

# 6 Developing Successful Careers

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For many years IT professionals have been aware of the need to develop new technical skills in the fast moving world of IT. In today's world, however, as more routine technical work is moved overseas, IT professionals need to focus on developing those skills that continue to be needed here in the UK. Employers regularly report a shortage of skilled IT workers who combine a knowledge of technology with an understanding of how IT can be exploited to bring business benefits or who can effectively manage projects to deliver IT-enabled business change. IT professionals need to branch out, especially into other business functions, to develop a more rounded skills-set and to integrate key technical and analytical skills into mainstream business functions. This chapter describes the very wide range of services offered by BCS to help IT professionals progress their careers.

## SKILLS FRAMEWORK FOR THE INFORMATION AGE (SFIA) AND SFIAPLUS

SFIA provides a clear model for describing what ICT practitioners do. It consists of a simple two-dimensional framework describing areas of work on one axis and levels of responsibility on the other. There are six main areas of work:

- strategy and planning;
- development;
- business change;
- service provision;
- procurement and management support;
- ancillary skills.

These categories are divided into specific skills (a full list of SFIA skills can be found in Appendix A). The levels defined within SFIA describe the level of responsibility and accountability exercised by ICT practitioners. Each of the seven levels, from new entrant to strategist level, is defined in terms of autonomy, influence, complexity and business skills. For each skill at each level, descriptors provide examples of typical tasks undertaken. The framework helps ICT practitioners to benchmark which skills they need for particular jobs or career paths.

In July 2003, BCS, e-skills UK, the Institution of Electrical Engineers (IEE) and the Institute for the Management of Information Systems (IMIS) joined forces to form the SFIA Foundation. One of the driving forces for SFIA is the Steering Group, whose members are drawn from SFIA's user community and includes Accenture, CISCO, the Department for Trade and Industry, IBM, the Irish Computer Society, Learning Tree, the Ministry of Defence, Norwich Union, Parity Training and QA Training. Further information about SFIA can be found at [www.sfia.org.uk](http://www.sfia.org.uk).

A new release of SFIA (version 3) was launched in November 2005 and results from extensive consultation with the IT industry, government departments, commercial organizations such as IBM and Norwich Union and the NHS. This new version of SFIA caters more effectively for organizations managing outsourcing relationships, business change roles, service management, security and IT governance and compliance, and these are the roles that are becoming increasingly important for UK-based IT professionals in the era of global sourcing.

BCS has enhanced the SFIA standard by aligning its own training and development standard, the Industry Standard Model (ISM) and SFIA to create SFIPlus. All professional grade members of BCS have free browser access to the SFIPlus standard. This comprehensive tool can be used to classify and benchmark skills. SFIPlus has been upgraded in line with SFIA version 3. Further information can be found at: [www.bcs.org/sfiplus](http://www.bcs.org/sfiplus).

### **BOX 6.1 DEVELOPING VALUE-ADD SKILLS**

John Webb, BCS IT Consultant of the Year in 2005, explains how he progressed his career beyond the traditional IT role to develop value-add skills:

**I am a senior consultant working for Xantus Consulting and have over 15 years experience working within corporate environments in financial, manufacturing and retail organizations.**

**My career started in 1988 when I joined EDS and gained 10 years' experience in an outsourced manufacturing environment, developing programming skills and managing numerous network infrastructure-based projects for several clients. The ability to build strong relationships with both the client and the project team was key in delivering first-class services.**

**I changed role in 1998 and moved to Umbro International, the Sports Retailer, where I experienced IT service delivery from the customer perspective. Here my blue chip corporate knowledge and understanding was put to use, defining and delivering a 3-year global infrastructure strategy. I championed the introduction of new design systems and supply chain-tracking facilities and supported the strategic decision to move manufacturing offshore.**

**During 2000 I worked as a consultant through my own company, managing the relationship between Barclays Bank and BT Ignite for high-visibility network changes to the hub of the financial service platforms, the key being clear communication and relationship building.**

