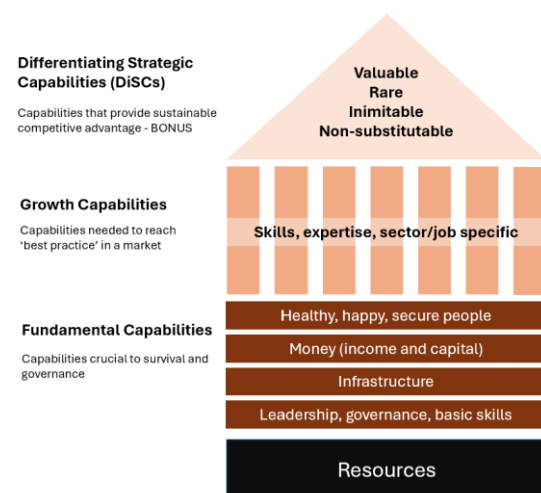


Building Strategic Differentiating Capabilities (DiSCs) for Syria – Fast

(Summary of keynote presentation by. SAMS 2025, Damascus, 5th July 2025)

Professor William Scott-Jackson. Oxford Centre for Impact Research

Although the current focus for Syria must be short term recovery, health and rebuilding infrastructure, the Syrian government is also beginning to define the strategic sectors, such as tourism and agriculture, which will power the country's long-term success. Clearly, as well as infrastructure and facilities, certain human capabilities are crucial for success in all the strategic sectors.



Every country requires various human capabilities in order to achieve its objectives (e.g. to rebuild a strong economy and society). Some of these are basic capabilities, that any similar country might need, but a few are described as Differentiating Strategic Capabilities (DiSCs) which are specific to the context and confer significant benefit. DiSCs can be described as *“people’s abilities, that are different to other people’s abilities, and which help achieve long term goals”*

DiSCs are highly valuable, rare and unique. Examples could be specific types of entrepreneurialism, resilience or optimism.

Although DiSCs can seem vague or intangible, through robust research we have been able to define, build and measure strategically important DiSCs for the UAE, Saudi, Oman and Qatar, which significantly contribute to the achievement of national strategies.

We can take Syria's strategic sector of tourism as an example. Syria has many advantages which for tourism, including cultural, historic and religious sites, and it will be able to build a new infrastructure including transport, luxury hotels and IT systems, to reach world class standards. But Syria also has less tangible, but equally important human capabilities. For example, Syrian culture is naturally hospitable, and this could be built upon to become a key DiSC. If Syrians were to become known as the most hospitable people on earth – would this be an advantage?

An example from Dubai shows that seemingly vague DiSCs can indeed be defined, built and measured. In Dubai's case, HH Sheikh Mohammed wanted Dubai to be the happiest city on earth. We were able to define happiness, in this case, as 'active enthusiasm', rather than passive contentment, to include tools for happiness in education and government policy and to develop measures for individuals and the nation to assess levels of active happiness.

We strongly recommend, therefore, that a robust research project should be launched now to identify the key DiSCs for each strategic sector. To define them, build them and measure them so that Syria can achieve its long-term goals and regain its rightful place as a social, economic and cultural leader in the world and for all Syrian people to be healthy, happy, secure and successful.