11.a support economic, social and environmental links between urban, peri-urban and rural areas
> 11.b adopt integrated policies that address mitigation and adaptation to climate change and enable resilience to disasters
> 11.c support LDCs in building sustainable, resilient buildings and utilizing local materials

Values

The core elements that guide the pursuit of the Cities Institute are: City Performance, City Wellbeing and City Infrastructure. In order to build capacity and strength within each of these elements the values that underpin them need to be identified and defined as a priority.

Values should include those that include: integrity, respect and ethics, diversity, inclusion and equity.

City Performance

How is city performance defined? Who is the city performing for? What are the metrics? How do these metrics align with the SDGs?

A city should perform in a way that benefits all users: residents, visitors, employees, business owners and industry. It should benefit all users at all their intersections of age, ability, ethnicity, language, employment status, and educational status.

City Wellbeing

Does City Wellbeing consider both human and non-human residents? Does it consider the wellbeing of all users, as well as the wellbeing of trees and plants in the public parks and private gardens? Does it consider the wellbeing of pets and wild birds?

How can city-shapers be equipped to develop their own wellbeing, and the wellbeing of other people, and creatures?

City Infrastructure

Infrastructure of a city can be more straightforward and includes physical infrastructure as well as social infrastructure. But the capability framework should ensure that any infrastructure available in a city is accessible to all, in terms of proximity and affordability. That infrastructure is sturdy, robust, and safe. It should be designed and implemented with a long-term vision and outlook, and be adjustable for a changing population, and the changing needs of a population.

Themes

The Cities Institute should support the Capability Framework by providing insights on best practice, strategic advice and resources. The following core themes of the Cities Institute explores the potential capabilities that are required to deliver on each of these.

Cities Institute Themes	A Cities Capability Framework needs to support people to have the skills to:
Housing	• Make better housing policies • Design and implement policies that benefit society and the economy • That incorporates the goal of building back better, after disasters, • Think outside the box and deliver housing policy and build housing that is affordable • Addressing social mobility: in the context of house prices increasing more than incomes over the past 3-4 decades. • Research and understand needs Informed by: (Maclennan et al., 2021); (Lawson et al., 2018)
Sustainability	• To move from sustainable to regenerative development
Legislation	• To move away from 'top-down' interventions • Support bottom up initiatives • Move away from a 'tickbox culture' Informed by: (Boyle & Wyler, 2021)
Investment	• To identify investment pathways that would deliver housing
Ownership	• To experiment with rental policy • To examine how housing costs compound income poverty Source: (Randolph et al., n.d.)

Cities Institute Themes	A Cities Capability Framework needs to support people to have the skills to:
Inclusivity	• Poverty • Social divisions are continuing around the world (BLM) • Local Level leadership – leadership at different scles • Design intersect • Community control
Community Building	• Move from ego to eco-centric planning • To consider Country in their community building • To engage with civic society and promote greater civic society engagement with government processes • To centre Traditional owners • To connect activism, civil society and government in policy making • To build a community that doesn't leave anyone behind or exacerbate further inequality • To recognise and appreciate the resources and knowledge that already exists in communities (Boyle & Wyler, 2021), especially Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in Australia, along with Indigenous communities around the world.
Private and Public partnerships	• 'mission-oriented public investment' – transport, telecommunications, water, waste management, energy production and distribution (Lawson et al., 2018, p. 11) • Build trust
Public Spaces	• Infrastructure: schools, courts, prisons, hospitals – asset-based services enhancing social and economic wellbeing
Rehabilitating	• And regeneration • Local people

Briefing notes

Considerations

Cities are currently facing crises of housing, affordability, employment, educational placements, and social cohesion.

Cities are also growing rapidly. A century ago, just 10 percent of the global population lived in cities. By 2050, around two thirds of the world will seek to build their lives in urban centres.

City Shapers (all people working in policy for city growth and change) will need to work together collaboratively and support innovative thinking around people, place and culture.