**In 2001 I joined Xantus Consulting, a specialist IT consultancy. One of my first assignments included developing a strategy to maximize the efficiency of a credit card system, which is used in approving 1.5 million new accounts per year, for a European credit card issuer. Currently I am part of a Xantus team advising Boots plc, where I have worked on a number of strategic initiatives. I gained external recognition for the work I recently completed for Boots by being awarded the BCS IT Consultant of the Year. This assignment saw me undertake a trusted adviser role and manage the delivery of a replacement UK data network, which resulted in an overall cost reduction of £9 million. The trusted adviser status is based on the breadth of market knowledge and impartial, up-to-date advice provided for the technology, service and commercial aspects of the project. The Management Consultancy Association also recognized Xantus for this project, awarding the company a Bronze Award for Best Practice.**

**The strength and depth of my experience now allows me to provide executive direction in dynamic environments, where my strategic planning, leadership and communication skills can be utilized to provide services that can support business initiatives and deliver 'best in class' IT service delivery. The real-world skills are typical of the Xantus consultant.**

**Xantus is an independent IT consultancy, offering expert advice and guidance on all aspects of the IT infrastructure lifecycle. The consultancy has recently managed a number of high-profile assignments including the delivery of IT infrastructure to support business process offshoring for several large and global organizations. Xantus has also developed business cases for delivering joint UK/offshore IT delivery capability for UK-based organizations balancing the benefits and risks involved in offshoring.**

**Further information can be found at [www.xantus.co.uk](http://www.xantus.co.uk).**

## CAREER BUILDER

BCS's career development tool, Career Builder, is an innovative online service that enables IT professionals to drive their own career development programmes. Built around the SFIPlus skills standard it enables BCS members to:

- review their IT skills against the industry standard;
- create a personal job description from recognized roles;
- set up cycles of training and development;
- identify objectives and actions in line with career development plans;
- pinpoint resources to help achieve development plans.

Career Builder is a membership service from BCS. Further information can be found at [www.bcs.org/careerbuilder](http://www.bcs.org/careerbuilder).

### BOX 6.2 NEW CAREER OPPORTUNITIES

Peter McElwaine, Solutions Architect in the Energy and Utilities sector at Wipro, explains his decision to join Wipro and the way this has enabled him to progress his chosen career:

'Why did you leave Microsoft and come to Wipro?' is the most frequent, and still to me surprising, question I have heard from my colleagues in the last 3 years; surprising because it reveals the extent to which even those at the heart of the offshore boom don't always realize the significance of the globalization of the IT industry.

It was apparent to me, as the major US hardware and software corporations reached a plateau in the wake of the dot com boom, that one of the biggest paradigm shifts in the history of my chosen profession was going to be driven by the new competitors from so-called emerging markets in southern and eastern Asia. Advantageous economics, startling numbers of highly intelligent, well-educated, English-speaking graduates, world-class quality management processes and a work ethic reminiscent of Victorian England were combining to produce an unstoppable and (controversially) beneficial wave of change in the way that IT products and services were developed and delivered to Western markets. And my career philosophy has always been to embrace inevitable change positively rather than to resist it.

The question I still ask myself is 'Why does Wipro need me?' I am relatively expensive, relatively immobile (geographically speaking), and perhaps slightly less inclined to put work before family than my Indian colleagues. The answer that appeals to me most is that Wipro needs me because I bring more than 20 years of technical, managerial and cultural experience to an organization where many of the people with that number of years behind them are now running the company, and are therefore no longer available for full-time work on projects. The recent rapid expansion of India's leading systems integrators has meant that early progression into management, following even earlier technical specialization, is the norm rather than the exception. Fortunately for me, Wipro recognizes that a solutions architect in charge of a multimillion pound development project needs both breadth and depth of experience, and both business consulting and technical skills.

