

# 3

## WHAT can I do? (Identifying your SKILLS and ROLE)

## Chapter 3 outline

### Identifying your transferable skills

- What are skills?
- Why are skills so important?
- What do I use my skills on?
- What are traits?
- Three ways to find your skills set
- The six families of skills
- Skills levels
- Producing your top skills list
- Identifying your ROLE from your skills

## Introduction

To identify your most suitable role you will need to identify your transferable skills set. A skill might be defined as an action (or set of actions) that achieve results. Transferable skills are core skills that we use most of the time to achieve our best results.

Most people do not know what their skills set is. Typically most people can name no more than 10 skills if you ask them what they do. However, using the exercises below you can expand the list to dozens or more!

## Identifying your transferable skills

If you ask most people what their best skills are they usually can't tell you. If you press them they mention things like: "I am persistent, patient, goal-centred." These are useful things to be – but they are not skills. You need to understand also what you are doing when you are being so persistent!

## What are Skills?

A **skill** is an action that will produce results with people, information or things. Skills may be very broadly defined as in "Communication Skills", which covers a multitude of sub skills or as precisely defined as you can make it. The better your understanding of your skills sets the better will be your chance of identifying the best role for yourself.

## Why are skills so important?

- Skills are more marketable than traits; skills point to your achievements
- Skills are the building blocks of your CV
- HR managers look for achievements and skills when making decisions
- Interviewers use competency frameworks – where they probe for skills
- Knowing and doing is **not** the same thing! *So concentrate on doing!*

## What do I use my skills on?

***You need to identify your skills in terms of the things to which you apply them.***

*For example, writing is a skill – which usually has a specific object.*

**Writing letters = skill (writing) + object (letters).**

This may appear to be very basic but most CVs and job applications define skills sets too loosely to be of any use to the potential employer – who is interested more in the results you can achieve using those skills. Identifying a skill, no matter how precisely it is done, is only one third of the work. If you list presenting as a skill, this ignores the range of subjects where your skills may be applied. Therefore there is a need to identify the precise object (or range of objects) for the particular skill.

*For example:*

If your favourite is **Presenting**.

*You need to know **what** do you present and how you present it?*

There are degrees of precision in defining a core skill

- **Imprecisely defined object** = presenting *anything*
- **More precisely defined** = presenting *complex financial data*
- **Most precisely defined** = presenting *complex financial data succinctly*

## What are Traits?

If you are identifying your skills you need to be clear about the difference between skills and traits (or attributes). A trait or

an attribute is a word describing the way in which we use a particular skill: E.g. Adjectives: Enthusiastic, precise, Adverbs: Carefully, patiently, Traits can point us to skills if we ask the question – what were we doing when we were being that enthusiastic or careful? The answer will come back as a word usually ending in –‘ing’ - such a word is a skills word.

### The most marketable traits:

- Honesty      → Reliability
- Consistency   → Enthusiasm

## Activity 1

### My Favourite Traits

#### List your favourite traits:

Prioritise the ones that would be most useful to **you** in your career.

Here’s a list to get you started:

- Pleasant      → Charming
- Honest        → Ingenious
- Clever        → Witty
- Persistent   → Thorough
- Creative      → Consistent
- Rigorous     → Diligent
- Inclusive     → Warm
- Reserved     → Numerate
- Aware         → Comprehensive
- Organised    → Wise

## My Favourite Traits (how my work is described)

1	2	3	4	5



*When you are done, enter your favourite traits in the WHAT box on the Career Blueprint (at the end of the book).*

### *Why do I need this?*

To help you understand how others see you. A good reality check to see if the perception matches the reality.

## Three ways to find your skills set.

### Activity 2

#### *Finding your skills set from your traits*

(Traits are the clues that lead you to your skills!)

You can convert your favourite traits to skills by asking the question?

List a number of your traits and convert them to skills - I have given you one sample:

What were you actually doing when you were acting reliably?

Trait	Skill(s) used when demonstrating this trait
Reliable	Accounting, paying, notifying etc.

