



Beyond Training

A Capability-First Approach to Workforce Development

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Founder | TrainingIQ

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Beyond Training - A Capability-First Approach to Workforce Development

First Edition

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“Helping organisations build capability—not just deliver training.”

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Foreword

Throughout my career I have worked in environments where capability matters.

Emergency services. Operational response. Vocational education. Workforce development. Leadership. High-risk industries.

Despite their differences, these environments share one characteristic: success depends on people being capable of performing safely, effectively and consistently when it matters most.

Over the years I have watched organisations invest heavily in developing their people. Training budgets have grown, learning systems have become more sophisticated and qualifications have become more accessible than ever before.

Yet one question continues to persist:

“Are these investments genuinely building workforce capability, or are they simply building training activity?”

Most organisations can report training hours, completion rates and qualifications achieved. Far fewer can confidently demonstrate that their workforce possesses the capability required to achieve organisational objectives.

That distinction sits at the heart of this paper.

Too often workforce conversations begin with training.

- What course should we run?
- What qualification do we need?
- Is there an accredited option?

These are reasonable questions, but they assume the solution before the problem has been properly understood. In practice, capability is rarely built through training alone.

It develops through experience, leadership, coaching, assessment, workplace systems and opportunities to apply learning in context. Formal training remains important, but it is only one contributor within a much broader capability system.

This paper is not an argument against training. It is an argument for starting somewhere different.

Rather than asking what training people need, perhaps organisations should first ask:

“What capability do we require, and how will we know when we have it?”

That single question changes the conversation. It shifts attention from activity to outcomes, from attendance to competence and from compliance to organisational performance.

I offer these ideas as an invitation to ask better questions, challenge familiar assumptions and place capability at the centre of workforce development decisions. Because organisations do not succeed because they deliver more training. They succeed because their people can perform when it matters most. That, in my view, is the distinction worth making.

Key Terms

The language used throughout this publication is deliberate. The following definitions establish a common understanding of the key concepts discussed.

Capability

The collective knowledge, skills, experience, behaviours, judgement and organisational systems that enable individuals and organisations to consistently achieve desired outcomes.

Capability extends beyond training or qualifications. It is demonstrated through performance.

Competence

The demonstrated ability of an individual to perform a task or role to an agreed standard under defined conditions.

Competence contributes to capability but does not, on its own, guarantee organisational capability.

Workforce Capability

The combined capability of an organisation's people, supported by leadership, systems, processes and culture, to achieve strategic and operational objectives.

Capability Assurance

The systematic process of providing objective evidence that individuals and organisations possess and maintain the capability required to perform safely, effectively and consistently.

Capability assurance relies on evidence rather than assumptions.

Capability Governance

The leadership, oversight and decision-making processes through which workforce capability is planned, monitored, reviewed and continually improved as a strategic organisational asset.

Learning Intervention

Any planned activity intended to improve workforce capability.

Learning interventions may include accredited training, non-accredited training, coaching, mentoring, workplace instruction, simulations, exercises, supervision, performance support or other development activities.

Training is one type of learning intervention—not the only one.

Accredited Training

Training delivered by a Registered Training Organisation (RTO) that leads to nationally recognised outcomes under Australia's Vocational Education and Training (VET) system.

Accreditation provides recognised credentials where these are required by legislation, regulation, industry or employers. It does not, by itself, guarantee workforce capability.

Non-Accredited Learning

Structured learning that does not lead to nationally recognised qualifications or statements of attainment.

When well designed and appropriately assessed, non-accredited learning can effectively develop workforce capability and may be the most appropriate solution where nationally recognised outcomes are not required.

Competency Framework

A structured description of the knowledge, skills, behaviours and performance standards required to perform effectively within specific roles or functions.

Competency frameworks help organisations define expectations, assess capability and guide workforce development.

Capability Before Courses™

The central philosophy of this publication.

Before selecting any learning solution, organisations should first understand the capability they require, the risks they face and the outcomes they seek to achieve.

Only then should they determine whether training—or another intervention—is the most appropriate response.

Chapter 1 - The Training Trap™

“When the first question is ‘What training do we need?’, we’ve probably started in the wrong place.”

Every organisation wants a capable workforce.

Whether the objective is delivering essential services, responding to emergencies, maintaining critical infrastructure or serving customers, organisational performance ultimately depends on people having the capability to perform their roles safely, confidently and effectively.

Most organisations recognise this and invest heavily in developing their people. They commission training, implement learning management systems, develop competency frameworks and allocate significant budgets to workforce development.

These investments are important.

Yet despite this commitment, many organisations continue to experience capability gaps, inconsistent performance and recurring operational issues.

Why?

One reason is that many organisations have unintentionally fallen into what I describe as **The Training Trap**.

The First Question Matters. When a capability issue emerges, the conversation often begins with questions such as:

- “What training do we need?”
- “Who should attend a course?”
- “Is there an accredited program available?”

These are logical questions. They are also premature.

They assume that training is the solution before the capability challenge has been properly understood.

In many organisations, training has become the default response to almost every workforce issue.

- A new piece of equipment is introduced. Provide training.
- An audit identifies a gap. Provide training.
- An incident occurs. Provide training.
- Procedures change. Provide training.

Sometimes training is exactly the right intervention. Often, however, it is only one part of a much broader solution.

Why Training Becomes the Default

- Training is familiar.
- It is visible.
- It can be scheduled.
- Budgets can be allocated.

- Attendance can be recorded.
- Certificates can be issued.
- Learning management systems generate reports showing completion rates and compliance percentages.

While these measures provide reassurance that action has been taken, they do not necessarily demonstrate improved workforce capability.

Training activity is relatively easy to measure. Capability is not.

As a result, organisations often focus on what they can count rather than what ultimately matters, but:

Activity Is Not Capability

Completing a course does not guarantee competence.