Sure, there have been cultural and operational challenges, but I expected those and have profited from them. For example, learning to communicate difficult concepts effectively by telephone because daily face-to-face communication is simply not possible has been proof, if such were needed, that I was not born with advanced telephone skills. As time progresses, I hope to become increasingly proficient at making offshoring work and perfect the art of being the interface between the

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European customer and the offshore delivery capability. In the meantime, I am doing what I enjoy most, architecting and designing systems that really meet business needs, and I am working alongside some of the most naturally talented people to be found anywhere in the industry. That, I think, is quite a good place to be.

## MENTORING

Individual BCS members can tap into the wealth of experience that exists within BCS by applying for help and advice from one of the BCS mentors. This service is free of charge and can be provided at any stage in a professional's career. All mentors are provided with training and are familiar with the range of products and services available through BCS. Each mentee is allocated a mentor who belongs to the same BCS branch, which makes contact and communication that much easier.

## CV SERVICES

Writing an effective CV is often the first step towards a successful career move. 'Recruiters are typically looking for people who can take on bridge-building roles – it is all about finding people who are problem solvers and do not just have the techie skills. Technology only has the right to exist if it delivers what the business demands and there is an increasing intolerance of IT for IT's sake', wrote Sean Quinn, associate director of the IT search and selection practice at recruitment company Hudson, in *Computing*.

**Your CV, therefore, needs to stress the right areas of your work; avoid saying how you recommended and implemented a specific application. Instead, stress how you saved the firm £5 million and improved the customer experience. We see candidates who say they are good communicators, yet they are unable to spell out what they are in 11-page CVs. First impressions count, and you can usually tell a lot from a candidate's CV – especially if there are lots of acronyms.**

QUINN (2005)

### CV guidelines

- Keep it short and precise. One page might be sufficient, three pages is a maximum.
- Use a common, easy-to-read font such as Times New Roman or Arial.
- Bullet points make it easy for the reader to assimilate key facts quickly, an important consideration when dealing with very busy people.
- Put recent and relevant experience at the beginning of your CV to draw attention to your strengths.
- Highlight the business benefits you have helped deliver.
- Revise your CV for every job you apply for. General purpose CVs rarely fit the bill for any specific job.

Further advice is available to BCS members through the Career Centre service.

### Career Centre

The online Career Centre service is available to BCS members and is offered with Monster, the world-leading career network. The service enables IT professionals to:

- create, edit and manage up to five CVs and covering letters;
- apply for jobs online and track the applications;

- receive the latest jobs by email;
- maintain CVs securely and privately;
- subscribe to free newsletters.

Further information can be found at <http://career.bcs.newjobs.co.uk>.

### **BCS Professional Experience Record**

This service, which is aimed at the individual IT contractor, consultant or freelance specialist, is designed to help capture skills and experience in a structured and consistent way by benchmarking them against the SFIPlus standard (see page 36). The primary aim of the product is to enable contractors to demonstrate their competence for any given contract or job based on their verified experience, giving them a competitive advantage.

As each assignment is completed and added to a contractor's CV, the client verifies the entry. The Professional Experience Record user does this by issuing a 'guest ticket', which allows the client to review the user's entry and, when satisfied, to verify it. This enables an individual IT contractor to build up a validated record of their career history. The Professional Experience Record can also be used to record current skills and plan, manage and record professional development in structured development cycles.

There is a charge for this member service. Further information can be found at [www.bcs.org/profdev/per](http://www.bcs.org/profdev/per).

