

Bringing SFIA to Life by Andy Andrews

Competencies Technology SFIA

A number of years ago, I was working with an IT function within an organisation that had spent six months and a hefty budget on adapting SFIA to suit the organisation's needs (more on the advisability and approach for customising SFIA in a future blog post). They sent me a hard copy of their handiwork – a sizeable volume of paper. Using this document (or should I say book?), each employee was required to carry out a self-assessment of the SFIA skills associated with their job. I can only imagine how long it took each of the 1400 employees involved to complete this exercise!

What was the result? The 1400 responses were placed on a shelf never to be used – there was no way to make practical use of the results directly from paper. The initiative and their investment to that point spluttered and died. One moral of the story is this: a successful SFIA deployment has to deliver tangible operational and strategic benefits and particularly for large teams this requires supporting technology.

For example, imagine that you were looking to find a person from the 1400 employees with a unique set of 4 or 5 SFIA skills with a specified level of proficiency, someone to work on a project; to fill a

vacancy; to succeed someone else – real IT business requirements. How many hours would it take to sift through the paper responses from the 1400 employees? On the other hand well designed software can list employees with a matching SFIA skills profile within seconds.

Software systems can also provide views on the organisation's SFIA skill gaps and capability. Try doing that with a paper based assessment!

Of course another issue with paper based assessments is that as soon as they have been completed, they are potentially out of date, whereas online versions are far easier to maintain.

I sometimes ask people what they use to manage their skills and competencies; they often tell me Microsoft Word documents, Microsoft Excel spreadsheets or even a Microsoft Access database here or there. None of these applications are truly fit for the task, so it's not only important to use technology, but to use the right technology to bring SFIA to life.

In the following blog posts, we will consider how using SFIA with technology can help with applications such as Learning and Development, Career Development and Recruitment.

SFIA Version 6



The SFIA Foundation Board is pleased to announce that the consultation for Version 6 of the Framework will commence early in the New Year. This will enable the Board's partners and the Framework users to input their requirements into the new version of the Framework. To ensure that we collate all user requirements alongside the alignment with the National Occupational Standards in IT, we will be extending the timescale of the project announced earlier in the year but the Board is confident that the output will better match the dynamic demands of employers in our sector. Full details of timescales will be released early in 2014. If you have any comments please email them to me at: busadmin@sfia-online.org

SFIA App – Behind the Scenes

With 96 skills in the framework and their description presented in bulky spreadsheets, it was a tedious task to find a specific skill and their corresponding description. During consultation with senior leaderships, explaining the description of different roles at different levels seemed complex and cumbersome.

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Therefore the objective was to find a way to simplify how the roles and their respective descriptions can be viewed and presented. Consequently the team at 'AKS Consulting Services' decided to come up with a mobile app that would bring the entire framework to mobile devices and tablets for quick access.

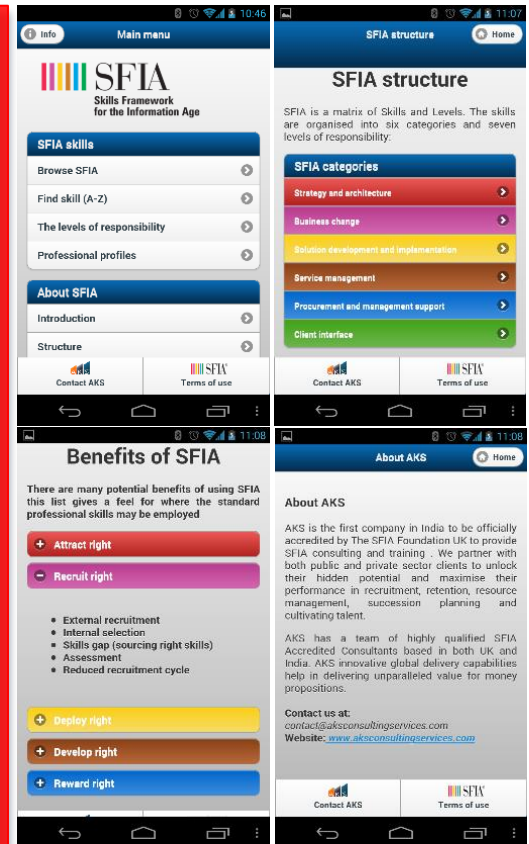
Initially, the team faced a lot of challenges but the senior leadership were aware of this reality and were quick to act. They invested heavily and made available some valuable resources. The team made full use of this opportunity and came up with a design and an implementation plan and to their credit, in a matter of days were able to create an app which was ready for the final stages of testing. Finally on 23rd August, 2013, the app was officially uploaded on the app stores of the two leading mobile ecosystems.

