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Department of Labour  
TE TARI MAHI



# Spotlight: A Skills Recognition Tool

## User Guide

### 1. Introduction for Managers

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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Thanks also to Victoria Gregory (Department of Labour), Sonya Bishara (State Services Commission), Kevin Cole (New Zealand Customs Service), Alex Finkle (Department of Conservation), Peter Lafferty (Department of Labour), Sigrid McCausland. Conor Twyford (Workplace Wellbeing).

And a particular thanks to the 57 jobholders who provided extended interviews.

**Disclaimer:** The Department of Labour has made every effort to ensure that the information contained in this report is reliable, but makes no guarantee of its accuracy or completeness and does not accept any liability for any errors. The Department may change the contents of this report at any time without notice.

ISBN: 978-0-478-33346-6

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## CONTENTS

<b>LIST OF TABLES AND FIGURES .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>INTRODUCING SPOTLIGHT .....</b>	<b>5</b>
What is the Spotlight skills recognition tool? .....	5
Applications.....	5
<b>PURPOSE AND VALUE ADDED .....</b>	<b>7</b>
In brief, what are the Spotlight skills?.....	7
What is new about the Spotlight tool?.....	8
How easy is it to use the Spotlight tool?.....	9
An additional toolkit – not a replacement .....	9
Why is the Spotlight tool needed? .....	10
What practical benefits does Spotlight offer HR practitioners? .....	11
What strategic benefits does Spotlight offer? .....	12
Are there costs in not recognising the Spotlight skills? .....	13
<b>BASIC CONCEPTS.....</b>	<b>14</b>
What are the Spotlight components? .....	14
What is the basis of the Spotlight skill sets and elements?.....	14
What capacities do the skill elements describe?.....	15
What is the basis of the Spotlight skill levels? .....	16
What is the function of the Spotlight activity examples?.....	18
How do we identify the level of the skill element?.....	18
How do we identify Spotlight skills in ongoing work activities? .....	20
<b>REFERENCES .....</b>	<b>23</b>

## LIST OF TABLES AND FIGURES

Table 1.1: The Spotlight skills recognition framework.....	6
Table 1.2: The five Spotlight skill levels.....	7
Figure 1.1: Spotlight skill recognition grid.....	8
Figure 1.2: The experience-based skills classified by Spotlight .....	9
Figure 1.3: Reasons why some skills may not be fully recognised .....	10
Table 1.3: Spotlight skill sets and their elements.....	14
Table 1.4: The five learning levels – definitions and basis.....	17
Figure 1.4: The interdependence of the three Spotlight skill sets .....	21
Table 1.5: Deriving skill elements and levels from activity examples.....	22

## **INTRODUCING SPOTLIGHT**

### **What is the Spotlight skills recognition tool?**

The Spotlight tool consists of a skills framework and a set of tools for applying this framework in writing position descriptions, selecting staff, managing performance and fostering individual and career development.

The Spotlight tool is designed to shine a light on three sets of hard to name process skills that make a real difference in helping jobholders carry out work activities effectively.

Research has shown that these skills fall into three sets:

- Shaping awareness
- Interacting and relating
- Coordinating.

The Spotlight framework subdivides these skill sets into nine skill elements. They are listed in Table 1.1.

Jobholders develop these skill elements through practice and problem-solving. The framework provides a way of identifying each skill element at five levels. The first is the skill level of a novice, becoming familiar with the job. Through practice and problem-solving, jobholders reach a level in the use of these skills where they can share solutions and incorporate these skills expertly into work systems. The levels are set out in Table 1.1.

We can see these skills only in action. Hence, the Spotlight tool provides lists of activities by which each Spotlight skill can be identified. Some very general activity examples have been added to Table 1.1 to illustrate what the three main sets of skills might look like at each level. The Spotlight tools include more detailed, research-based examples of activities using the skill elements (see User Guide 2, Table 2.1). The activity examples are simply examples – they are not part of the basic Spotlight framework, which consists of the sets of skill elements and the skill levels

### **Applications**

The Spotlight toolkit shows how the basic Spotlight framework can be used in:

- writing a job or position description
- advertising a job and matching applicants to its skill requirements
- helping jobholders improve their performance and build their career.