### **BCS Women's CV Service**

BCS Women Committee member Kelly Walsh runs a CV clinic and writes about the service:

**When the BCS Women egroup first started, there were lots of requests for help and advice in finding jobs. The committee decided to start up a specialized group to help with these requests and so the CV Advice Team was born. BCS Women operates the CV Advice Team primarily for the members of BCS Women, although requests have been received from all over the world and from many different industries. Team members are volunteers from the group who have experience either in recruitment (graduate and experienced) or interviewing or have a lot of industry experience.**

**The CV Advice Team provides support and feedback on CVs, covering letters, careers advice and mentoring. When reviewing a CV we ask what type of job the person is looking for and most of the time we can point them in the direction of relevant job sites or suggest certain parts of the industry for consideration by the individual. There have been several success stories where members have reported back that they got the interview/job they wanted after applying the feedback.**

**Recurring themes from the CV advice given is collated and posted on the website so that other members can benefit. Items produced include a sample CV structure, dos and don'ts, how to write a cover letter and interviewing techniques. The Advice Team also welcomes suggestions on what else members would like to see. In 2005 there were 107 requests for CV feedback, which is an increase of 44 per cent on 2004, and the demand for the service is growing.**

Further information can be found in the topics section of the BCS Women website at [www.bcs.org.uk/bcswomen](http://www.bcs.org.uk/bcswomen).

## **CAREER DEVELOPMENT SERVICES FOR HEALTH INFORMATICS PROFESSIONALS**

Health informatics in itself is not (yet) a mature discipline but UKCHIP (see pages 24–5) is in the process of developing a continuing professional development scheme that establishes and then regularly monitors an individual's 'fitness to practice' in

health services at one of three levels, from entrance to service director and technical specialist posts. The BCS Health Informatics Forum, members of the Association of Information Management and Technology Professionals (ASSIST) and others in education, training and operational health roles have designed the processes. The scheme in operation now addresses the community of practice of those who are already working in the health domain and also those coming into it from expert positions in other sectors, in addition to those who are just starting out in their career.

Professional development may include traditional training courses and conferences, and self-development activities aimed at improving a wide range of professional skills. About 40 hours development is required each year and evidence can be entered online to record past achievements and plan future activities. In addition to giving a clear outline of where an individual wants to be in the next period, the information from UKCHIP can be aggregated by a manager to give an indication of the potential impact on corporate resources and budgets over that period.

Where an individual is working for an external service provider, directly or indirectly for NHS organizations, they too must be seen to operate to the same professional standards. It is crucial that contractors show their commitment to, and knowledge and competence in, informatics to support health practices, especially where they may be living in a different health care environment whilst working for the NHS.

The UKCHIP website gives much more detail of the processes and examples of development records and allows professionals to register online from home (see [www.ukchip.org](http://www.ukchip.org)). This information was provided by Jean Roberts, UKCHIP Board and member of the BCS Health Informatics Forum.

## NETWORKING

BCS specialist group meetings and events provide excellent networking opportunities for keeping up to date with the latest developments within the profession, discussing topical issues and making useful contacts. A full list of specialist groups is given in Appendix B. For more information contact [sg@hq.bcs.org.uk](mailto:sg@hq.bcs.org.uk) or telephone 01793 417472.

BCS has some 40 branches in the UK; each holds regular meetings in their locale on a diverse set of subjects within the field of IT. Branch meetings enable members to maintain contact with other professionals in their area, keep abreast of current developments and contribute to BCS initiatives. Further information about BCS branches can be found at [www.bcs.org/branches](http://www.bcs.org/branches).

### **BOX 6.3 LEARNING TO USE OFFSHORE RESOURCES WISELY**

Steve Wharrad is a technical programme manager at Barclays and a medallist in the BCS Project Manager of the Year Award 2005. He is accountable for the build, test and delivery of the infrastructure and software needed to support any business initiative. This includes decisions on the use of partners to help with business development, the options around offshoring, as well as working effectively with software vendors. Steve writes about the lessons he has learnt from integrating offshore work into projects managed from the UK:

**Consideration of the value and merits of offshore work is now part of any project initiation. To my mind it sits well with the determination of the project approach. The**

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obvious benefit is cost, but there are other advantages around quality (many offshore capabilities operate at CMMi level 4 or 5) as well as the greater control around scope that offshore working demands.

