



Skills Update

IT skills crucial says Intellect

Intellect, the UK's ICT trade body is determined to improve the industry's IT skills. The IT Supplier Code of Best Practice, recently published by Intellect and OGC (The Office of Government Commerce) makes skills core to two of its ten commitments. And it goes further. In Commitment 10 – Individual Skills and Professionalism – it stipulates that 'skills will be specified by reference to a recognised, independent framework, such as SFIA'.

This reference underpins SFIA's growing position as the industry's first choice skills framework. And the Code of Best Practice is no paper tiger, as Intellect Director General John Higgins makes clear. "The IT Industry is committed to

the adoption of these new measures," he said.

With IT suppliers to government expected to adhere to the new code, Ron McLaren of the SFIA Foundation said he is expecting more adoptions of the framework.

The new code is not the only initiative recommending organisations measure and report on their skills. Last November the Accounting for People Task Force recommended organisations begin reporting annually on their Human Capital – a recommendation likely to be accepted by the DTI. In addition, Resource Management is one of the five core elements of the revised quality standard ISO 9001:2000. Organisations



that have invested in ISO 9001 and want to retain it are now obliged to establish systems to determine competencies needed, skills gaps and personal development plans.

For more:

www.intellectuk.org
www.accountingforpeople.gov.uk
www.bsi-global.com/Corporate/9000.xalter

Higgins: "The IT industry is committed to these new measures."

Skills and competency frameworks seminar

A seminar to be held on April 19th in London will focus on the practical side of implementing skills frameworks. Organised by Parity and InfoBasis in conjunction with the SFIA Foundation, the BCS, e-skills UK, and the Office of Government Commerce (OGC), the seminar will

include an update on the BCS's new SFIPlus framework, its successor to the ISM.

The aim of the seminar is to show best practice in implementing skills and competency frameworks. OGC's Jane Grant will talk on 'Best Practice Skills

Delivery in Government' and Diane Benjamin will discuss how the NHS is using skills frameworks.

The free one-day seminar will be held at Brown's Courtrooms, Covent Garden. To book a place, visit www.parity.net/skillsseminar or phone 0800 656 100.

The SFIA Foundation is a not-for-profit body jointly owned by:



BCS announces SFIAplus as next step for ISM



The BCS has aligned its own training and development standard – the Industry Structure Model (ISM) – to SFIA to create SFIAplus.

“SFIA plus will be a more comprehensive tool that not only enables organisations to classify and benchmark their IT skills, but also to train and develop their teams to meet their IT skill requirements,” said Kate Edwin-Scott of the

BCS business development unit.

SFIAplus provides extensive additional information on skills and jobs based on BCS’ experience built up over the 18 years since the ISM was launched. Covering 9 function groups, 10 levels of responsibility and 300 IT job roles, the ISM is used by 1,300 organisations in its current version.

“This alignment of SFIA and the Industry Structure Model will remove any confusion from the skills management arena,” said Kate. “It will enable our current ISM users to benefit from the increasing use of SFIA as a national skills standard.”

SFIAplus will underpin the new range of BCS professional development products.

Edwin-Scott: “SFIAplus will enable ISM users to benefit from the increasing use of SFIA as a national standard.”

Training providers sign up to SFIA

Leading UK IT training providers are increasingly mapping their training courses to SFIA.

The recently launched One Stop Shop, an e-skills UK online service, provides a database of IT courses, searchable by SFIA category, and by postcode

and delivery method.

In addition, leading technical training company Parity has an online searchable database, while Xpertise Commercial Director Bill Walker says his company plans to align its courses to SFIA. “Increasingly our clients are using SFIA as a

tool for career development. We see the benefit in that, and are keen to help establish the framework as the national standard.”

For more:

<http://www.e-skills.com/cgi-bin/wms.pl/332>
<http://www.parity.net/Training/SFIA/>

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SFIA Adoptions Up

Over the past six months, SFIA Foundation Operations Manager Ron McLaren has noted an increase in organisations considering using SFIA for skills management. “Interest has definitely picked up since the November launch of SFIA 2.0,” says Ron. “Among those exploring SFIA are the several branches of the Armed Forces and a number of large financial services

companies. There has also been interest from Local Government.”

EU Meta-Framework

International skills standards were discussed March 24-25 at a skills workshop run by the European Commission. Among topics raised was the possibility of a ‘skills meta framework’ which would sit above individual national skills frameworks and provide transparency between them.

ICT BTEC launched

Edexcel has chosen SFIA as the basis for a new global IT qualification. Edexcel will initially offer a BTEC Award qualification in IT Skills for the Business Practitioner - Systems Development, at NQF levels 3 and 4, which will map directly to the SFIA ‘Development and Implementation’ category. Over the next two years additional qualifications will be built on the same model.