Holding a qualification does not automatically translate into workplace performance.

People may leave a training room with new knowledge yet never have the opportunity to apply it.

Skills may decline through lack of practice.

Procedures may remain unclear.

Supervisors may reinforce old behaviours.

Organisational systems may continue to create barriers to effective performance.

Training has occurred, but Capability has not necessarily improved. This is the essence of The Training Trap. It is the mistaken belief that training activity is a reliable measure of workforce capability.

The Real Capability Challenge

Capability is influenced by far more than formal learning. It develops through experience and

- Coaching.
- Mentoring.
- Effective supervision.
- Meaningful assessment.
- Clear expectations.
- Well-designed procedures.
- Reliable systems.
- Constructive feedback.
- Opportunities to practise.
- Organisational culture.

Training is one component of this ecosystem. It is an important component. But it is only one.

No amount of training can compensate for ineffective supervision, poor systems or unclear operational expectations.

Likewise, highly experienced workers may require very little formal training if appropriate support, coaching and performance systems already exist. Capability should therefore be viewed as an organisational system rather than a training program.

Diagnosis Before Intervention

The purpose of this paper is not to argue against training. Training remains one of the most valuable workforce development tools available. The challenge is ensuring it is used for the right reasons.

Before prescribing training, organisations should first ask:

- What capability is actually required?
- What evidence demonstrates current capability?
- What is preventing effective performance?
- Is the issue related to knowledge, skill, experience, supervision, systems, culture or something else?
- What intervention is most likely to improve capability?

Only after these questions have been explored should training be considered as part of the solution.

Sometimes it will be the answer. Sometimes it will not.

Escaping the Training Trap

Escaping the Training Trap does not mean delivering less training. It means making better decisions about when training is needed, what outcomes it should achieve and how those outcomes will be measured. It means recognising that the objective is not to deliver courses. Nor is it to maximise attendance, qualifications or compliance statistics.

The objective is to develop a workforce that is capable of performing safely, effectively and consistently in the environments in which it operates. That subtle shift—from focusing on training to focusing on capability—changes every conversation that follows.

That shift — from training to capability — is the foundation upon which the remainder of this paper is built.

Chapter 2 - Capability Before Courses™

Capability Before Courses is the central philosophy that underpins the TrainingIQ approach.

It is based on a simple idea:

Before deciding how people should learn, organisations must first understand what people need to be capable of doing.

Too often learning begins with the solutions already available. Training calendars are reviewed, mandatory programs are scheduled, budgets are allocated and qualifications are identified. Only then do organisations ask what capability they are actually trying to develop.

The process is backwards. Courses are not the objective. Capability is.

Training is an activity. Capability is an outcome.

An organisation can deliver hundreds of courses each year without materially improving workforce capability. Equally, significant improvements in capability may occur with very little formal training if organisations invest in better supervision, coaching, workplace practice, knowledge transfer or operational systems.

Capability is demonstrated through performance. It is reflected in how people apply knowledge, exercise judgement, manage risk and adapt to changing operational environments.

Unlike training, capability cannot simply be scheduled. It must be developed.

Before selecting any intervention, organisations should ask, “What does successful performance actually look like?”

This shifts attention away from learning activities and towards workplace outcomes.

- What tasks must people perform?
- What decisions must they make?
- What level of judgement is required?
- What are the consequences if capability is lacking?
- How will competence be demonstrated?

Only after these questions have been answered should learning strategies be considered. Training then becomes purposeful rather than habitual.

One of the most persistent misconceptions in workforce development is that capability can be delivered through training. It cannot.

Training can transfer knowledge, develop skills, increase awareness and improve confidence.

Capability develops through the interaction of experience, practice, feedback, coaching, supervision, assessment, operational exposure and organisational culture.

Formal learning is one contributor within that system. It is rarely the whole solution.

This explains why two people who complete the same course may demonstrate very different levels of workplace performance.

CAPABILITY BEFORE COURSES™

— Capability should determine the approach, never the other way around. —



When organisations adopt a Capability Before Courses™ mindset, the questions they ask begin to change. Instead of asking, “What training do we need?” - They ask:

- What capability do we require?
- What evidence demonstrates current capability?
- Where are our greatest capability risks?
- What factors are preventing effective performance?
- Which intervention is most likely to improve performance?
- How will we know that capability has improved?

Training may still form part of the answer. It is simply no longer assumed to be the answer.

Capability Before Courses is not a rejection of training. It is a discipline. It requires organisations to resist the temptation to prescribe solutions before understanding the problem. Sometimes the answer will be accredited training. Sometimes it will be workplace learning, coaching, mentoring, stronger supervision or improved operational systems. The intervention matters less than the outcome it produces.

Capability should determine the solution. Never the other way around.

That principle sits at the centre of the TrainingIQ philosophy and underpins every recommendation we make.

Chapter 3 - Beyond the Accredited vs Non-Accredited Debate

For many organisations, workforce training discussions quickly become centred on a familiar question:

“Should this training be accredited or non-accredited?”

While understandable, it is often the wrong question.

Like many aspects of workforce development, the debate tends to focus on the delivery mechanism rather than the organisational outcome.

The better question is:

“What capability are we trying to develop?”

Only after that question has been answered should an organisation determine whether accredited training, non-accredited learning, workplace experience or another intervention is the most appropriate solution.

The False Choice

The workforce development sector often presents accredited and non-accredited training as competing alternatives.

Accredited training is frequently perceived as the gold standard because it leads to nationally recognised qualifications, while non-accredited training is often viewed as a more flexible but less rigorous option.

In reality, both approaches have important strengths.

Nationally recognised training provides consistency, portability and quality assurance. It is essential where legislation, licensing, industry regulation or nationally recognised qualifications are required.