**Table 1.1: The Spotlight skills recognition framework**

SKILL SETS AND THEIR ELEMENTS	SKILL LEVELS				
	Breadth or depth of skill required for increasing levels of participation				
	1. Familiarisation	2. Automatic fluency	3. Proficient problem-solving	4. Creative solution-sharing	5. Expert system-shaping
	<b>Capacity to:</b>				
	Build experience through practice, reflection and learning from others	Apply experience independently and automatically	Use automatic proficiency while solving new problems	Help create new approaches through shared solutions	Embed expertise in an ongoing work system
<b>A. Shaping awareness</b> – capacity to develop, focus and shape your own and other participants’ awareness by: A1. Sensing contexts or situations A2. Monitoring and guiding reactions A3. Judging impacts	Learn job contexts, demands and impacts	Automatically monitor the work situation and assess its impacts	Monitor contexts and impacts whilst solving problems	Share situational awareness and new solutions	Understand systems and opportunities to influence them
<b>B. Interacting and relating</b> – capacity to negotiate interpersonal, organisational and intercultural relationships by: B1. Negotiating boundaries B2. Communicating verbally and non-verbally B3. Connecting across cultures	Learn work roles and boundaries	Communicate flexibly and negotiate boundaries deftly	Maintain interactions whilst focusing on solving problems	Contribute creatively to working relationships and networks	Help build organisational practices that contribute to diverse communities
<b>C. Coordinating</b> – capacity to organise your own work, link it into to the overall workflow and deal with disruptions by: C1. Sequencing and combining activities C2. Interweaving your activities with others’ C3. Maintaining and/or restoring workflow	Learn to sort and sequence activities	Smoothly link up tasks and interweave activities	Solve problems whilst maintaining workflow	Share creative approaches to keeping work on track	Help build and maintain sustainable work systems

## PURPOSE AND VALUE ADDED

### In brief, what are the Spotlight skills?

Spotlight is a set of practitioner tools, backed by a research report. It is designed to help identify precisely some key skills that are important, but are hard to define.

Skills are capabilities of individuals or groups, effectively applied in goal-directed work activities that are required to carry out jobs.

The skills recognition Spotlight is designed to shine a light on the skills that enable people to carry out work processes effectively at increasing levels of proficiency.

It identifies three sets of skills, consisting of nine skill elements in all, and the five levels at which each skill element may be used.

In brief, the three skill sets are:

- A. Shaping awareness** – capacity to develop, focus and shape your own and other participants' awareness
- B. Interacting and relating** – capacity to negotiate interpersonal, organisational and intercultural relationships
- C. Coordinating** – capacity to organise your own work, link it into the overall workflow and deal with disruptions

When broken down into nine skill elements, these help define what are often called soft skills. But these skills are soft only in the sense of software operating systems – they are the skills that run or enable ongoing work processes.

These work process skills are not natural attributes, but are learned at work. The Spotlight levels reflect deepening learning, based on participation in work processes.

**Table 1.2: The five Spotlight skill levels**

1. Familiarisation	2. Automatic fluency	3. Proficient problem-solving	4. Creative solution-sharing	5. Expert system-shaping
<b>Capacity to:</b>				
Build experience through practice, reflection and learning from others	Apply experience independently and automatically	Use automatic proficiency while solving new problems	Help create new approaches through shared solutions	Embed expertise in an ongoing work system

The Spotlight lens can be given sharper focus, by itemising the nine skill elements. They are set out in Figure 1.1.