Top insurer benefits from skills management

When Norwich Union first adopted SFIA nearly three years ago, they did so because like many companies they needed a handle on the skills they had internally. Norwich Union is part of Aviva, the world's seventh largest insurer, and the biggest in the UK. Formed by the merger of several large insurance companies in the late '90s, Aviva has some 60,000 staff. About half these staff are in the UK, where five major insurance companies came together to form Norwich Union, each bringing its own systems, infrastructure and procedures.

"Each company not only had its own IT infrastructure," explains Gary Cannon, people development manager at Norwich Union Life and Pensions, "they also had their own cultures, ways of dealing with staff and processes."

The result was that while the newly formed company had a good handle on the inventory of its physical assets, it had no centralized way of judging the extent of its human capital. "On the IT side this was particularly important, as we needed to consolidate our IT systems, and have the right personnel to support them," says Gary. There was also a desire to pass a critical eye over the employment of contractors.

"We wanted a method to describe the skills of all IT staff. Rather than use a system from one of the merged companies, we decided to go with SFIA for

two reasons. Firstly, it came from outside the merged organizations so no one party had a vested interest in it. Secondly, it was a national standard used by other major employers. By using it, we would be able to benefit from other people's experience and make comparisons with them."

Over several months, IT staff assessed their skills against SFIA, and had their self-assessments confirmed by their managers or by other competent staff. Because SFIA describes IT skills in general terms, the project team added another layer of vendor-specific information to the framework.

In this way, Norwich Union was able to reduce contractor spend substantially, explains Gary. "In the beginning, the model was fairly crude. Contractors were seen as a cost that had to be reduced. "For example, it might be decided to lose 12 C++ contractors and retrain 12 COBOL programmer staff to take their place, because they were insufficiently engaged."

Now that Norwich Union is managing its skills, it has developed a more sophisticated approach to contractor hires. The key to this is forecasting 'skills hot spots' – areas where a future shortfall of skills is predicted. "For example, you might predict a need for 50 people with a certain skill set for the roll-out of a system in the future," says Gary. "Using skills management we can

see whether we have those people available and what the knock-on effects will be if we remove them from their current posts. If the area of expertise is strategic, you can consider training people up for it, but if it's short term, you might choose to engage contractors to help you over the short term 'hump'."

This approach has been very successful in reducing contracting spend, but Gary is reluctant to take all the credit. "Although it's managed out of the Resource Management team, it's vital that other parts of the organization are involved. Indeed, without their involvement, it wouldn't work. The point of having a common language for skills is that the various departments in HR, the Learning and Development Team and line managers can all benefit from it by rigorously applying the performance management processes."

So just how much did Norwich Union save by adopting this approach? As you would expect from a financial organization, they have a good idea of their costs, but are also a little reluctant to mention any precise figures. "Let me put it this way," says Gary Cannon. "Let's say you managed to achieve a 5% saving on your own firm's staff budget. You can do the arithmetic, but let me just say that Norwich Union has more than justified the effort it's put into this."



Cannon: "Norwich Union has more than justified the effort it's put into this."

Last word



*SFIA Foundation
Operations Manager
Ron McLaren sets out
his stall.*

It is a pleasure to write the first Editorial for the SFIA newsletter.

Interest in the framework has been growing apace. Acknowledgement from Government and use by significant organisations is showing that SFIA's time has come.

If you have not been in contact with us before, I'll take this opportunity to explain where the Skills Framework for the Information Age comes from and what it does.

Following encouragement by the DTI in 1998, a working party of senior people from across the IT community was set up to prepare a standardised view of skills in IT and Telecomms. This group was led during 1999 by e-skills NTO (the forerunner of e-skills UK), and then by e-skills UK itself. The resulting framework was completed by 2000, and launched at the DTI conference centre in June 2001.

Four key bodies in the industry (BCS, IEE, IMIS and e-skills UK) then came together to form The SFIA Foundation, which took up the ownership of the framework. The aim of the SFIA Foundation is to maintain the framework, facilitate the spread of best practice in its implementation, and to encourage its uptake.

The Foundation has a Steering Group, consisting of senior managers from user organisations and other significant players in IT and Telecomms. There is also a User Group, for the exchange of ideas and the channelling of feedback.

SFIA does not tell people how to manage their IT staff, nor how to define their jobs. But it does give a rational and consistent definition of the underlying skills. It is not a strait-jacket! This is the secret of its flexibility.

IMIS (Institute for the Management of Information Systems) was one of the

early adopters of SFIA. IMIS uses SFIA as the basis for its accreditation system. All IMIS members are assessed against the levels and skills in SFIA. This demonstrated at an early stage that SFIA was robust enough for mission-critical use. More about IMIS in the next edition.

If you have not looked at SFIA yet, I urge you to do so (www.sfia.org.uk). It is not just for green-field situations: SFIA can add consistency to an existing framework.

All the documentation can be downloaded or ordered from the web site. In addition, make sure you keep up to date with the latest developments by subscribing to this newsletter – to do so, just mail me at ron.mclaren@sfia.org.uk.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Ron McLaren

The SFIA Foundation is a not-for-profit body jointly owned by:



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