Priced at £7.99, the app has been downloaded more than a 100 times all across the world with number of downloads increasing each day.

"I was really lucky to be a part of the team. The best thing was that I came to know about SFIA and its various skills. I am now aware of the various roles in the IT industry that suit my interests and needs." - Rishabh Singh (Team Member).

"Thanks to this internship opportunity, I will now have a vague idea when applying for different roles in different IT companies. This is certainly an added bonus." – Abhinav Gupta (Team Member).

"Surprised with the response received. Second version of the app underway" – Mandeep Singh (Project Manager)



Challenges:

- Team of interns with little to zero experience in mobile app development.
- Ambiguous requirements
- Steep learning curve
- Tight deadline
- high expectations
- incorporating various changes
- coming up with a sound testing plan

Team Members



Mandeep Singh



Rishabh Singh



Malvika Gupta



Abhinav Gupta



Nitish Parikh

SFIA, Apprenticeships, and a new standard



In June 2012, the UK Government commissioned an independent review of apprenticeships in England, to ensure that in the future the programme is meeting the needs of the changing economy, consistently delivers the professionally recognised qualifications and skills which employers and learners need, and is maximising the impact of government investment.

The review was carried out by Doug Richard (a former BBC "Dragon") and published in November 2012. One of his key recommendations was:

"The focus of apprenticeships should be on the outcome. There should be **recognised industry standards** at the heart of every apprenticeship. They should clearly set out what apprentices should know, and be able to do, *at the end* of their apprenticeship, at a high level which is meaningful and relevant for employers. These Standards should form the basis of new apprenticeship qualifications, which replace apprenticeship frameworks, the current qualifications which comprise them and the current national occupational standards which underpin them. There should be just one apprenticeship qualification for each occupation associated with an apprenticeship. They should link to Standards for **professional Registration** in sectors where these exist and are well-recognised."

The Richard review has informed much of the current work on new Apprenticeships, under the employer-driven "Trailblazers" programme. Working with the Gatsby Foundation, BCS, THE Chartered Institute for IT, has undertaken to create a **new IT Standard at SFIA Level 3**, and is working closely with the Trailblazer stream designated as "Digital Industries", which is intended to address the shortage of skills across IT.

Apart from defining the **Standard**, we need to establish a process for **assessment** and subsequent **registration** of individuals attaining this Standard. Many of them will do so by completing an accredited Apprenticeship programme, others by different routes.

It is anticipated that the Register will be open to all occupations which require competence in one or more SFIA Skills at Level 3.

To be successful, it is vital that the new Standard meets the needs of employers. We are happy to gather opinions through comments, dialogue, meetings, and workshops - whatever is most convenient. We have already begun to involve a representative sample of organisations which employ staff in roles which align with these occupations.

If you would like to contribute, or simply to know more about the current programme, please contact either me, or the Programme Manager, Richard Lester, at BCS.

We welcome your interest, and look forward to hearing your opinions and ideas

[The Richard review can be seen at:

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/34708/richard-review-full.pdf

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Common ICT Job Profiles & Indicators of Skills Mobility ACS

The Australian Computer Society has been conducting annual employment surveys since 1993. For the first time, the 2013 survey contained a dedicated skills section. Respondents were asked to nominate the top four skills they use in their current role using skills defined in the Skills Framework for the Information Age (SFIA). There were over 5,000 respondents to the 2013 survey. The results of the survey provide a clear understanding of skills mobility both horizontally across ICT job roles of similar skill levels, and vertically. This white paper identifies the skills profiles for twenty five common ICT job roles. For an individual, understanding job design trends allows you to identify skill development areas that afford you the best potential to deliver on your career ambitions. For organisations, effective job design is critical to successfully executing your strategic and tactical business plans. To access the White Paper register at: <http://www.acs.org.au/information-resources/ict-skills-white-paper>

SFIA Applications: Learning and Development

By Ben Hedges in Competencies Learning SFIA



How does your organisation determine the learning needs of its IT employees? For many organisations it works like this; once a year, at some point prior to preparing the training budget, a catalogue of learning solution is distributed and managers and/or employees will have the option of selecting which solutions are required and, in the case of departmental managers, how many are required. The learning solution catalogue is often based on training that was delivered last year, the training vendor's current catalogue and hopefully input from technical specialists within the organisation.

