

**LEARNING UNCUT EPISODE 5:  
MAKING A CAPABILITY FRAMEWORK VALUABLE – KATE FRASER**

- Michelle Ockers: Welcome to another episode of Learning Uncut. I'm Michelle Ockers
- Karen Moloney: And, I'm Karen Moloney.
- Michelle Ockers: Today we speak with Kate Fraser, the Learning and Development Manager at Standards Australia, about the use of a Capability Framework as a foundational input to developing an Academy in her organisation. We'll speak about developing a framework, how it's been used and maintaining the framework.
- Kate Fraser: Thank you.
- Karen Moloney: Hi Kate
- Kate Fraser: Hi Michelle
- Michelle Ockers: So Kate, we're going to talk a little bit about the Academy that you've set up at Standards Australia over the past few years, and in particular one piece of work around capability frameworks and the importance of them for the Academy, so perhaps if you can kick us off for talking to us a little bit about how the Academy got started and why it was important to the organisation?
- Kate Fraser: Yeah sure. So, our organisation being Standards Australia, we create and publish Australian standards. If you think of Australian standards for buildings you know minimum benchmarks for plumbing, electrical and certainly there are Australian standards for children's playgrounds and all sorts of things.
- So what our organisation does is we actually develop those standards and get them ready for publication and so the way that our business model is made up is that we have approximately a 110 staff that cover the whole nation and approximately 7,000 volunteers who are technical experts that do all the writing of the standards. What we do as an organisation is provide the product, the process and also the people to steer these volunteer technical experts in the right direction so that they can actually get the product at the end, which is the Australian standard for their industry.
- The reason why I'm giving you this background is because the organisation actually noted that they needed a systematic approach to training or learning to bring up our people to speed quicker but also to be able to bring up our volunteer technical experts quicker as well so that they understand what the rules of the game are what the process, is how do you actually write an Australian standard and so on. Whereas the focus for the staff is more around project management; what are the rules of putting a standard together what makes a standard why are standards important and that type of thing.

How it all began was my boss the deputy CEO went to the board and said we really need to invest in learning for our organisation, it needs to be done in a systematic way we need to start from grassroots, get it right from the outset, set up some very good foundations, please give us the budget to do it and they said yes. And so that's what prompted him to recruit a training manager at the time and to be able to get that underway and get started.

That's when I came along funnily enough I was actually one of those technical experts before I was an employee at Standards Australia so I had I had a head start in terms of how do you actually put a standard together I knew how to implement standards as well in practice and also knew some of the staff and the culture at Standards Australia so it was a brilliant head start. So then my boss gave me the project of setting up the Academy the brief was -

Michelle Ockers : I just going to say it sounds like it had really strong senior sponsorship then?

Kate Fraser: Yes, so that was definitely to my advantage and to my benefit that these things had already been highlighted. I had a lot of backing from the board particularly and also the executive, particularly the deputy CEO and the CEO. With that comes a lot of expectations as well being able to you know it's one little duck swimming on the water to get everything in place, and being able to manage those expectations and managing up. So whilst it's great to have that level of sponsorship being able to manage well, it's not going to happen tomorrow and to be able to articulate that, and to be able to give them the peace of mind when they need to go and report to the board that this is actually underway and the milestones are being met and that you know, progress is happening.

Michelle Ockers: At that point did you figure out that a capability framework was important to your strategy?

Kate Fraser: Yeah when I was handed the brief! The brief was brief, so it was pretty much, we need a learning framework we need you know to be able to bring our employers up to speed quicker it needs to be systematic and that was about the brief. So thankfully the organisation had already put out a new organisational strategy which was good and so that's when I started talking to our managers and our executive group around well whatever we do needs to align with that strategy and one of the ways to do that was to start looking at a capability framework.

I had spoken to a number of other standards organisations around the world also and so we have colleagues in the Netherlands particularly as well as the British Standards Institute they seem to be the leading organisations in terms of delivering academies when you look at the standards world , so I have a chat to them and then I also reached out to a number of other organisations in Australia to give context and just to really find out well given this brief how have other people embarked on this particular adventure and then started to speak to a lots of different consultants in the in the field.

I quickly arrived at the idea of a capability framework and the reason being was that well, given the brief and given where the organisation wants to go with the academy and certainly what our future plans are in terms of our strategic plan, I need to know what are the key skills and knowledge base that the whole organisation needs to be able to achieve that strategic plan and the capability framework was the way that I was able to do that I had the benefit of starting at Ground Zero grassroots there was very little legacy training and learning in place so that that is a great place to start from and of course the enthusiasm was there from the organisation to get going as well.

So that was how the capability framework came up before all of that though it was all part of the project plan that I got to prove by the executive and the board so just being able to plan out that project from the outset have really clear milestones the capability framework was part of that and being able to articulate each of those milestones so that the executive and the board have confidence in what you're doing as a learning partner.