### *Why do I need this?*

It is important to be able to distinguish between traits and skills at all stages of the process. Traits are general descriptions and show how we operate. Skills are more precise and show what we can do.

### Activity 3

## Finding your skills set from your life story

(More detective work! What’s your record? What have you done?)

Identify incidents in your life when you achieved results you were proud of. Write each one of these as one page listing out the following:

- **Your objective**  
What you were trying to achieve
- **Your obstacles**  
What stood in your way

→ **Your actions**  
What you did – focussing on the skills you used make sure the words end in “ing” – this gives you the skills words – rule a separate column for these

→ **Your outcome**  
What you actually achieved.

Read your story over to a friend - get them to write down the skills words.

This is a very useful exercise because it uses the same structure interviewers use in competency interviews (see page 52).

*This example should help:*

<b>Your objective</b>	To build a garden shed from a DIY Kit	
<b>Your obstacles</b>	I am not into DIY, we were running out of space in the house and my partner was threatening divorce!	
<b>Your actions</b>	I read the plans. I checked all the items in the box. I assembled all the tools I needed. I dug the foundations .. etc	<b>Skills words</b>
		Reading Checking Assembling Digging Etc.
<b>Your outcome</b>	I got the shed up in an afternoon and saved about €300 and saved my marriage	

**TIP:** Ask a friend to listen to your story and quiz you on what you did – with the objective of extracting as many skills as possible. You will be surprised at the results.

#### Why do I need this?

Transferable skills are the building blocks of your career. If you know your skills you can more easily identify what makes you effective and how you get results.

*Now fill this in for your story:*

Your objective		
Your obstacles		
Your actions		Skills words
Your outcome		

## Activity 4

### *Finding your skills set from previous jobs:*

You can do this in at least four ways:

- 1 Analyse a work project in the same way as you did for a life experience in (2) above
- 2 Go through your job descriptions – they will be peppered with skills words
- 3 Recall any performance reviews or things you were praised for – these judgments will include skills words somewhere.
- 4 Recall things you were regularly called upon to do. These will not only identify the skills words but will show you the more marketable ones!

Skills words in job descriptions	
Skills words from performance reviews	
Skills words in my tasks (on request)	

#### *Why do I need this?*

Past achievement is a reliable indicator of future performance.

#### *Handy hint:*

Remember skills words end with the letters “ing”!

A skill is an “ING” thing!

## The six families of skills

As you do more work discovering your skills sets you will find it handy to divide skills into logical families.

### 1 PHYSICAL SKILLS:

→ The first major family of skills is that dealing with technology, equipment, plants, animals or skills involving our senses.

*Typical skills words in this category: Making (furniture), repairing (kettles), installing*

### 2 INFORMATION SKILLS

→ The second family of skills deals with collecting and analysing data of all sorts.

*Typical skills words in this category: Researching, Analysing, Deciding*

### 3 INTERPERSONAL SKILLS

→ This deals with all our interpersonal skills which we use in one-to-one situations or in groups.

*Typical skills words in this category: Helping, Listening, Persuading, Collaborating*

### 4 CREATIVE SKILLS

→ These are skills we use to create or adapt things.

*Typical skills words in this category: Designing, Adapting, Transforming, Drawing, Painting*

### 5 MANAGERIAL SKILLS

→ These are the skills we use when we lead people or get things done.

*Typical skills words: Supervising, Motivating, Selling, Changing*

### 6 ADMINISTRATIVE SKILLS

→ The last category of skills involves what we do to keep things running smoothly.

*Typical skills words: Listing, Co-ordinating, Counting, Classifying, Checking*

## Why our skills are not apparent to us

Most people are only barely aware of the range and depth of their own skill set.

A helpful way to raise awareness is to examine the four stage of learning as below:

These are:

1 “I don’t know that I don’t know” - This is when you think anybody can do anything!