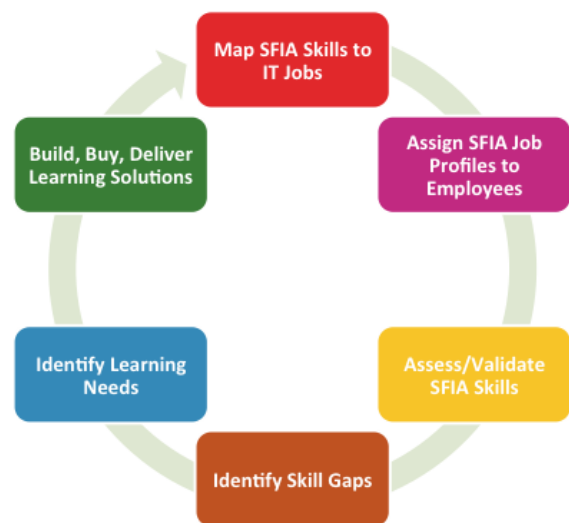
What if last year's offerings are out of date? What if your managers haven't properly checked on their team's requirements? What if your training vendor is driven to promote their courses without understanding your needs? What if your managers' and employees' selections aren't based on actual business needs? What if...?

In some cases the approach is even more random.

Isn't there a more accurate and objective way of identifying your organisation's IT learning needs? Yes, there is and the answer comes in the form of SFIA-based job roles.

By mapping SFIA skills and levels to your IT jobs and then having your employees assess their SFIA skills it is possible to identify where your employees greatest skill gaps are. If you have done the job of mapping skills to jobs accurately and in line with your business requirements, the gaps will indicate which skills

require development in order to support business need rather than any other agenda. Furthermore, by mapping learning solutions to skill gaps you will be able to determine which learning solutions you will need to deliver in order to address your IT business needs. This methodology is graphically represented below:



What happens if you don't have a learning solution in place to address a gap? This approach also provides you with a clear view of which learning solutions you need to develop or procure. Rather than taking a speculative approach to developing, procuring and delivering your learning solutions, a SFIA-based methodology will enable you to make the best use of your hard-earned learning budget.

There are many other advantages to this approach too, not least being the ability to develop a SFIA skills profile and learning plan for each employee and the ability to aggregate and determine needs for teams, countries and regions. It also provides the ability to plan the most effective use of learning resources and allow you to determine if you should build or buy, and whether you should choose onsite or public courses.

So here are another couple of questions that often crop up:



Skills Update

a) Isn't it a lot of work to map training solutions to the skills in SFIA?

b) How can we use SFIA to determine the content that we need to source and/or develop?

The answer to a) is yes, it can be, however many training vendors have already done the work of mapping their training catalogues to SFIA skills. It is in the interest of training providers to do this work and share it with you as this approach will also help them to provide you with appropriate solutions. If you use an external training provider check whether they have already done this work for you, if not, then you may need to do this work yourselves, perhaps facilitated by your Learning and Development team.

This will ensure that your learning solutions are up-to-date, fit for purpose and that you are making the most of your training budget.

The answer to b) is that the skills in the SFIA framework provide a great deal of detail which you can leverage, for instance the SFIA skill descriptors and proficiency indicators can be used to outline the learning outcomes of any learning solutions that you have identified for development.

Learning and Development resources and budget for IT are precious; make sure that you make the optimum use of them by taking a more scientific approach to identifying your learning needs and by leveraging the power of SFIA!

SFIA Assessment Service named as a finalist in the 2013 itSMF UK Awards

BSMimpact were thrilled to be named as a finalist in the itSMF UK Awards in the category of Service Innovation of the Year!

The Service Innovation of the Year Award is presented to the organisation offering the most novel product or service offering developed within the year. Finalists were assessed on the level of ingenuity and inventiveness in their offering, and the originality of the solution.

As a long term user of SFIA as part of his consultancy work, Matthew Burrows, Managing Director of UK-based BSMimpact, decided to develop an online SFIA Self-Assessment service following the successful development of an ISO/IEC 20000 assessment on the Assessment Portal platform. This was seen as an excellent way of making SFIA more accessible, and offering immediate benefits to all individuals and organisations for less than £25 per person and no investment in infrastructure or software.

