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SAVE MONEY by finding and keeping the right IT SKILLS

Following the initial over-hype, the move towards e-business continues - even during a slowdown in the economy. Forget about recession and job losses. As we rely ever more heavily on an IT/IS infrastructure, we are still short of key IT skills, and the shortage is now becoming business-critical.

IT professionals are typically technology-loyal rather than employer or industry-loyal, and have thus earned a reputation for job-hopping as they look for new challenges to broaden or develop their skills. There IS something that can be done about this, however!

Many IT employees feel frustrated and undervalued when their skills are not used to the full, or are not recognised by their employer. Frequently they are expected to undertake mundane work which IT users should be doing. The nub of the problem is that organisations are frequently poor at describing the skills they require, and managers often have a poor understanding of the skills that are critical to the business or to a particular project. As a result, projects are often poorly resourced, and are equally often late in implementation! Many fail to meet user needs, either.

Too frequently, organisations fail to ask what IT skills are held and what skills the individual would like to use - in contrast to their often elaborate tracking of other attributes, such as foreign language or soft skills.

It is clearly vital to identify and describe skills so that everyone is clear what is meant, and what is needed, and a skills framework is the best means of describing skills to avoid misunderstandings, providing a lingua franca both for the individual and the organisation. ValueAdding.com has been involved in developing skills frameworks in a number of large organisations.

The Skills Framework for the Information Age (SFIA) is just such a framework, and is rapidly gaining currency across all sectors - because it is simple and accessible to everyone. SFIA has been developed by the e-skills NTO, which is an employer-led, not-for-profit organisation. The SFIA framework relates to the detailed skills described in the role-based British Computer Society (BCS) Industry Model Structure and puts them into a matrix that describes 57 skills in 17 sub-categories and 6 categories against 7 levels of responsibility and accountability.

We believe there are three broad "flavours" for a skills framework, depending upon the organisational requirements.

1. Definition of IT roles in a stable environment to facilitate:

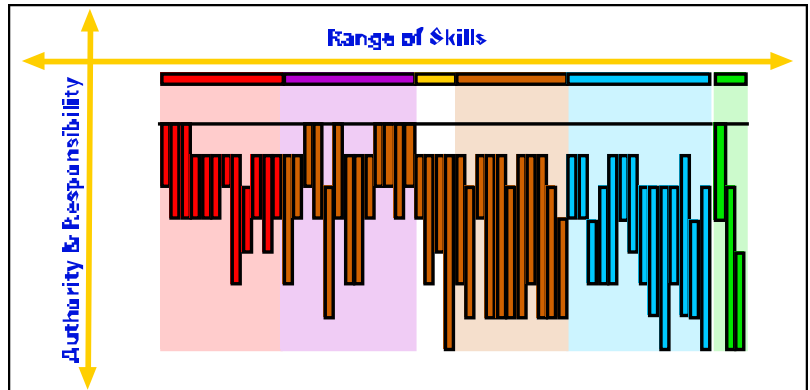
- Organisational development planning
- Personal development programmes
- Training course planning

2. Definition of detailed skills for resourcing assignments:

- Used in a project rich environment
- Used with resource management to identify the skills and duration for which they are required

3. Identification of candidates for IT roles by:

- Capturing skills of individuals from outside the IT community (This needs to be at the detailed skill level)



The SFIA model can be used as the basis of a framework, but for more meaningful assignment or project definition we need to deal with Detailed Skills as described in the BCS Industry Structure Model. For example, we may need someone not just with project planning skills, in general, but more specifically with PRINCE2 skills. The finished framework can thus have many more skills than the 57 listed in the SFIA model. The level of detail required will vary from organisation to organisation dependent upon which of the three "flavours" they are.

Application of the framework can take many different forms from a paper based questionnaire to a screen based database or Excel spreadsheet. But before we determine the how, we must first understand its uses, interfaces and objectives.

With a more detailed understanding of users and uses we can develop a framework based on the SFIA model and appropriate to the organisation. Deploying the framework is the domain of HR specialists, and ours have found that it is far from the easiest part of the project, as management structure, culture and accountability are just a few of the dependencies to be addressed.