**Figure 1.1: Spotlight skill recognition grid**

SKILL ELEMENTS	LEVELS				
	1. Familiarisation	2. Automatic fluency	3. Proficient problem-solving	4. Creative solution-sharing	5. Expert system-shaping
<b>A. Shaping awareness</b>					
A1. Sensing contexts or situations					
A2. Monitoring and guiding reactions					
A3. Judging impacts					
<b>B. Interacting and relating</b>					
B1. Negotiating boundaries					
B2. Communicating verbally and non-verbally					
B3. Connecting across cultures					
<b>C. Coordinating</b>					
C1. Sequencing and combining activities					
C2. Interweaving your activities with others'					
C3. Maintaining and/or restoring workflow					

We cannot see skills and job requirements directly, especially the skills that enable people to carry out ongoing work processes. What we can see is the activities enabled by these skills.

Therefore, the Spotlight tools include lists of examples of activities, already classified into skill elements and levels. The activity examples are provided to help identify skills (see User Guide 2, Table 2.1).

Once the conceptual framework of three skill groups and five skill levels is learned, it can be applied directly, and the examples become less necessary.

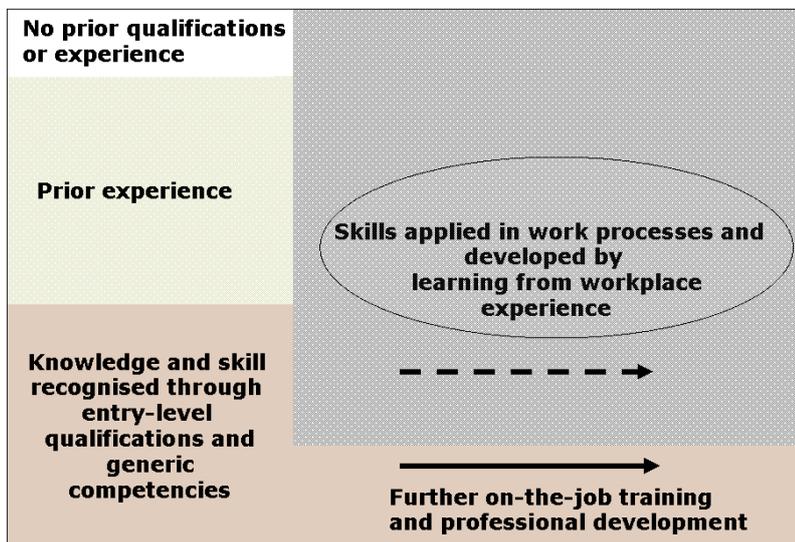
The Spotlight tool was developed through a project funded by the New Zealand Department of Labour, drawing on the latest international theories of skill, and on an interview-based study of a wide range of jobs at all levels of the public service, public health and public education sectors. A full research report is available describing the methodology.

### **What is new about the Spotlight tool?**

There are five innovations that make the Spotlight a complementary tool to support any other approach to naming skills:

- The nine skill elements provide a precise new research-based vocabulary for pinpointing exactly what capacities employers are seeking when they use broad terms such as ‘communication’, ‘time management’, ‘empathy’ or ‘flexibility’.
- By translating what are often seen as personal attributes into their component skills, the Spotlight tool enables recognition of the work that goes into using and building these skills, both individually and in work teams.
- The Spotlight approach has identified skills that integrate thought and feeling, bringing objective awareness to emotion work, and humanising the intellectual/technical skills needed to work on, with or for other people. It thus identifies skills contributing to ethical behaviour and service quality.
- The Spotlight Tool focuses on the work process skills that turn knowledge inputs into outcomes. Spotlight focuses specifically on the skills that link task activities into integrated work processes, contributing to the overall workflow.
- The Spotlight tool helps to classify key skills in the grey area of work-based experience (Figure 1.2).