Michelle Ockers: Fantastic. So perhaps it's time to have a chat about how did you go about building a capability framework? What did it take?

Kate Fraser: I recognised very quickly that I was and still am no expert in writing capability frameworks, and you know also recognized that this wasn't my only project on my workload so being one person running the learning function at Standards Australia you need to recognize where you can make impact if you're going to do it yourself and what do you outsource. My expertise was definitely not in capability frameworks, very interested but started you know really looking around to see you know, which consultants in the field do have the expertise who has done work with other organisations similar to ours and but then who also has a broad range of expertise and pulling one together because our business models a little bit different to most other organisations.

And so what we did was engage a consultant to be able to help us put that capability framework together and some of the key aspects of that consultant was that they did have a very broad range of introducing capability frameworks to lots of different types of organisations including organisations similar to ours, but also a very consultative approach and interested in becoming quite immersive to really understand the organisation and you know being able to tease out you know the salient points, what are the what are the key functions of the organisation the key skills and knowledge that we need to be able to achieve our strategic plan.

Karen Moloney: So when you started out would say you've kind of identified that you needed a capability framework and so how did you get started with identifying how you would use that framework within the organisation and how that would be applied and what you would need to do to get it implemented?

Kate Fraser: Yes ,so my I mean we had to fight for budget for this as well because the capability framework doesn't come at a bargain price and so to be able to

get that over the line I needed to articulate exactly what this would be used for and I could see well of course primarily it was to set up the Academy so that we could identify where the learning gaps are and where we're we're striving toward and how do we actually articulate the different proficiencies within the organisation.

To answer your question, I knew that I needed to offer all the other benefits of introducing a capability framework as well so it of course they're not only useful for learning and development of course they have lots of other benefits like you using it for recruitment or using it for performance management or using it for preparing an individualized learning plan. There's so many other uses for that and I've relied heavily on the consultant to help me with the articulation of that early on as well as you know throughout the project as well at the end of the project we did end up with a user guide that actually walks people through each of those uses so that it is quite clear that it's not just a learning and development initiative that it's actually across the organisation that's got lots of benefits for employees as well as managers and to have a common language about you know what is the knowledge the skill or the behaviour that we're looking for and what proficiency should we be at or in fact you're really quite a star in this particular capability maybe we can develop you even further because you are such a star and become even more proficient at it.

So those the uses are the capability framework were identified early on simply to be able to request and receive the budget that we're after as well as being able to demonstrate from the outset the value of the capability framework that it wasn't just one of those things that HR or L&D do and then it just ends up on the shelf and doesn't get used the in our organisation was very concerned about that because I think we've all seen that and you know making sure that the you know the benefits or the uses of that capability framework were wide ranging and really obvious.

Karen Moloney:

So the recruitment arm of the business is also implementing that a capability framework based on the work that you did. Was that something that came about, is that something that you took to them or was that something that they it was more strategic around they would be the next area to have a look at implementing a framework or how did that work?

Kate Fraser:

So we've worked in consultation with the HR team and I guess the stage one of introducing that capability framework was always you know with the setting up the Academy in mind but as part of as part of that project we actually aligned every position description to the capability framework as well so you would pick up any position description and the back page has a proficiency level for every capability that you would find in that in that framework.

The way our framework works is that you don't get a zero value for any of those capabilities you actually get a value so there's no here's no N/As as in not applicable, everybody gets a value towards everything so that therefore the selection of each of the capabilities was important because it meant that

every employee across Standards Australia was expected to have skills or knowledge at some level for each of those.

In terms of using it for recruitment to get back to your original question I guess the original push was about the Academy and this is how Learning and Development is meeting the needs of organisation etc and you know we rolled out quite a lot of awareness workshops on how to use the capability framework and so on, and we in terms of recruitment we found that managers were actually picking it up and using it if they're off their own steam they were finding it quite good the way that the capability framework was framed to them was you know this is given your this position description this is when the position or the person in that position is fully functioning flying in the position, not necessarily at novice. So what's where that's where you can actually identify what are you recruiting for what skills or what are you what are you happy to develop professionally if you do bring them on board and we're about to embark on phase two of the capability framework which is a review and also looking at how can we implement things stronger and one of those is to provide a little bit more structure around the recruitment now that we know that how people are using it.

Michelle Ockers: Okay, with 110 staff I'm not sure how many of those are managers, but I imagine there would have been an opportunity to involve a lot of them in the development of the framework how did that engagement work and what was done and how long did it take you to put the framework together?

Kate Fraser: So there was particularly because of the release of the first capability framework the organisation hadn't had one before so there was a fair amount of engagement that occurred to bring people on board and also make sure that we had some champions high up to help us smooth it over.