It is technically called  
UNCONSCIOUS  
INCOMPETENCE

2 “I know that I don’t know” - When you find out that it’s not as easy as it looks

– Called CONSCIOUS  
INCOMPETENCE

3 “I know that I know” – when you learn your skills and build up your level

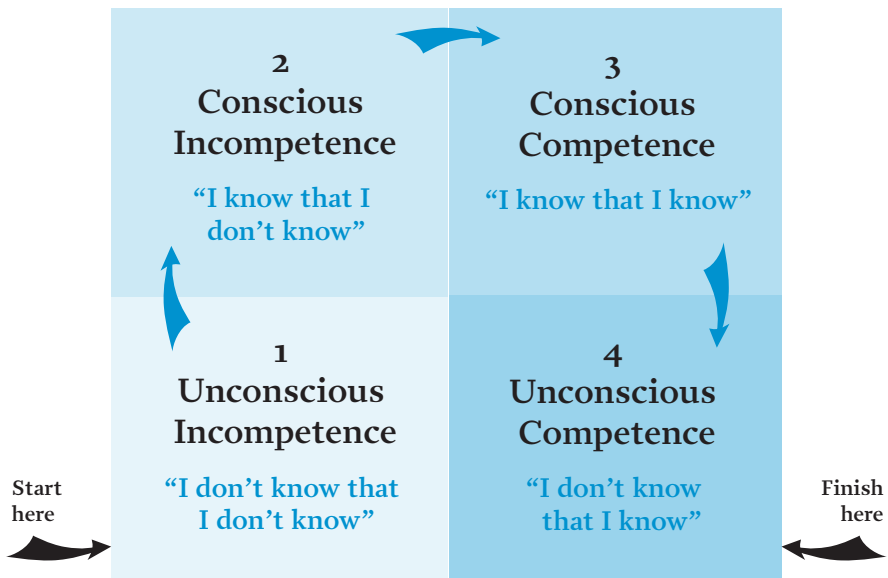
– Called CONSCIOUS COMPETENCE

4 “I don’t know that I know” – When you are so competent you can perform well without thinking it! - This stage is then called UNCONSCIOUS COMPETENCE

The diagram below explains what happens.

So the result of this strange phenomenon is firstly that we don’t know that we know, we don’t know how we learned, and worst of all, we don’t know how to repeat the experience because we have no memory of it! Unless,

of course, we take the time to find out. How do we get around this problem? How do we access the memories of skills? If two of the phases involve consciousness, can we recover these? It is said that the brain retains everything that it records – the only difficulty is in the rate and method of recovery which seems to get less and less reliable as we grow older. We get around this problem by story telling. The stories we tell are about things we have done and a good story starts off with a challenge, a list of the obstacles to be faced, what we did and the results achieved. If we tell that story to ourselves we will get one result. If we tell the story to others and ask them to listen out for the skills contained in our story the results will be much more comprehensive.



## A recent trend in job interviewing: Competency interviews

In the last few years many interviewers have gone over to a form of interviewing which asks for examples where interviewees have used their skills. The structure they use has three Phases:

1. PROBLEM

2. ACTIONS

3. RESULTS.

*Does this look familiar?*

To prepare for such interviews candidates need to identify the depth and breadth of their experiences with the skills sets of the job for which they are applying.

If you are stuck in identifying your skills set try this:

- 1 Look at the type of equipment or technology you like to use – this will help you identify your **physical skills**
- 2 Look at your library, books, magazines, favourite websites – this may give you clues about your **informational skills**
- 3 Think of ways in which you like to be creative – this will access your **creative skills**
- 4 Think about the way others relate to you, or ask for your help – this will give you clues about your **interpersonal skills**
- 5 Identify situations where you took the lead (or were asked to) – particularly if others were reluctant to get involved –

this will give you data about your **managerial skills**

- 6 Itemise the situations where you have had to write things down, calculate or classify things – this will identify your **administrative skills**

### Skills levels

As you inventory your skills you will notice that certain skills, such as recording are not as complex or as difficult to acquire as higher level skills such as analysing data.