**Figure 1.2: The experience-based skills classified by Spotlight**



### How easy is it to use the Spotlight tool?

It is axiomatic that modern managers are busy people, with limited budgets. The Spotlight tool offers the following advantages:

- It is small-scale, focusing only on nine key skill elements that are required in all jobs.
- The framework is flexible, applying to all jobs at all levels, yet allowing for very detailed specification of skills and activities using them.
- It is easy to integrate into existing HR practice, because it does not displace existing approaches, but rather it complements them, adding useful data.
- Practitioner time spent in learning to apply the tool is relatively short, as the booklets provide resources and step-by-step guides to the job analysis questionnaire and to applying the framework in a range of HR and training functions.
- The Spotlight tool is versatile. It has a dual application in identifying the skill demands of jobs and the competencies and capabilities of people, both individual and in work teams.

### An additional toolkit – not a replacement

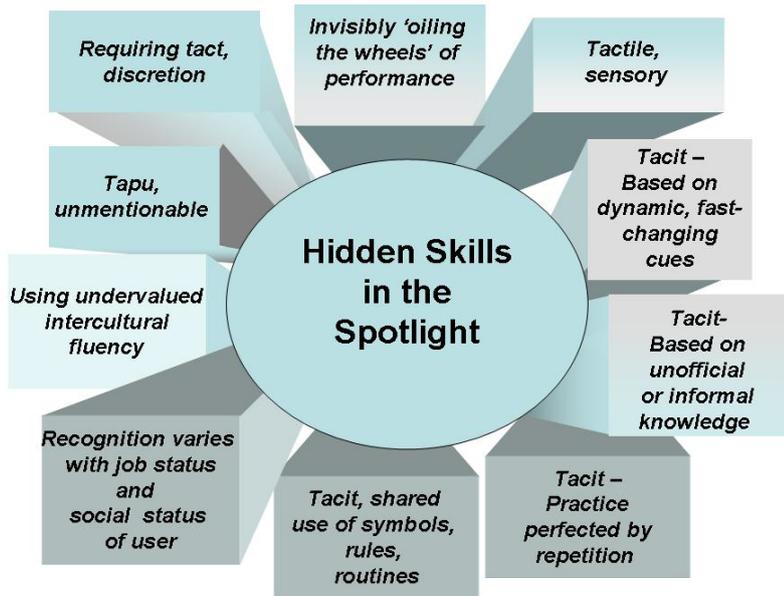
The Spotlight tool offers a straightforward way to organise extra information about nine applied skills. It can be used alongside any preferred approach to analysing job and person requirements.

The skills identified by the Spotlight tool can simply be added to existing job profiles. When managers are trying to pinpoint what they mean by ‘adaptability’, ‘time management’ or ‘teamwork’, the Spotlight descriptors provide a handy reference list, already classified into levels.

## Why is the Spotlight tool needed?

The Spotlight tool is designed to help identify skills that are easily overlooked.

**Figure 1.3: Reasons why some skills may not be fully recognised**



### ***Skills for which there is no name***

To some extent, we are prisoners of language – if we can’t put a label on something, it is easy to assume it does not exist. This applies to the recognition of skills.

It may be awkward to mention skills such as tact, discretion or work behind the scenes. There are social taboos against naming some health work done behind the screens.

Some tactile skills may lie in senses hard to put into words, for example, a disability worker may use touch to gauge very subtle developments in a child’s muscle coordination.

Words may not fully pick up the tacit skills used in dynamic and rapidly changing situations, for example, in jobs where team members must get the picture and signal to each other what is happening using specialised shorthand codes.

Tacit skills may also be built through indirect information exchange, based on work stories that have little official status, or they may be shared or copied wordlessly through symbols, unspoken rules, cues, routines or rituals that are part of the organisation’s or community’s non-verbal culture.

### ***Skills that are not well understood***

Under-specified skills that oil the wheels of more visible work processes include individual meta-cognitive skills - the second-order skills of monitoring one’s own learning, behaviours and impacts – and practical ‘supra’ skills – the second-order integrative skills that allow

activities to be carried out smoothly and linked together. These are the skills of bringing together routines practised to automaticity, with conscious focus on new challenges, and of fitting individual activities together to produce team and organisational workflows.