A focus on behaviours is important – ways of working together, integrating multidiscipline approach critical to wicked challenges/systems change

A Capability Framework can provide the basis for a broad sector of city-shapers working across research, policy and application - that includes more than those that we typically think of as responsible for city development (such as planners and architects)

A Capability Framework must consider the desired future state and the actions and skills required to achieve it to be a meaningful tool for articulating the skills, knowledge and behaviour; and professional development of the workforce.

A Capability Framework must consider the behaviours and values or people and organisations and establish guidelines for collaboration and multidiscipline approaches with a systems thinking perspective.

A Capability Framework should support city shapers to:

> Make informed decisions;
> Implement legislation, policy, programs, and service delivery that reflects and serves the unique needs of different groups
> Achieve the targets of SDG 11: Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable.

The Capability Framework could be used to support activities of the Cities Institute in:

Internal development and delivery

> Training design
> Recruitment
> Skill development
> Workforce planning
> Professional development and upskilling
> Mentoring and coaching
> Procurement

External advancing city planning

> Articulating need for particular skills, knowledge and behaviours
> Bringing together multidiscipline teams across stakeholders in city shaping projects
> Articulating the value of multidisciplinary approaches for better outcomes

Recommendations

Consider gaps in capability resources and how existing resources might be leveraged

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Professional development eg develop new micro/short courses for government and industry,

Consultancy services eg articulate expertise and ways of working

Conclusion

In order for the Cities Institute to realise it's vision for the future through a real world approach, understanding the skills, knowledge and behaviours of all stakeholders working together will support driving its ambitious agenda.

Micro-credentials are short courses that enable learners to upskill quickly on specific areas of study. The pace in which the world is changing and evolving has disrupted the role tertiary education plays in preparing students to enter the workforce. The World Economic Forum estimated the half-life of professional skills is now 5 years and progressively decreasing, meaning that in 5 years or less, what we think we know will be outdated or wrong.

Micro-credentials enable learners from high school students to established professionals in the workforce to upskill quickly and cost-effectively. Their characteristics vary across businesses and educational institutions, both locally and internationally. They also range in duration, costs, prerequisites, audience and credentials on completion.

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Capability Frameworks

Select examples of capability frameworks:

Government Capability Framework: describes the core knowledge, behaviours, skills and abilities required of all public sector employees, across all levels and all occupational groups

> Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultural Capability Framework. https://www.apsacademy.gov.au/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-cultural-capability-framework
> Australian Government Capability Development Framework. https://www.homeaffairs.gov.au/about-us/careers/vacancies/capability-development-framework
> Australian Public Service Academic Cultural Capability. https://www.apsacademy.gov.au/aps-people/diversity-and-inclusion/cultural-capability
> NSW Public Sector Capability Framework. https://www.psc.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/2020-11/capability_framework_v2_2020.pdf
> Victorian Public Sector Commission Capability Framework. https://vpsc.vic.gov.au/workforce-capability-leadership-and-management/workforce-capability/vps-capability-framework/

University Capability Framework: describes knowledge, behaviours, skills and attributes required of tertiary sector staff:

> The University of Queensland Leadership Framework. https://staff.uq.edu.au/information-and-services/development/leadership/framework

Additional Resources: including precinct audit across capacity and leadership requirement:

> Brookings Institute: 12 Principles Guiding Innovation Districts. https://www.brookings.edu/articles/12-principles-guiding-innovation-districts-2/

About Cities Institute

We unite world class research with a real world approach, engaging with academia, industry, government and community groups to shape policy and pioneer meaningful change in our cities. We lead with deep experience in design methods, sustainable architecture and healthy urban and strategic planning.

Academic thinking grounds our practical initiatives in robust research. We connect those with insights with those that shape and deliver city outcomes, ensuring a practical application for policy, change and impact that ultimately benefits the communities around us.

Collaborate with us

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