We actually found that lots of people were very interested in becoming involved because it was new they could see the benefits they could see that it would actually develop themselves in terms of their knowledge and they were interested in seeing how this aligns strategically to our strategic plan and many of them had a lot to say as well. Nearly every manager in the organisation was involved so that their team was equally represented throughout the capability framework because given the framework it actually it doesn't just cover one technical position it covers every position across Standards Australia so you've got you know we're covering everything from the legal team to finance to IT to publishing to you know our standards development project managers to our you know business analysts and that that is quite tricky in itself to you know make sure that the framework is not too generic that it doesn't say anything but not diving down into so much detail that only services one team has the noisiest manager that got everything in there that they wanted.

This is where the skills of the consultant that we brought on board really came into play the consultant was able to negotiate those things in you know because drawing on their own experience working with other organisations bigger and smaller being able to navigate those political

conversations as well and making sure that we're getting sign-off from the top that you know this is actually what it represents and what and does actually align strategically with our strategic plan.

So in terms of how long it took, a consultation always takes a long time and you need to make time for that and the consultant must have met with somewhere between 30 and 40 people spending time to ask them you know what are the key skills and knowledge pieces you know within your role within your team how does this align to the strategic plan here what it what are the top five things that your team needs to achieve to you know, keep the organisation moving forward discussions around KPIs and how that all works out and certainly you know if you're looking for new people what are you looking for to actually you know bring your team forward and meet the needs of the organisation.

Michelle Ockers: They sound like some really good questions to tease out the answers.

Kate Fraser: Yeah, and we're finding with the current review that we've got on now because we're in phase two and reviewing it you know 18 months later. We're using very similar questions again as well, what's what are the success points of this capability framework? What are the good things and then what needs improvement of course, but then revisiting those questions around you know is your team still in the same place as far as 18 months ago? Or you're looking at different things now and we're finding actually that the framework is still quite stable in terms of what the capabilities are and what they say and now when we're just talking more about how it is used and people needing more support or structure around how it's used and the appetite is there to use it and we're getting some excellent feedback so that we can actually deliver on that.

Karen Moloney: What are some of your challenges around sustainability and maintenance of a framework like that?

Kate Fraser: It's obviously extremely detailed and see things change over time with you know roles and skills that are required and capabilities within the organisation absolutely so over that time we've had quite I want to say maybe 15 to 20 new positions arise. Brand new positions, positions we've never had before and also you know the business sometimes takes a little bit of a different direction maybe prioritizes different things, we're going through a digital transformation for instance and so and Karen, you know sustaining it I think was a good choice of word because we all know that these types of things often are created they're launched they look fabulous we invest in the graphics they look lovely.

So certainly my team, and certainly the deputy CEO has been really conscious of that and that's why the second phase is on now in terms of the revision of the capability framework to make sure it is current and recent and also so that we've got a very sensible view on how the framework is being used if it is being used and what a what are some of the barriers or the obstacles for it being used some of the some of the things coming out from that review are that as you've mentioned these things can be really

detailed and it you know sometimes they're not helpful as a quick reference but then of course the dangers of having a quick reference is that you lose a lot of detail and you lose the you know the suitability of it so we're just trying to find a good way to have a happy medium there because some people are finding the full framework is too detailed but then of course you've got lots of managers that actually love the detail because it really helps them when they dive right into it so it's just really trying to find and be able to create resources, a range so that people can sort of select what works for them in their working style it's been quite interesting the other thing that we're finding from that review in terms of you know sustaining this capability framework and its implementation is a lot of people are asking for more structure around can you help us use it and can you develop more resources to help us use it and so some people are quite good at picking it up and running with it and just giving it a crack whereas others are really asking for that a little bit of hand-holding to help them be able to get the most out of it that framework.

Michelle Ockers: What have you found the most useful or what tips would you give people about making sure that the framework is actually used and people get the value out of it?

Kate Fraser: A good big one for me was because we've done a lot of recruitment over the last 18 and whenever as I mentioned there was all of those new positions that came through and I would proactively approach that manager to say "ah don't forget you need to map that position description to the capability framework I am available to help you do that it's a quick exercise", rather than leaving them to their own devices just proactively putting it out there and offering to them let's just sit down for 20 minutes that's all it takes I'll help you do it I'll do all the documentation for you it's going to be easy and you know therefore you know it is a bit of hand-holding but it actually helps them move forward on that and then you know the documentation is getting done correctly as well.

However, I found that doing that a few times with those managers they were independent and autonomous and doing that after a while so eventually they would say to me are whenever I put the offer out I "don't worry Kate I've got this you know you've showed me how to do it it's it's easy and it's fine". And I actually used to like catching up with them because every time we went through the process I would say I would ask them for feedback in terms of business capability framework still working for you and your team. Was this process we just went through was that easy and you know even if I might even already know the answers I just wanted to actually have that active conversation with that manager and get that feedback and get them to articulate that.