### ***Undervalued skills***

Some skills that make for high-quality performance have simply been undervalued. For example, research suggests that emotional intelligence or coordinating skills may be noticed more in supervisory or managerial jobs or valued more when performed by men. Skills such as coping with risk may be seen as natural in mainly female community nurses, but rewarded in mainly male fire-fighters.

The same point – of valuing a skill when held by one group of workers and undervaluing it when it is exercised by others – extends to the cultural context. Thus, the competence of working in a community with a different culture may be recognised when practised by pākehā but not when practised by Māori.

The Spotlight tool introduces a simple framework for helping to recognise and value consistently all these types of hidden skills.

## **What practical benefits does Spotlight offer HR practitioners?**

The Spotlight tool has a wide range of applications, providing consistency, economy and ease of use for busy HR practitioners and managers.

### ***Adding value to position descriptions (User Guide 2)***

To be useful, position descriptions need to be brief, but they also need to:

- identify the job's key activities and the important but hard to define skills that account for effective, quality work performance
- clarify the progression of skills that both link and separate the different jobs in job families, such as customer service advisor/team leader/section manager.

User Guide 2 provides tools and guidelines for capturing this hard to define information, in a way that is economical, consistent and comparative.

The Spotlight skills add to the value – but not to the length – of existing position descriptions

### ***Adding value to recruitment and induction (User Guide 3)***

At a time when selection mistakes are increasingly costly, Spotlight can:

- provide criteria and tools for identifying candidates oriented to developing job-specific skills through practice and problem-solving
- strengthen induction and orientation programmes by helping guide the transition from novice to fluent practitioner, thereby contributing to staff retention.

To ensure effective selection, a good understanding of jobs, particularly their less visible aspects, is necessary. User Guide 3 contains tools for turning the profile of less obvious work process skills in position descriptions into selection criteria and induction materials.

An orientation system can help manage recruitment risks. The Spotlight recruitment toolkit thus includes a guide to structuring and tracking early learning in the job, potentially speeding progress to fluent, independent proficiency.

### ***Adding value to performance management (User Guide 4)***

The quality of customer or client relations depends on jobholders' proficiency in the hidden skills of awareness-shaping and relationship management. User Guide 4 contains tools for negotiating a systematic approach to developing these skills in individuals.

Performance also involves the cost-effectiveness of work processes. The Spotlight tool can help in identifying and developing a range of coordinating, teamwork and trouble-shooting skills.

The tools in User Guide 4 include a focused approach to negotiating 'stretch' goals with jobholders, encouraging them to seek opportunities for problem-solving and solution-sharing.

By treating the interpersonal and time management aspects of work not as personal attributes, but as skills to be developed, the Spotlight performance management tools may help in providing constructive feedback. This is because performance levels are defined in terms of learning stages, not personal qualities.

### ***Adding value to personal and career development (User Guide 4)***

The Spotlight framework sets out the processes by which people develop and apply growing levels of skill in a job. It can help in identifying the hidden workplace knowledge of more experienced workers, ensuring that it is shared, for example, through team or mentoring arrangements.

Matching this process of individual development, the Spotlight tool can contribute to capability-mapping for the purposes of career pathing and planning:

- As the Spotlight skills are added to position descriptions, a map will emerge of jobs requiring similar Spotlight skills, but at different levels. This will help to identify a new basis for career pathways.
- The sequence of learning levels in the Spotlight framework will give an extra dimension to the planning of individual progression within a job. For example, level 4 (solution-sharing) skills can be used as a framework for mentoring opportunities within multi-level teams.

It may then be possible to offer new challenges to employees who have plateaued in their current jobs. By helping identify jobs using similar work process skills in different work areas, the Spotlight framework may aid internal mobility, contributing to retention.

## **What strategic benefits does Spotlight offer?**

### ***Contributing to high performance organisations***

High performance organisations have developed systems for facilitating innovation. The Spotlight framework can help foster organisational innovation by encouraging a problem-solving and solution-sharing approach to continuous learning and process improvement.