Non-accredited learning provides flexibility. It allows organisations to respond quickly to emerging risks, tailor learning to local operating environments and continually improve programs without the administrative constraints that often accompany accredited delivery.

Neither approach is inherently better. Each serves a different purpose.

The challenge arises when organisations select one simply because it is familiar, rather than because it is the most appropriate solution.

National Standards Matter

TrainingIQ strongly supports Australia’s vocational education and training system.

Well-developed Units of Competency represent decades of collaboration between industry, regulators and education specialists. They describe the knowledge, skills and performance expected of competent workers across a wide range of occupations.

These standards provide an excellent benchmark when designing workforce capability.

However, they should be viewed as one input into capability design—not the starting point for every workforce development initiative.

Organisations rarely operate in generic environments.

They have their own procedures, equipment, governance arrangements, risk profiles, operating contexts and organisational culture.

Effective capability development must reflect these realities.

Designing for Capability First

TrainingIQ advocates an approach that begins with organisational capability requirements rather than training products.

Once the capability required has been clearly defined, relevant Units of Competency can be used to inform the design process by mapping learning outcomes, performance expectations and assessment requirements against nationally recognised standards.

The result is a capability solution that is:

- aligned with recognised industry benchmarks;
- tailored to organisational needs;
- operationally relevant;
- evidence based; and
- capable of evolving as organisational requirements change.

Importantly, the organisation gains the benefit of nationally recognised standards without allowing those standards to unnecessarily constrain the design of its capability system.

Competency-Informed Capability Development

TrainingIQ describes this philosophy as Competency-Informed Capability Development.

Rather than asking whether training should be accredited or non-accredited, TrainingIQ asks a different question, “How can nationally recognised competency standards strengthen organisational capability while preserving the flexibility needed to meet operational requirements?”

The answer is often to design capability systems that are informed by nationally recognised standards but delivered in a way that best serves the organisation’s operational objectives.

This approach allows organisations to incorporate additional organisational knowledge, procedures, equipment, decision-making frameworks and operational experience that may never appear within a national training package but are nevertheless essential for safe and effective performance.

Preserving Future Options

Designing capability in this way also creates significant strategic flexibility.

Where learning resources, assessments and learning outcomes have been deliberately mapped against relevant Units of Competency, organisations retain the option of pursuing accredited delivery in the future if their operational, regulatory or commercial requirements change.

Accreditation therefore becomes a future pathway—not a design constraint.

The organisation avoids unnecessary compliance while preserving the ability to transition to nationally recognised delivery if and when it adds value.

BEYOND THE ACCREDITED vs NON-ACCREDITED DEBATE

The right question is not accreditation. The right question is capability.



The Role of TrainingIQ

TrainingIQ is not a Registered Training Organisation and that is deliberate.

Our role is to help organisations understand the capability they require, design evidence-based capability systems and identify the interventions most likely to improve performance.

Sometimes that solution will involve accredited training delivered through an RTO. Sometimes it will involve non-accredited operational learning. Sometimes it will combine elements of both.

The objective is never to maximise accredited training. The objective is to maximise workforce capability.

That is the distinction.

That is the philosophy.

And ultimately, that is the conversation organisations should be having.

Chapter 4 - The Workforce Capability Continuum

“Workforce capability is not created by a single event. It is developed through an interconnected system that begins long before training and continues long after it.”

One of the reasons organisations fall into The Training Trap is that training is often viewed as the centre of workforce capability. It isn't.

Training is one contributor within a much larger system.

Understanding that system is essential if organisations are to make informed decisions about workforce development. The Workforce Capability Continuum provides a way of understanding how capability is created, developed, demonstrated and sustained throughout an organisation.

Rather than viewing capability as the outcome of a course, the Continuum recognises that capability develops through a series of interconnected stages, each influencing the next.

It Begins with Business Need

Every workforce exists to achieve organisational objectives.

Whether those objectives involve protecting communities, responding to emergencies, maintaining infrastructure or delivering customer value, workforce capability should always align with the organisation's strategic and operational goals.

Without this connection, workforce development risks becoming activity rather than investment. Training should never exist simply because training has always been delivered. It should exist because it contributes to organisational performance.

Defining Capability Requirements

Once organisational objectives are understood, the next question becomes, “What capability does the organisation require to achieve them?”

This is a fundamentally different question from asking what courses should be delivered.

Capability requirements describe the collective knowledge, skills, experience, behaviours and judgement needed across the workforce. Only once these requirements are understood can organisations begin designing effective capability strategies.

Competence Is Individual. Capability Is Organisational.

Capability belongs to organisations. Competence belongs to individuals. This distinction is often overlooked.

An organisation may require emergency response capability, project management capability or hazardous tree capability. Individual workers contribute competence within specific roles that collectively create organisational capability. Understanding this relationship helps organisations move beyond generic training toward clearly defined performance expectations.

Interventions Build Capability

Once capability requirements and competency expectations are understood, organisations can determine the most appropriate interventions. Training is one option.

Other interventions may include:

- coaching
- mentoring
- workplace practice
- structured supervision
- improved procedures
- knowledge sharing
- performance support tools
- job redesign
- technology improvements

The most effective solution is the one that addresses the identified capability need, not necessarily the one that delivers the greatest amount of training.

Capability Must Be Demonstrated

Capability is not confirmed when training finishes. It is confirmed when people consistently perform effectively in the workplace. This requires evidence.

- Observation.
- Assessment.
- Performance data.
- Verification.
- Feedback.
- Operational outcomes.

Without evidence, organisations can only assume capability exists. Assurance requires more than assumption.

Capability Never Stands Still

Organisations evolve. Technology changes. Legislation changes. Communities change. Risks change. People leave. New people arrive.

Capability must therefore be viewed as a continuous process rather than a destination.

Maintaining workforce capability requires organisations to continually review, strengthen and adapt their workforce development strategies.

Capability is not built once. It is continuously developed.