So is the effort worth it? In our view, the answer is "yes". For the individual we see the following benefits:

- Using SFIA in conjunction with the BCS IMS can give clarity to the skills they want to develop
- They have a better understanding of their market worth, as more organisations use SFIA
- They can use it to highlight their training and development needs to their employer

For the employer some large savings derive from use of a framework, including:

- More focused targeting of resource requirements
- Reduced waste of expensive resources
- Latent talent identified
- Resource planning facilitated
- Improved succession planning
- Improved organisational development

For one organisation we worked with we estimated that they will save 30% of their IT staff of 1500. (Their estimate put the figure at 50%) Either way the bottom line is a large saving.

Summary checklist:

- Understand the organisational environment;
- Establish who will use the framework;
- Determine what they will use it for;
- Use the right level of detail by involving the users;
- Test it and refine it.

To discuss any aspects of this article please contact: Roger@valueadding.com

Competencies

At ValueAdding.com "We help clients to respond to market requirements by improving their processes and costs through the skills of their people." We have consultants with a broad range of expertise and significant experience that can help you overcome a wide range of problems. For each of the problems or issues listed below please make contact with our lead consultant in that field.

PROBLEMS OR SUBJECT AREAS

CHANGE MANAGEMENT STRIVING FOR EXCELLENCE

Led by Richard Coombes:
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Better service and access for customers is not "just a call away"

We all know that improvements in communication technology mean we can access almost any service at any time to suit ourselves. However, as customers attempting to deal with service providers, we are often disappointed or frustrated that the apparent ease with which the initial contact is made does not result in a more efficient end result.

It is good to be able to order over the phone or internet at a time to suit ourselves, better still to request installation of some new service, and excellent when we find we can ask for help at the time that we need it. However, unless the product, service or assistance is actually delivered, the "instant access" rapidly becomes an empty promise. The result is that we either take our business elsewhere or return to the old way of doing things.

Extensive staff training in product or service characteristics obviously helps, but all too often front line staff are themselves let down by the delivery process.

Before introducing new and advanced methods of customer access, the best organisations review and change the delivery process itself. This Business Process Re-engineering (BPR) must involve the staff who deliver the service. By involving them in the re-design and thus in the objectives of the exercise they will buy into the overall changes being proposed, and ensure that service to your customers really does improve.

Restructuring the "back office" process may well inform the IT structure. However, experience tells us that very often the changes required are less capital intensive, more mundane and involve less

technical re-design.

Three key steps are involved in this change process.

- **Step 1** involves understanding existing processes. Managers are often not good at this, because they believe that the process operates according to the procedure manual that they carefully wrote some time ago. If you initiate a re-design exercise from the wrong start point you will end up with a new process whose problems are the same as those that you have now.

- **In step 2** staff should be allowed to create a vision for the future. You need to guide them by declaring the objectives of the organisation, but then allow them to build a picture of what their future best process will look like, from the point of view both of the customer and the staff who are going to operate the process. In this step you can develop a template for any future process – a backbone upon which you can build the exact workings later.

- **Step 3** is the time to become involved in detailed writing of procedures and protocols. Start by designing your new process according to the template structure, then identify any changes from the original and describe any new activities.

Because of the external benchmarking of the Best Value Review system, local authorities are now attempting to improve their service to customers through improved access arrangements. However, if their only change is to introduce a Call Centre or One-Stop-Shop to handle the initial enquiry, many will discover that existing processes are not sufficiently robust to deliver service improvements. Those who find that housing repairs still take six weeks to complete, or that incomplete applications for Housing Benefit still hinder the payment of rents may need to review how their processes actually deliver the service, rather than just re-design the initial access.

For further information on this topic contact Richard Coombes - richard@valueadding.com

Getting to know us



Jackie Smith has worked internationally in the finance, telecoms, defence, IT, manufacturing, health, education and arts sectors, on such issues as culture change as a result of M&As and changed strategic imperatives; employee retention; performance improvement; values based leadership; facilitating team development and problem-solving; preparation of business plans (SMEs); management training and the design of performance management systems including competencies and skills inventories. Her projects have also included executive/management coaching, leadership and high potential development.