You will need to:

- a Maximise the list of skills that you have and
- b Sort those skills into those that are highest level
- c Identify those that you are enthusiastic about using
- d Research which ones are the most marketable

Some higher level skills with people, like leading or mentoring or guiding comprise dozens or more other skills or sub-skills. It is very easy to get lost in a forest of skills so naming, classification and prioritisation needs to be done.

You would also need to think about the level at which your skills operate

- Learner
- Average level
- Professional

If you are at learner or average skills level you may need to re-consider training and development as part of your career plan going forward.

## Producing your top skills list

When you have researched your best examples prioritise your skills according to level and liking.

### *What are my top skills?*

Ones which meet all or most of these criteria:

*I love using these skills, I like learning about them, they come easily to me and they would be useful in the world of work.*

Here are some examples (Not all for the same person!)

	1	2	3	4	5
<b>Skill</b>	Restoring	Writing	Motivating	Playing	Counselling
<b>Object</b>	Furniture	Proposals	Sales Staff	Keyboards	Students
<b>Trait</b>	Sensitively	Concisely	Effectively	Precisely	Empathetically

For each of your favourite skills you will need to clarify it further under the following headings:

1 Skill name	2 Preferred object	3 Trait	4 Skills type	5 Level	6 Marketability 1=Very good 2=OK 3=Needs Training
Restoring	Furniture	Sensitively	Physical	Master Craftsperson 10 years experience	Level 1 In heavy demand!

*Why do I need this?*

Good CVs are built up from clearly identified skills sets. At interviews you will be better able to identify what you can achieve in your chosen role.

**Activity 5 – Fill one in for yourself!**

**Master Skills Template.** Here is a template for you to fill out.

	1	2	3	4	5
Skill Name					
Preferred Object: <i>I like using this skill with</i>					
Skills type *1					
Skill Level <i>How proficient are you at it?*</i> 2					
Marketability (e.g. “in demand”) etc.					

\*1: PHYSICAL INFORMATIONAL  
INTERPERSONAL CREATIVE  
MANAGERIAL ADMINISTRATIVE

\*2: 1=Very good  
2=Ok  
3=Needs Training



**Enter the information about your skills and objects into the WHAT box of your Career Blueprint**

**Activity 6**  
*Identifying your ROLE from your skills*

Your role can be deduced from your list of four or five top skills e.g. someone who is good at leading, setting goals, supporting and motivating people could be called a MANAGER or a TEAM LEADER.

## How to find potential roles (or jobs) from skills.

If you can identify your core skills set precisely to include the most marketable skills you enjoy using then you can use this information to guide your research and your assessment of potential offers.

In your researches ask yourself and others the question:

→ **What do you call somebody with this skills set?**

In assessing potential job offers ask the question:

→ **How well does this job description match my top skills set?**

## Activity 7

*Do some creative thinking about HOW your top skills could be combined in different ways to suggest different roles and enter your favourites on your Blueprint.*

e.g. combining the following skills:

**Motivating+supporting+setting (goals)+ innovating**

Could give you the following alternative roles (and careers):

*Film Director, Marketing Executive, Politician, Project Design Manager etc.*

**Your top 5 skills and some possible roles:**

Your top 5 skills	Possible roles
1	
2	
3	
4	

*Why do I need this?*

To show that you have options not immediately apparent to you.

*Hint:*

Use an internet search engine to find jobs that match your five top skills – enter them in the search line and the system should return sites or pages that contain those skills. *Be patient!*

In the next chapter roles will be discovered through your interests.

you use your skills to achieve results

## Chapter 3 Summary

As a career detective you now know the following:

- 1 Skills need to be precisely defined in terms of the action, the object (what you use the skill on) and the attribute (how you use the skill)
- 2 Traits are useful in describing how you operate but employers are more interested in the how
- 3 Our best skills are hidden from us in the way our mind works – our brain “forgets” how it learned
- 4 Explore your life and career to date to find examples of the skills you used
- 5 We need to do a reality check on our perceived skills set to ensure they are at the right level – if we are offering them to the market

## Activity 8

*List some specific goals you can set about enabling your career to move forward:*

Action	Date	Desired outcome
1		
2		
3		