Seeing the Bigger Picture

The Workforce Capability Continuum reminds us that training is not the beginning of workforce capability. Nor is it the end.

Training is one contributor within an integrated capability system that connects organisational objectives, individual competence, workplace performance and continuous improvement. Organisations that understand this relationship make better decisions about workforce development. They invest in interventions that address genuine capability needs. They measure outcomes rather than activity. Most importantly, they develop workforces that are capable of performing when it matters most.

The chapters that follow build on this model by exploring how organisations can assess capability, select interventions and provide meaningful assurance that workforce capability has been achieved and sustained.

Chapter 5 - The 5A Framework™

“A practical methodology for building, demonstrating and assuring workforce capability.”

The previous chapters established a simple proposition:

Workforce capability should be approached as a strategic organisational issue rather than a training problem. The obvious question then becomes, “How do organisations put this into practice?”

The answer lies in a disciplined, evidence-based process.

The **TrainingIQ 5A Framework** provides a practical methodology for identifying capability requirements, selecting interventions and providing confidence that workforce capability exists and is being sustained.

Rather than focusing on learning activities, the framework focuses on organisational outcomes. It is not a framework for delivering training. It is a framework for making better decisions about workforce capability.

The Five Stages

The framework consists of five interconnected stages:

Assess → Analyse → Align → Apply → Assure

Each stage informs the next and together they create a continuous capability improvement cycle.

Stage 1 – Assess

Every capability initiative should begin with understanding the organisation's operating environment and the capability required to achieve organisational objectives.

Key questions include:

- What is the organisation trying to achieve?
- What risks exist?
- What capability is required?
- What does successful performance look like?
- What are the consequences if capability is absent?

Without a clear understanding of the capability requirement, organisations risk investing in solutions that address symptoms rather than causes. Assessing capability requirements establishes the foundation for every decision that follows.

Stage 2 – Analyse

Once capability requirements have been established, organisations need an accurate understanding of current capability. This requires evidence rather than assumptions. Useful sources of evidence include:

- competency assessments;
- operational observations;
- performance data;
- workplace documentation;
- incident investigations;
- interviews; and
- existing qualifications and experience.

The objective is not simply to identify capability gaps. It is to understand why those gaps exist.

A performance issue may result from insufficient knowledge, limited experience, ineffective supervision, poor procedures or organisational culture.

Understanding the cause is essential if the right intervention is to be selected.

Stage 3 – Align

This is the decision-making stage.

Having identified capability requirements and analysed current performance, organisations determine the interventions most likely to improve capability.

Training may be one option. It may also be:

- coaching;
- mentoring;
- workplace practice;
- revised procedures;
- performance support tools;
- technology solutions; or
- changes to organisational systems.

The objective is to align interventions with capability needs rather than defaulting to familiar solutions.

This is where organisations escape The Training Trap™.

Stage 4 – Apply

Selecting the right intervention is only the beginning. Capability develops when learning and improvement initiatives are applied in the workplace.

This stage focuses on implementation, reinforcement and operational application. Learning must be supported through practice, feedback, supervision and opportunities to apply new skills in real environments.

Without application, learning fades. With application, capability grows.

Stage 5 – Assure

The final stage answers one of the most important questions an organisation can ask, "How do we know our workforce is capable?"

Capability should never be assumed simply because training has been completed. It should be demonstrated through evidence.

Examples include:

- workplace observation;
- practical assessment;
- performance measures;
- verification processes; and
- operational outcomes.

Capability assurance provides leaders with confidence that capability exists, continues to develop and remains aligned with organisational requirements. This transforms workforce development from a compliance activity into a governance process.

A Framework for Better Decisions



The 5A Framework is not another training model. It is a decision-making framework that helps organisations move:

- from assumptions to evidence;
- from activity to outcomes;
- from compliance to capability; and
- from training delivery to organisational performance.

By following a structured process of assessing, analysing, aligning, applying and assuring, organisations are better positioned to invest wisely, reduce capability risk and build workforces capable of performing when it matters most.

For TrainingIQ, the 5A Framework is more than methodology. It is the practical expression of the Capability Before Courses philosophy.

Chapter 6 - The Executive Capability Conversation

"Capability is not a training issue. It is an organisational performance issue."

For many organisations, workforce capability sits comfortably within learning and development, training departments or operational teams.

Executives receive reports on training completion rates, compliance statistics and qualification numbers, but capability itself rarely becomes an executive conversation. Training is discussed. Capability often isn't. That is increasingly becoming a risk.

Modern organisations operate in environments characterised by complexity, workforce shortages, technological change and increasing community expectations. Under these conditions, workforce capability becomes a strategic asset. It also becomes a strategic risk.

Boards routinely ask questions about financial performance, safety, governance and cybersecurity. Increasingly, they should be asking similar questions about workforce capability.

- What capability does the organisation require to achieve its objectives?
- Where are our greatest capability risks?
- How confident are we that critical capabilities actually exist?
- What evidence supports that confidence?
- What capability vulnerabilities exist within our workforce profile?
- What would happen if key people left tomorrow?

These are not training questions. They are governance questions.

The Limits of Training Metrics

Traditional workforce reporting often focuses on activity:

- courses delivered;
- attendance rates;
- qualifications achieved;
- compliance completion rates.

These measures may be useful operational indicators, but they provide limited insight into organisational capability.

Executives are ultimately interested in a different question, "Can our people perform when it matters most?"

A workforce may be fully compliant and still be underprepared. Conversely, a workforce may possess strong operational capability despite relatively modest training activity. Capability requires a different set of measures.

The Capability Questions Executives Should Ask

TrainingIQ encourages executive leaders to adopt five capability questions:

1. What capabilities are mission critical to organisational success?
2. What evidence demonstrates those capabilities currently exist?