Some approaches are more suited to utilizing offshore capability. For example, typical waterfall developments fit well, whereas prototyping or show-and-tell type approaches are not so suitable.

The major challenge with offshore capability is communication. The barriers on time zones have not really materialized: we work in a global environment, and are well used to dealing with parts of the business and suppliers that operate around the world. The communication challenges can be overcome by recognizing the need for a formal approach to the development. Entry criteria for the work need to be agreed with the offshore supplier. Quality checks need to be established to make sure the work packages hit these requirements. Equally exit criteria need to be well understood. Communication is likely to involve some on-site working so the mutual understanding can be cemented.

The challenge of communication has broad parallels with the purchase of software from an overseas vendor. I have had recent experience of the delivery of code from a USA-based software house. They were to supply code, with amendments to meet our specification, by dates agreed in the contract. But there were delays and concerns about quality. Entry and exit criteria, a playback of requirements to ensure mutual understanding plus a greater awareness of communication has meant that the code is now delivered and proceeding well through our internal testing. This is exactly the same approach I would expect to see where work is being contributed by an offshore capability.

The offshore proposition is a valuable tool, providing quality at a sensible price. The key to success is understanding if the proposition suits the particular project.

## BCS INFORMATION RESOURCES

Brian Runciman, BCS Managing Editor, writes about the information resources now available online from BCS:

The new BCS website includes extensive editorial sections, one of which is a basic section on offshoring. This section is being expanded with articles, reports and opinion pieces on the subject to give individuals and organizations useful background information and advice.

In addition to the offshoring reports from the BCS Working Party (including this one), the section will include specific coverage on what the UK does well and should be promoting about itself. The section will cover UK specializations such as business process management, software development, outsourcing advisory services and arbitration services.

To provide help to individuals who may have been affected by the offshoring phenomenon, or are concerned about it, the website has an extensive careers section. This contains advice on career moves and how to progress an existing career path. It also includes a range of personal experiences from individuals in many types of IT work.

As a further support for members the new website has an enhanced library service for the exclusive use of BCS members. This includes access to Books 24x7, where members can choose from a list of 200 titles covering various aspects of IT and business. These titles are from more than 80 recognized industry publishers, including John Wiley, Microsoft Press, Sybex, McGraw-Hill, Harvard Business School Publishing, HRD Press, Amacon and the Centre for Creative Leadership.

Via EBSCO members can also now access a range of journal and magazine databases free of charge. The topics covered are:

- corporate business;
- internet and personal computing;
- information science and technology.

Selected Forrester reports are also available covering research focused on providing strategic insight into technology trends. The wide area of coverage makes the research applicable to any decision maker within an organization. There will be two high-level reports available to download from the BCS site every month. Topics that are covered by Forrester include, amongst others:

- application development;
- business intelligence;
- computing systems;
- IT services and outsourcing.

## **BCS BOOKS**

As globalization, global sourcing and outsourcing continue to grow, IT professionals in industry and the public sector will increasingly need to learn new skills and adapt to new ways of work. BCS has launched a book publishing programme with titles explicitly aimed at the IT professional looking to improve their skills, prospects and options. With the role of the IT professional evolving to include more managerial tasks, personal skill development becomes increasingly important. Books on professional issues, project management and IT law are available to help readers prepare themselves for wider responsibilities.

As IT drives massive changes through industry and the public sector, IT professionals will need new management, analysis and business skills if they are to maintain a competitive edge in an increasingly pressurized market. BCS books on global sourcing, process modelling and management and business analysis will help readers come to terms with the latest thinking in these dynamic areas and help prepare them for changes to come.

Further books will be published to help IT professionals develop the skills, knowledge and flexibility to adapt to the changes currently facing them in an increasingly globalized world. Appendix C contains a list of current publications from BCS. Further information about the BCS publications programme can be found at [www.bcs.org/books](http://www.bcs.org/books).