Michelle Ockers: It sounds like you've stayed really close to the business and people that the leaders in the business around how to use it and keeping it fresh and current and relevant?

Kate Fraser: Yeah and I mean there were some things that I've been I've been stronger in doing and then other things where I haven't just simply because you know

you've got to choose your priorities and can't do everything smooth. I guess some of that stuff's coming out in the review now but we've got more capacity to actually do it more holistically now and we've also got the benefit of having had that capability framework active within the business for 18 months now as well and there's some good solid feedback coming from managers who are actively using it.

Karen Moloney: I think probably having that you know being able to provide that support still 18 months down the track I mean I think that in itself is probably fairly unique in terms of most things that are put out by L&D. You know rather than just kind of a there you go and here's the user manuals and all that that comes with it you know, but still providing that at that hand-holding and that support is - I would imagine key to the success that you've had?

Kate Fraser: Yeah absolutely Karen and I guess we've recognized also that we need to push on and keep going with that you don't just drop them all and you don't set and forget because just because you've built it doesn't mean it'll get used or that they'll come or whatever and it is the responsibility of L&D; whatever you brought whatever you whatever initiative it is that you've rolled out that you keep at it you keep reminding people that it's there you keep helping people to use these things or reminding them of the benefits because it's not top of mind for them all day every day.

They get they get consumed with their jobs at hand and they don't think about the L&D initiatives so it is that and it's not coming from a bad place so it is our responsibility to communicate with the business and keep reminding them of these things even though we feel like we might be getting repetitive but people do actually appreciate, that you know and yes you've got to change your message a little bit otherwise it does sound repetitive but I find that people in the business do appreciate the constant communication rather than the set and forget.

Michelle Ockers: Yeah so it's busyness rather than intent, and desire to do to do the right thing to develop people into use of tools available. Kate, is there anything we haven't given you the opportunity to talk about in regards to capability frameworks that you'd like to make sure gets passed on to people listening to the podcast?

Kate Fraser: I think be sensible about making sure you've got a good amount of budget for it and be sensible about getting in an expert in to help you rather than taking it all on-board yourself and also allowing enough time for it to be developed and the consultant will help you work out the timeframes for that given your context in your situation and I think with those three things you'll be on a good path so that you don't you know get yourself into a bind and also that you're able to manage expectations with the organisation on when and how it will be developed I think lots of people try to take on these things themselves and then it becomes a bigger beast and I don't know, I think it's always good to get somebody objective in and who can really guide you and help you with that and then what you know you work as the supportive second person who actually does know the business and can guide and channel that. I think they were the biggest lessons that I learned

and that I was really glad that I went down that path otherwise I could see that I don't know who knows what we would have ended up with!

Michelle Ockers: Sounds like you were very smart the way you went about it and speaking of smart, professional development is smart for all of us of course and one of the things we're interested in learning about from all about podcast guests is how they go about their own professional development. So Kate what's the most powerful thing you do for your ongoing professional development?

Kate Fraser: For a long time I was a team of one and I know that lots of L&D practitioners are and so it was important for me to get out of our organisation and connect with other Learning and Development professionals. So that might be networking events I went to lots of those and also you know just finding out, key people to connect with and you know taking them out for lunch and having a chat and just being really proactive in speaking to others and learning from their experiences and trying to reciprocate where you can as well.

I became quite active on social media for the same reason and I also participated in many, many, many webinars so that you know I was sort of keeping on top of you know what were the what were the key issues out there and most of it Michelle was about reaching out side of my organisation connecting with other L&D; practitioners and learning from their experiences rather than feeling like I had to do it all by myself.

Michelle Ockers: Yeah and there's plenty of people out there I think we're willing to be part of the network and engage in some good conversation I think that's something you'd be finding through your work with Learning Experts, Karen?

Karen Moloney: Absolutely, it's really it's been a really interesting 18 months or so for me launching that around you know reconnecting maybe with some people that I hadn't connected with for a long time and just having some of the discussions that I've had and just really feeling how much support there is out there and it's just kind of give me a renewed sense of faith in the industry cos for a while it didn't seem that nice and yeah like I think we do have some incredible people out there that know an awful lot they're really ready and willing to share their stories with us it's been great.

Michelle Ockers: Kate thank you so much for joining us today to talk about the Academy and the importance of the capability framework and share your tips if people do want to speaking of getting in touch with others and learning from others people do want to follow up and get in touch with you what's the best way for them to do that?

Kate Fraser: The easiest way is probably to find me on LinkedIn. I'm really easy to find Kate Fraser, just send me a message no problem.

Michelle Ockers: Great, and for anyone who'd like to follow up with Karen or myself on the back of the Learning Uncut podcast all our contact details are in the show notes so thank you and we look forward to speaking again soon.

Kate Fraser:

Thanks Karen, thanks Michelle