3. Where are the greatest capability risks?
4. What interventions are being used to address those risks?
5. How is capability being monitored over time?

These questions move organisations away from assumptions and towards evidence. They also encourage capability to be managed with the same discipline applied to financial, safety and operational risk.

Capability as Organisational Resilience

Capability is often invisible until it is tested. Major incidents, emergencies, rapid growth, organisational change and workforce disruption expose capability strengths and weaknesses very quickly. Resilient organisations understand this. They invest in capability before they need it. They understand that capability is not simply about today's operational requirements but tomorrow's challenges as well. Succession planning, knowledge transfer and workforce sustainability therefore become capability conversations rather than human resource processes.

The Role of Executives

Executives do not need to become training specialists. They do, however, need confidence that appropriate systems exist to identify, develop and assure workforce capability.

Their role is to ask questions, establish expectations and ensure capability receives the same organisational attention as other strategic risks.

The responsibility for building capability may sit throughout the organisation. The responsibility for governing it sits with leadership.

A Different Conversation

The Executive Capability Conversation is ultimately a shift in perspective. It moves organisations from asking, "How much training have we delivered?" to asking: "How confident are we that our people can perform when it matters most?" One question measures activity. The other measures organisational readiness.

For TrainingIQ, that distinction matters enormously. Because capability is not simply a learning issue. It is a leadership issue.

Executive Reflection - Better Questions Lead to Better Decisions

The purpose of this reflection is not to judge organisations. Every organisation is on its own capability journey. The purpose is to encourage a different conversation.

When leaders begin asking different questions, they make different decisions. Those decisions influence where resources are invested, how capability is developed and how organisational success is measured.

Ultimately, organisations do not become more capable because they deliver more training. They become more capable because their leaders deliberately build, measure and assure workforce capability.

That is the executive capability conversation, and it is one worth having.

Take a moment to consider your own organisation. For each statement below, rate the extent to which each statement reflects your organisation:

1 – Strongly Disagree

2 – Disagree

3 – Unsure

4 – Agree

5 – Strongly Agree

Statement	Score
We have clearly defined the workforce capabilities required to achieve our strategic objectives.	
We understand where our greatest capability risks exist	
We can identify critical roles and potential single points of failure	
We measure workforce capability—not just training activity	
We have objective evidence that our people are competent	
Learning investments are aligned with organisational priorities	
We know whether learning transfers into workplace performance	
Capability assurance is a regular part of our governance processes	
We actively capture critical organisational knowledge	
We are building the workforce our organisation will need in the future	

Interpreting the Results

- 40–50: Your organisation demonstrates many of the characteristics of a mature capability system. The focus should be on continuous improvement and sustaining organisational capability.
- 30–39: Strong foundations are in place, however there may be opportunities to strengthen capability governance, evidence and assurance.
- 20–29: Your organisation is likely relying on training activity more than capability evidence. A structured capability review may identify opportunities for improvement.
- Below 20: Your organisation may be experiencing the effects of The Training Trap. Workforce capability should become a strategic priority before additional investment in learning is considered.

Recognising capability as a strategic leadership issue is only the first step; the next challenge is establishing the governance needed to build, sustain and assure it over time.

Chapter 7 - Capability Governance

“Workforce capability should be governed with the same discipline as safety, finance and organisational risk.”

Every organisation governs the things that matter. Financial performance is monitored. Safety performance is reviewed. Operational risk is assessed. Cyber security is managed. Compliance is reported.

Boards receive regular information that enables informed decisions about these critical organisational functions. Yet one area often receives far less attention. Workforce capability.

This is surprising.

Every strategic objective, operational outcome and community expectation ultimately depends on the capability of the people responsible for delivering it. Without capable people, even the best strategies, systems and technologies will fail to achieve their intended outcomes. Capability should therefore be viewed not simply as a learning issue, but as an organisational governance responsibility.

Beyond Learning and Development

Historically, workforce capability has often been delegated to Human Resources or Learning and Development functions. These teams perform an essential role, however, organisational capability cannot rest solely with one department.

Capability is influenced by

- Executive leadership.
- Operational managers.
- Supervisors.
- Subject matter experts.
- Safety professionals.
- Human Resources.
- Learning specialists.
- Individual employees.

Everyone contributes. For this reason, workforce capability should be governed across the organisation rather than managed in isolation.

Leadership sets expectations - Managers reinforce performance - Supervisors coach and observe - Learning professionals enable development.

Together, they create an environment in which capability can flourish.

What Capability Governance Looks Like

Capability governance is not about creating additional bureaucracy. It is about ensuring that leaders have confidence in the capability of their workforce and the systems that support it.

Effective capability governance asks questions such as:

- Do we understand the capabilities required to achieve our strategic objectives?
- Are competency expectations clearly defined?
- Do we know where our capability risks exist?
- How do we assure ourselves that critical capability is maintained?
- Are our workforce development investments delivering measurable organisational value?
- How do we know?

These are governance questions. They deserve governance answers.

Capability Assurance Is Evidence

Earlier chapters introduced the concept of Capability Assurance™. Capability governance depends upon it.

Good governance relies on evidence rather than assumption. Attendance records provide evidence that learning occurred. Qualifications provide evidence that recognised standards have been achieved. Neither necessarily demonstrates current workplace capability.

Capability assurance requires broader evidence.

- Observation.
- Practical assessment.
- Performance measures.
- Verification.
- Operational outcomes.

Only then can leaders confidently say that workforce capability exists.

Capability Is Dynamic

One of the greatest governance challenges is recognising that capability is never static.

- Technology changes.
- Legislation evolves.
- Community expectations shift.
- New risks emerge.
- Experienced employees retire.
- New employees enter the workforce.

Capability must therefore be continuously monitored, reviewed and strengthened. Governance is not an annual event. It is an ongoing organisational responsibility.

The Capability Governance Cycle

Capability governance is most effective when it operates as a continuous cycle.

