



# Securing and Retaining talent:

## Skills or Potential?

### When securing and retaining talent, are you looking for skills or potential?

Knowledge of “how to” is one thing, hard-earned experience is another, mastery of a skill requires both. No doubt skills can be learnt, but if I'm in the back of a commercial jet, I still want the pilot to have real experience (in a wide range of conditions), necessary qualifications and the knowledge to manage unpredictable situations.

Having the potential, promise or untested capability is not going to cut it, not even hours on a simulator and passing a multiple-choice exam! I want to fly with airlines that have people like Sully (check out Captain Chesley “Sully” Sullenberger in the movie “Sully”). There's no substitute for tried and tested experience, if a pilot requires 100 hours of experience, then not even 10 pilots with 10 hrs and potential will do!

IT organisations increasingly use process models of best practice to help deliver and manage technology, yet very few systematically assess demonstrated relevant experience of staff to align best practice and technology.

### Finding resources with real world experience – putting skills first

When we use SFIA (Skills Framework for the Information Age) to confirm what skills your organisation, your staff, and your suppliers have, we don't validate potential and theory, we confirm experience and mastery of practicing the skills and doing what SFIA is describing, many times and in real working environments.

We use SFIA precisely because it is the globally-adopted description of real activity in the Digital, Cyber and Technology dependent world – what you have done rather than just what you know or might theoretically be able to do.

Certification and training often only demonstrates knowledge and understanding, which is important, but you need resources who:

- have taken the opportunity to put that into practice in the real world, and
- have continued to practice those skills to the point where they are competent, experienced and capable.

### Got any pilots already?

#### How do you know?

What could be more frustrating than looking externally for talent when appropriately skilled resources could be found from within? If you don't know what skills you have internally, then the potential for lost time and cost in recruiting increases exponentially. Remember if you are not providing the opportunities to challenge and develop your staff somebody else will.

If you're sourcing staff based on potential, then you're going to need to have people internally who already have the skill, and who have time to help the person to gain experience and mastery in that skill. That's going to take some time. It will cost less to bring an experienced pilot up to speed on a new type of plane, if they have already demonstrated mastery in another type.

This is where SFIA can help by focussing on the application of professional skills and being technology and methodology agnostic, you can build a clear picture of their skill potential for your specific needs.

### You need a balance in your talent pool

SFIA makes an important contribution in the selection process and can help your organisation recruit the skills needed. It plays an even bigger part in understanding the skills you already have by providing the common language to describe and build “healthy” balanced talent pools, including:

- those who are still learning, (and have potential!)
- people with the same skills but at different levels,
- people with particular skills specialisms, and
- appropriate coverage across all the skills and experience levels that you have decided are core to have in your organisation.

SFIA contributes to delivering business outcomes by providing insight into the capability of your team, by quantifying the difference between the team you want and the team you have and the means to manage it.

With the appropriate skills and experience, it is relatively straightforward to confirm what skills you have, which skills are needed, and how any gaps can be addressed through development or recruitment.

■ Phil Lovell, Senior Consultant  
BSMimpact