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The Capability Approach to Career Guidance

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What is the Capability Approach?

Introduced by economist and philosopher:

Amartya Sen



Capability Approach as

...a reaction against:

- Income and GDP as dominant outcome measures
- Economics that views people as a means to an end
- Happiness as a main indicator how people's lives are going

...an argument for:

- Attention to the resources people have available, and the factors that allow them to be converted into desired lifestyles
- Well-being is understood in terms of the lifestyles that are realistically attainable

Why apply the Capability Approach to career development?

1. A fresh starting point in philosophy/economics with **social justice** is a central concern: A focus on autonomy, choice and agency
2. **Well-being** is also a central concern, but a good life is defined in terms of being free to make choices – to be and do what matters to you
3. Broad brush so flexible in application **across cultures** and has credibility with influential international bodies

Ideas from the Capability Approach

Career outcomes are '*beings and doings*'

Being = a state (e.g. safe and free from hunger)
but also a position or social identity

Doing = relates to activity, occupation

People seek out '*beings and doings*' that they have
'reason to value'.



Creative commons source:
www.indianetzone.com/49/indian_economists.ht

CA is a resource theory

Being in possession of a resource does not guarantee enjoying the valued outcomes it should provide.

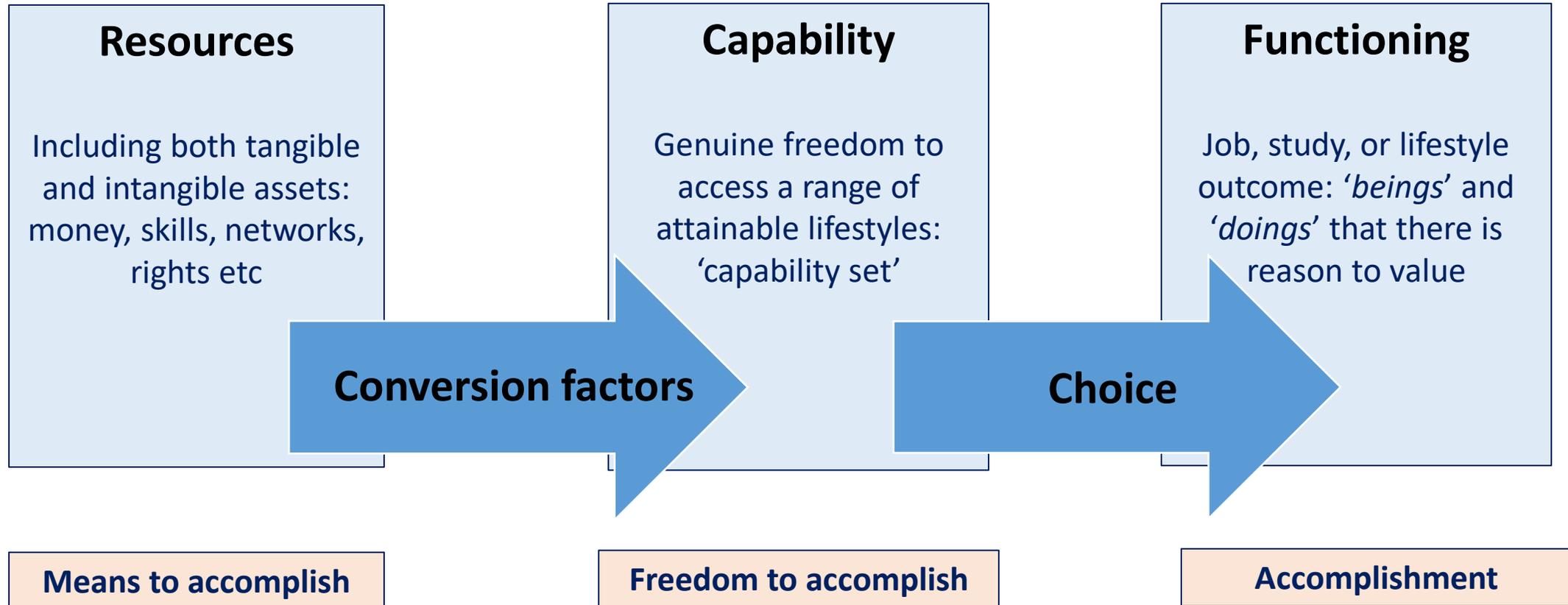
‘Conversion factors’ are needed to enable people to convert their resources into desired outcomes.



Key concepts in the Capability Approach

Resources:	Tangible and intangible e.g. money; skills
Conversion factors:	Environmental and social conditions Positive facilitating and negative barriers
Capability set:	All that the individual can do or be All realistically attainable jobs/lifestyles
Choice:	Individual factors (agency and limitations)
Functionings:	What an individual is and does Their attained work/lifestyle

Overview of the Capability Approach



Why the Capability Approach is *NOT* straightforward to apply to practice

1. It is 'radically underspecified'
2. It is potentially very demanding in the information required to conduct assessments
3. Unresolved issues about who gets to define 'capabilities' and by what process
4. Most research to date has focused on understanding careers through the lens of the CA; not on designing and testing career education and guidance interventions.

**The utility of
resources arises from
the individual being
part of wider systems**

Economic system

Financial capital:
income, expenditure, debt, savings
Generic skills for work
Vocationally specific skills

Psychology

Confidence & agency
Psychological capital
Future focus

Socio-cultural system

Social capital
Cultural capital
Identity capital
Moral capital

Physical system

Embodied capital: health and physique
Spatial capital: geography
Temporal capital: time
Equipment and possessions

Some implications of the Capability Approach for practice

Autonomy	Developing capabilities involves promoting client autonomy as a central ethical principle and a unifying goal for practice
Voice	The genuine participation of service users is required in the conceptualization of capabilities for service design
Assessment	The informational basis of the Capability Approach is demanding and implies a holistic approach to assessment
Values	The Capability Approach means helping people attain a lifestyle that they 'have reason to value'

The service users' voice

Career development practice places listening as a central activity; but contains the clients' voices in a safe box: the guidance interview

The Capability Approach implies genuine service user involvement in the objectives, design and governance of services according to their value systems



The Capability Approach means helping people attain a lifestyle that they *'have reason to value'*

- A key issue to help client to identify '***what matters to you?...what is important?***'
- Implies a thought process that is **rational** at least to some extent
- Considering **trade-offs** between different kinds of outcomes from different pathways
- **Evidence** that values identification is an effective approach in counselling for career choice



An example: Applying capabilities to welfare-to-work programmes for the unemployed

Established programmes make welfare benefit payments conditional on participation in EITHER:

WORK FIRST: Place into employment as fast as possible; not important what the job is.

OR

HUMAN CAPITAL DEVELOPMENT: Training in vocational skills required by sectors where there are staff shortages.

New perspective:

CAREER FIRST

- Support to choose sustainable career pathways
- Guidance precedes skills development or job applications
- Respect freedom to choose options according to own values
- Voluntary participation
- Listen to the service user voice

Further reading

Robertson, P.J. & Egdell, V. (2018). A capability approach to career development: An introduction and implications for practice. *Australian Journal of Career Development*, 27, Issue 3 (October), 119-126.

A special issue (5 articles) on the Capability Approach to career guidance of the ***International Journal of Educational and Vocational Guidance*** will be published very soon.

Thank you!

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Any questions or comments?