Leaders should regularly:

- Define capability requirements.
- Assess current capability.

- Identify emerging risks.
- Invest in targeted interventions.
- Verify workplace competence.
- Review organisational performance.
- Continuously improve capability systems.

This cycle ensures workforce capability evolves alongside organisational needs rather than reacting to isolated events.

Perhaps the most significant shift proposed in this paper is that workforce capability should no longer be viewed solely as a learning function. It should be recognised as a strategic organisational asset requiring active leadership and effective governance.

Boards should ask about capability.

Chief Executives should discuss capability.

Executive teams should review capability.

Managers should reinforce capability.

Supervisors should observe capability.

Learning professionals should enable capability.

Everyone has a role. Because capability is not created by a single department. It is created by the organisation.

Looking Ahead

If capability is to be governed effectively, organisations need a way of understanding how mature their capability systems really are. Some organisations operate reactively, responding only when capability problems emerge.

Others have embedded workforce capability into strategic planning, operational management and organisational decision making.

Understanding this progression is the purpose of the next chapter. It introduces the TrainingIQ Capability Maturity Model™—a practical framework for assessing how effectively organisations build, manage and assure workforce capability.

Chapter 8 - The TrainingIQ Capability Maturity Model

“Capability is not built overnight. Like any organisational capability, it develops through increasing levels of maturity.”

Every organisation invests in workforce capability. The difference lies not in whether organisations invest, but in how systematically they manage that investment.

Some organisations respond only when capability problems emerge. Others align workforce capability with strategy, manage capability risk and provide ongoing assurance to leaders. The difference is not simply the amount of training delivered. It is the maturity of the capability system.

The TrainingIQ Capability Maturity Model™ provides a practical way of understanding that progression. It helps leaders identify where their organisation is today, recognise the next stage of improvement and establish priorities for action.

The model is not intended to judge organisations. Capability maturity is a journey, and every organisation starts somewhere. The objective is not perfection. It is deliberate and continuous improvement.

Level 1 – Reactive

Workforce development is largely reactive. Training is arranged when problems arise, incidents occur or compliance requirements demand it. Decisions are driven by immediate needs rather than long-term capability planning.

- Training is event-driven.
- Capability gaps are usually discovered after problems occur.
- Workforce planning is limited.
- Evidence of capability rarely extends beyond training records.
- Success is measured primarily through course completion.

Organisations at this level often experience recurring capability issues because underlying causes are not consistently examined. They are most vulnerable to The Training Trap™.

Level 2 – Compliant

Capability systems become more structured. Mandatory training is planned, competency requirements are documented and learning management systems provide greater visibility of compliance obligations.

- Mandatory training is well managed.
- Compliance reporting is reliable.
- Competency frameworks are in place.
- Qualifications and currency requirements are valued.
- Workforce development focuses primarily on regulatory and organisational obligations.

Compliance provides an essential foundation. However, it does not by itself confirm that people can perform effectively in the workplace.

Level 3 – Managed

The organisation begins managing capability rather than simply administering training. Capability requirements are linked to operational needs, interventions are selected more deliberately, and performance evidence begins to inform workforce decisions.

- Capability gaps are identified systematically.
- Learning and development are linked to organisational objectives.
- Multiple capability interventions are considered.
- Managers actively support capability development.
- Performance information informs decision making.

Training becomes one capability intervention among several rather than the automatic response.

Level 4 – Integrated

Capability is embedded within organisational planning and operational management. Executive leaders discuss workforce capability alongside other strategic priorities, and capability information informs workforce planning, succession and organisational improvement.

- Capability planning supports strategic objectives.
- Capability information informs organisational decisions.
- Capability risks are actively managed.
- Learning, operational performance and workforce planning are integrated.
- Capability assurance processes are established and used.

Capability is no longer treated as an isolated learning function. It becomes part of how the organisation plans, operates and improves.

Level 5 – Assured

Workforce capability is recognised as a strategic organisational asset. Leadership confidence is supported by objective evidence, and capability is continually monitored, strengthened and aligned with organisational strategy.

- Capability is governed at executive level.
- Capability assurance is evidence-based.
- Workforce decisions are informed by meaningful capability data.
- Continuous improvement is embedded.
- Capability is recognised as a driver of organisational performance.

Training continues to play an important role, but it operates within a mature capability system rather than as a separate activity.

THE TRAINING IQ CAPABILITY MATURITY MODEL™

Capability is not built overnight. It develops through increasing levels of maturity.



Progression, Not Perfection

Few organisations operate entirely within one level. Most display characteristics of several. An organisation may have highly effective compliance systems while remaining reactive in succession planning. Another may demonstrate strong executive leadership but have limited capability assurance processes.

The purpose of the Capability Maturity Model™ is not to assign a simplistic score. It is to stimulate discussion, identify priorities and provide a practical roadmap for improvement. Progress is achieved one step at a time.

Using the Model

The Capability Maturity Model can be used to:

- assess organisational capability systems;
- identify strengths and improvement opportunities;
- support strategic workforce planning;
- inform investment decisions;
- guide executive and governance discussions;
- benchmark capability maturity over time.

Most importantly, the model gives leaders a common language for discussing workforce capability and agreeing on the next practical step.

A Capability Journey

Capability maturity develops through stronger leadership, clearer governance, better evidence, informed decision making and sustained attention to organisational performance.

The question is not whether an organisation has reached Level Five. The more useful question is, “What is the next step in becoming more capable than we are today?”

That question reflects the philosophy underpinning this paper. Capability is never finished. It must be continually developed, demonstrated, governed and strengthened.

That is the essence of organisational maturity.

Chapter 9 - The Future of Workforce Capability

“The organisations that thrive in the future will not necessarily be those that deliver the most training. They will be those that understand, develop and assure workforce capability better than everyone else.”