The assessment is constructed to ensure that individuals are only asked relevant questions, using the answers to previous questions to determine which questions to ask. The report is automated, and delivered to the individual in Word format within approximately 24 hours of completion. This report requires no knowledge of SFIA to interpret, and is used to enhance CVs/Resumes and as a baseline for Continual Professional Development (CPD) plans.

The assessment is also used by organisations for teams, departments or entire organisations. It can be used to dramatically improve the recruitment cycle, using SFIA skills to do intelligent matching of candidates to roles. It is used in Continual Professional Development (CPD), to help individuals to target the skills they need at the right levels, and pick the most appropriate options for improvement.

Some SFIA Partner organisations are now using the assessment as an integral part of their consultancy offering to their clients, reducing the cost and effort for the customer, ensuring a consistent and high quality output report.

Matthew Burrows said "we made the decision to enter the SFIA Assessment service for the Service Innovation of the Year because it is an innovative solution to a challenging problem of assessing staff skills. The service has made SFIA accessible to everyone, allowing them to get benefit without any background or knowledge of SFIA. With just 15-45 minutes of effort online answering some plain English questions, the SFIA Skills Profile is produced and sent to the individual."

"We were very pleased to be named as a finalist in the itSMF awards for the SFIA Assessment service. It is a fact that the need to understand and develop skills in line with the changing face of ICT across the globe is a priority for organisations, so to have developed an innovative service that can help organisations achieve this is extremely rewarding".

For more information on the SFIA Assessment, visit <http://www.sfia-alliance.org/sfia-resources.html>

Skills Update

“Balancing costs, risks and quality of IT Services”

Best practices, frameworks, methods, such as ITIL®, COBIT®, ISO/IEC 20000, SFIA, Six Sigma™ are bringing new approaches to IT management, helping organizations quickly adopt valuable collections of good practices followed by many leading companies but also rapidly spreading in smaller organizations across different business lines.

Conference SDFI (**S**ervice **D**elivery **F**orum **I**nternational Czech Republic Brno, Holiday Inn, 22nd May 2014) is established to provide vendor neutral platform bringing together IT professionals across business lines and company sizes to share their positive experience with usage of global practices but also offer platform for sharing mistakes which could happen in adoption process. The conference SDFI was started first in 2012 and is getting year by year more respect and reputation in IT community.

The Vision is to establish a tradition of the most respectable IT event in the Czech Republic in terms of the practical usability of provided information: „The most respected practitioners event“. Speakers from abroad are invited to the conference with the objective of establishing an international forum.



Skillsoft is a pioneer in the field of learning with a long history of innovation. Skillsoft provides cloud based learning solutions for its customers worldwide, ranging from global enterprises, government, and education to mid-sized and small businesses. Skillsoft's customer support teams draw on a wealth of in-house experience and a comprehensive learning e-library to develop off-the-shelf and custom learning programs tailored to cost-effectively meet customer needs. Skillsoft's courses, books and videos have been developed by industry leading learning experts to ensure that they maximize business skills, performance, and talent development.

Skillsoft currently serves over 6,000 customers and more than 19,000,000 learners around the world. Skillsoft is on the web at www.Skillsoft.com.

The Last Word

This year promises to be an exciting one in The SFIA World! With ongoing projects within the SFIA community and the Foundations plans for SFIA Version 6 moving forward nicely! All in all we are looking forward to some positive changes! Alongside our Partners and Consultants we remain dedicated to the SFIA Community and to spreading the SFIA word. It is important that we continue to focus on assisting companies, individuals and the industry as a whole into understanding the full potential that can be reached by implementing the SFIA Framework successfully for assessment, organisation and progression.

The Foundation continues to develop SFIA and encourage and support its use within organisations. Help us keep up to date with User experience and assist others with their SFIA Journey by sharing your story: either in the form of a case study or an article for our next edition of 'Skills Update' the SFIA Newsletter. Whether it's a success story, a tale of trouble overcome, or unique SFIA implementation we'd love to hear from you. We feel that there are exciting times ahead and look forward to working with you all. So until the next edition of 'Skills Update' we thank you for your on-going support and wish you a prosperous few months.



Lucy Ryan
Business Administrator

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