Jackie is an organisational psychologist with degrees in Russian and Psychology as well as a Masters degree in Human Resource Management. She is also a qualified trainer in Neuro Linguistic Programming (NLP).

Jackie first became an organisational development consultant with one of the Big Five. Prior to consultancy, she managed a team of psychologists supporting a major change initiative in the largest educational institution in the southern hemisphere, and also set up a greenfield-site management development centre for a global group of companies.



Chris Fegan's expertise is within the service function, creating and implementing Best Practice solutions.

Prior to entering consultancy, Chris had more than eight years' experience in customer-facing roles with Securicor Cellular and WorldCom International, during periods of rapid change in the cellular and fixed line Telecoms industry. He experienced both extremes of change, from exponential expansion to downsizing, and demonstrated his ability to manage change through the service function by leading highly successful Business Improvement Teams working across operational interfaces and focusing on delivering Best Practice. He has also led in-house improvement teams, driving efficiency through Business Process Re-engineering.

Chris has a Business Degree from the University of Sussex and is currently supporting peers in developing a start-up CRM practice within the Financial Sector.

COACH YOUR WAY OUT OF THE RECESSION

Coaching is becoming increasingly important as an approach to developing staff. It can be tailored to meet the needs of an individual, at the convenience of the individual - and it can be done on or off the job. As they realise the value of adopting a coaching style rather than using a directive approach to managing staff, more and more organisations are using coaching as an alternative to sending people on time-consuming training programmes or to conferences. An external coach can often achieve as much as, or more than, an internal one, especially at management and executive levels in organisations which do not have the resources to coach at this level.

BEING A COACH

Developing coaching skills takes time, and involves practice, feedback and support. The rewards for doing this are more motivated and involved staff, increased productivity and, over time, an increase in self-management, reducing managerial investment in problem-solving; greater retention and loyalty (reduced staff turnover costs) - and personal satisfaction for the coach. I have learnt as much about myself when coaching as I have in being coached.

WHAT DO YOU NEED TO HAVE TO BE A COACH?

- *Curiosity, wanting to explore, suspending judgement while you do so*

- *Resourcefulness, using your abilities and talents*
- *Openness to what happens, prepared to go where the coached person wants*
- *Determination to keep going when blocks arise and the core issue hasn't yet surfaced*
- *Focus on the relationship – a win-win collaboration*
- *Ability to follow the other person's agenda (unless it involves a performance problem and your agenda needs to be communicated also)*
- *Being clear about what you want as a coach*
- *A sense of fun*

TIPS FOR COACHING

- *Reach up-front confidentiality agreements about who will or will not receive information about whom, before the coaching commences.*
- *Pay attention to the coaching process and commit to it. Explore what coaching is and isn't, what might or might not occur. Articulate what is going on, not just what the person says but how they say it and, where appropriate, how the coached person and you as a coach feel about the process.*
- *Coaching impacts all aspects of life. Understand how changes, or development of new skills at work, can impact on other parts of someone's life. Clarify what actions need to be taken to*

sustain change.

- *When we constantly make decisions that go against our inner values, we lack energy and motivation, and depression may set in. Helping a person clarify their personal values is a useful step in understanding what motivates them. Work on personal (rather than just organisational) values is paramount for sustainable effectiveness in large corporations.*
- *As you work on getting to the core of an issue, show your own vulnerability, possibly by disclosing times when you had difficulties or confidence problems, by sharing concern about where to head next in the coaching session or about how effective you are being.*
- *Denial and resistance are common first reactions to change. Share the change cue with people so that exploration and commitment can occur*
- *Teach coaching skills as you go, either directly or indirectly (by example).*
- *Set clear goals and measures*

CASE STUDIES OF THE BENEFITS OF COACHING

If you would like to see some case studies about coaching, or simply to know more about the subject, contact:

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