Work is changing.

Technology is evolving. Communities are becoming more demanding. Regulatory environments continue to develop. Experienced employees are retiring while new generations enter the workforce. Across many industries, organisations are competing for increasingly scarce skills.

Against this backdrop, organisations face an important question, “Is the way we have always approached workforce development still fit for the future?” For many organisations, the answer is no.

The future will demand a different way of thinking about capability. From Training Management to Capability Management.

For decades, organisations have focused on managing training. Courses were scheduled. Attendance was recorded. Qualifications were achieved. Compliance requirements were met.

These activities remain important. They are simply no longer sufficient.

Future organisations will need to manage capability with the same discipline they currently apply to finance, safety and organisational risk. This means understanding not only what learning has occurred, but whether the workforce is genuinely capable of delivering organisational outcomes.

Capability — not training — will increasingly become the measure of success.

Evidence Will Replace Assumptions

Historically, organisations have often assumed capability because people completed training or held recognised qualifications. Increasingly, that assumption will be challenged.

Boards, regulators, insurers, communities and executive leaders will expect stronger evidence that people can perform safely and effectively in increasingly complex environments.

Capability assurance will become an essential component of organisational governance. The question will no longer be, “Who attended the course?” It will become, “Can we demonstrate that our workforce is capable?” That is a fundamentally different conversation.

Knowledge Is Becoming an Organisational Asset

One of the greatest workforce risks facing many organisations is not a lack of training. It is the loss of organisational knowledge.

Across Australia, experienced employees are retiring with decades of operational expertise. Much of that knowledge exists only in experience, judgement and practical wisdom. Unless organisations deliberately capture, transfer and develop that knowledge, it disappears.

Future capability strategies will place greater emphasis on:

- knowledge management;
- mentoring;
- coaching;
- communities of practice; and
- succession planning.

Developing capability is no longer just about teaching people. It is about preserving organisational intelligence.

Technology Will Support Capability — Not Replace It

Artificial intelligence, automation, digital learning platforms and performance support technologies will continue to transform workplaces. These technologies offer enormous opportunities. They can improve access to information, support decision making, personalise learning, provide real-time guidance and identify workforce trends that were previously invisible. Yet technology cannot replace professional judgement, operational experience or organisational culture.

Capability will continue to depend on people applying knowledge, making informed decisions and adapting to changing circumstances. Technology should strengthen capability — not become a substitute for it.

Learning Will Become Continuous

Traditional models of workforce development often separated learning from work. People attended courses, returned to the workplace and waited until the next training event. The future will be different. Learning will increasingly become embedded within everyday work through:

- short, targeted learning experiences;
- workplace coaching;
- digital performance support;
- knowledge sharing;
- reflective practice; and
- continuous improvement.

Capability will develop every day — not just when training is scheduled.

Leadership Will Matter More Than Ever

Perhaps the greatest influence on future workforce capability will not be technology. It will be leadership. Leaders shape culture, influence priorities and determine where resources are invested. They ask the questions that drive organisational behaviour.

Organisations with leaders who understand capability as a strategic asset will be better positioned to adapt to change, respond to uncertainty and build resilient workforces. Capability will increasingly become a leadership responsibility rather than simply a learning function.

The Opportunity Ahead

The future presents organisations with an opportunity:

- to move beyond measuring training activity;
- to build systems that genuinely develop capability;
- to strengthen organisational resilience;
- to reduce capability risk; and
- to make better evidence-based decisions.

These organisations will not simply keep pace with change. They will be better prepared because of it.

Looking Forward

The future of workforce capability is not defined by new technology, new qualifications or more sophisticated learning systems. It is defined by a change in thinking:

- from activity to outcomes;
- from compliance to capability;
- from assumptions to evidence; and
- from courses to organisational performance.

The question is no longer whether workforce capability matters. The question is whether organisations are prepared to think differently about how it is developed, demonstrated and assured.

Chapter 10 - Conclusion

Workforce capability is the destination

Throughout this paper I have challenged a number of long-held assumptions about workforce development.

Not because training lacks value. It does not. Training remains one of the most important tools available to organisations seeking to develop their people.

The challenge is that training has too often become the starting point rather than the outcome of careful organisational thinking.

When the first question becomes, “What training do we need?”, there is a risk that organisations begin searching for solutions before they have fully understood the problem.

The purpose of this paper has been to encourage a different conversation. One that begins with organisational purpose. One that asks what capability is required to achieve strategic objectives. One that seeks evidence rather than assumptions. One that recognises that capability is built through a combination of learning, experience, leadership, coaching, workplace systems and organisational culture.

Most importantly, one that measures success by workforce performance rather than training activity.

Throughout these chapters we have explored:

- The Training Trap™, where organisations mistake training activity for workforce capability.
- Capability Before Courses™, the principle that capability should determine the solution—not the other way around.
- The Workforce Capability Continuum, recognising that capability develops through an interconnected organisational system.
- The 5A Framework™, providing a practical methodology for building, applying and assuring workforce capability.
- The Executive Capability Conversation, encouraging leaders to ask better questions.
- Capability Governance™, recognising workforce capability as a strategic organisational responsibility.
- The Capability Maturity Model, providing a roadmap for continuous improvement.
- The Future of Workforce Capability, challenging organisations to prepare for an increasingly dynamic and complex world.

Taken individually, each concept offers a different perspective on workforce development. Taken together, they represent a different philosophy. A philosophy that places organisational capability—not training—at the centre of decision making.

This philosophy does not diminish the value of accredited training. Nor does it dismiss vocational education, professional development or compliance learning. Rather, it recognises that these are all important contributors within a much broader capability system.

The organisations that will succeed in the future will not necessarily be those that deliver the greatest volume of training. They will be the organisations that understand what capability they need, develop it deliberately, demonstrate it confidently and continuously strengthen it over time.

That journey requires leadership. It requires evidence. It requires discipline. Above all, it requires organisations to think differently.

If this paper encourages leaders to pause before commissioning another course...

If it prompts executive teams to ask different questions...

If it shifts even one conversation from training activity to workforce capability...

Then it will have achieved its purpose.

Because organisations do not succeed because training has been delivered. They succeed because their people can perform. Safely. Competently. Confidently. Consistently. When it matters most.

That is the objective.

Training is one way of achieving it.

Workforce capability is the destination. Always.

The TrainingIQ Approach

A Simple Premise

TrainingIQ was established on a simple premise: before organisations invest in courses, qualifications or learning solutions, they should first understand the capability they are trying to build.

Too many organisations confuse training activity with workforce capability. Courses are commissioned, qualifications are achieved and compliance obligations are met, yet leaders are still left asking the same question: 'Can our people perform when it matters most?'

Training is often part of the answer, but it should rarely be the first question. Our approach begins by understanding organisational outcomes, the capability required to achieve them, the evidence available, and the gaps that genuinely need to be addressed.

We believe there is a better way. One that starts with understanding capability, not prescribing training.

What We Believe

1. Capability is the objective; training is one of many possible solutions.
2. Advice should precede solutions.
3. Evidence should replace assumptions.
4. Competence should be demonstrated, not assumed.
5. Workforce capability is a strategic organisational asset.
6. Learning creates value only when it improves workplace performance.
7. Capability should be governed with the same discipline as safety, quality and risk.
8. Every investment in workforce development should contribute measurable organisational value.

How We Work

Every engagement begins with curiosity. Before recommending a solution, we seek to understand the organisation, the work, the risks and the outcomes being pursued.

TrainingIQ works from the outside in.

We begin with organisational outcomes, then identify the capability required to deliver those outcomes. Only after understanding the evidence, context and risks do we recommend an appropriate intervention.

Sometimes that recommendation is accredited training. Sometimes it is non-accredited learning, coaching, improved supervision, redesigned assessment, stronger governance or no training at all.

The solution should always fit the problem. That principle guides every recommendation we make

Every engagement starts with five questions:

1. What organisational outcomes are you trying to achieve?
2. What capability is required to achieve those outcomes?
3. What evidence demonstrates current capability?

4. Where are the capability risks or gaps?
5. What intervention will deliver the greatest organisational value?

How we help

We help organisations build workforce capability through advisory, evidence and practical solutions. TrainingIQ services include:

- Capability Advisory
- Capability Reviews and Health Checks
- Learning and Assessment Design
- RTO Advisory Services
- Capability Governance and Assurance
- Training Delivery and Facilitation
- Strategic Workforce Capability Projects

The common thread is not the service itself—it is a commitment to improving organisational performance.

Our Commitment

TrainingIQ exists to help organisations build workforces that are capable, resilient and prepared to perform when it matters most.

If organisations begin by understanding the capability they need, they make better decisions about training, leadership, systems, assessment and investment. If they can demonstrate capability rather than simply record learning, they become safer, more resilient and better prepared for the future.

Because capability is more than training.

It is more than a qualification.

It is more than a training record.

It is the ability of people and organisations to perform safely, effectively and consistently when it matters most.

That is the purpose of TrainingIQ.

Capability before courses.

Always.

About the Author

Richard Shadforth is the Founder and Principal Capability and Training Adviser of TrainingIQ.

With more than three decades of experience across the military, emergency services vocational education and training, organisational capability and workforce development, Richard has worked with government agencies, local government, emergency management organisations and industry to strengthen workforce capability in operational environments where performance matters.

Throughout his career he has observed a recurring pattern: organisations frequently respond to capability challenges by commissioning more training, yet the underlying issues often lie elsewhere—in leadership, systems, supervision, governance, organisational culture or the way capability is understood and measured.

These observations became the catalyst for the philosophy presented in this paper.

Richard established TrainingIQ to provide independent, evidence-based advice that helps organisations understand the capability they need before determining the most appropriate intervention. Sometimes that intervention is accredited training. Sometimes it is non-accredited learning. Often it is something entirely different.

His work is guided by a simple belief:

Organisations do not succeed because they deliver more training. They succeed because their people are capable of performing when it matters most.

Beyond Training is the first publication in the TrainingIQ Thought Leadership Series and reflects Richard's commitment to advancing the conversation around workforce capability, organisational performance and evidence-based workforce development.

References

The ideas presented in this publication have been informed by established research and practice across workforce capability, vocational education and training, organisational learning, competency-based assessment, leadership, governance and workforce development.

The concepts and frameworks developed by TrainingIQ build upon this body of knowledge while introducing an integrated advisory approach to workforce capability.

The first edition of this publication draws upon, and has been influenced by, literature and guidance from sources including:

- Australian Skills Quality Authority (ASQA)
- Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF)
- Standards for Registered Training Organisations (RTOs)
- Australian and State Work Health and Safety legislation
- Safe Work Australia
- Australian Institute of Training and Development (AITD)
- Industry Skills Councils and Training Package guidance

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TrainingIQ acknowledges that workforce capability is an interdisciplinary field informed by education, operational experience, organisational psychology, risk management and leadership practice.

The author also acknowledges the many practitioners, operational leaders, trainers, assessors and workforce development professionals whose practical experience has influenced the thinking presented throughout this publication.

While the concepts presented in this paper represent the TrainingIQ philosophy and methodology, they have been shaped by decades of collective experience across industry, government, emergency services and vocational education.

THE TRAININGIQ CAPABILITY PHILOSOPHY™

A CAPABILITY-FIRST JOURNEY

From recognising the problem to building, governing and maturing workforce capability.



CAPABILITY BEFORE COURSES. ALWAYS.

TrainingIQ

CAPABILITY. COMPETENCE. OUTCOMES.