### ***Developing capacity to serve a changing population***

Service organisations, in particular, will need to respond to demographic change. The growing diversity and changing age profile of the population will change the ways in which goods and information need to be provided.

At all levels of technical expertise, there will be a growing demand for a collaborative, person-centred and integrated approach to service provision. The process skills identified by the Spotlight tool are amongst those that will increasingly be required.

### ***Growing and retaining skills***

Demographic shifts will also change the age profile of the workforce. As the retirement rate increases, at the same time, it will become harder to recruit replacement staff from outside the organisation. Even more pressing than the skills gap will be the skills quality gap arising from a shortage of people with the required experience.

The process skills identified by the Spotlight tool are precisely the indefinable qualitative components of skill that will need to be developed and retained in-house. With workforce ageing, there is a growing need to fully identify and embed the tacit skills of the existing workforce before they are lost, and the Spotlight framework provides a way of doing this.

### **Are there costs in not recognising the Spotlight skills?**

There are opportunity costs in not recognising all the skills of staff:

- Skills will be underutilised and underdeveloped.
- Tacit skills not transferred from more experienced to newer workers will be lost.
- Jobs will be experienced as dead-end in terms of career mobility.
- Alternatively, unrecognised skill demands may mean jobs are overloaded.

Thus, some opportunity costs will transfer into the outright costs of high turnover when staff leave because they feel their skills are under-recognised.

Individually, turnover is costly. A conservative estimate is 120% of annual salary in the case of low-paid employees who are fairly easy to replace, but this cost rises with skill and experience to 150% for a graduate recruit who leaves within 18 months and even higher for employees who are harder to replace. The methodology for calculating such costs is summarised in Section 2.5 of the Spotlight research report.

Current low unemployment rates and high participation rates make individual employers vulnerable to turnover.

High turnover rates create a growing imbalance between inexperienced and experienced staff, The result may be not so much a skill shortage as a skills quality gap.

Cost that can be avoided by recognising a job's hidden skill demands:

- Tangible turnover costs – costs of separation, vacancy, replacement and induction; performance differential of new hire – conservative total: 8 months' salary costs.
- Intangible turnover costs – workload increases of colleagues; stress, impact on morale; decreased productivity due to loss of work group synergy; loss of intangible intellectual capital, work process knowledge, client contacts, external relationships and goodwill – conservative estimate: another 6 months' salary on average.

## BASIC CONCEPTS

### What are the Spotlight components?

The Spotlight framework is used to name the less visible aspects of job requirements and jobholder skills. It comprises a vocabulary for precisely naming certain skills enabling effective work performance and a classification system for identifying these skills at a range of levels. As well, a set of activity examples is provided, preclassified according to the skills and skill levels they require (see User Guide 2, Table 2.1).

This section explains the basic concepts of the Spotlight framework (see Figure 1.1):

- Three skill sets – shaping awareness, interacting and relating, and coordinating.
- Nine skill elements – these describe the skill sets in more detail.
- Five skill levels – these describe a progressive growth of proficiency in using the skill sets or elements.

Together, the skill sets, the skill elements and the skill levels form a framework for identifying under-recognised skills.

This section also provides activity examples to illustrate uses of these skills and to help identify the levels at which the skills are being used. By matching these examples to those required in a job or carried out by an individual, it may be easier to identify the skills and skill levels that enable these jobs.

### What is the basis of the Spotlight skill sets and elements?

People from 57 different jobs in New Zealand were asked to describe their work activities. Researchers drew out nine common threads. The focus was on important and often unnoticed capacities for awareness, relating and coordinating. The nine skill elements thus fell into these three sets of skills. The skill sets are easy to remember, and they help in thinking about the main aspects of the skill elements. For most practical purposes, the more detailed skill elements will be more useful.

**Table 1.3: Spotlight skill sets and their elements**

<p><b>A. Shaping awareness</b> – capacity to develop, focus and shape your own and other participants' awareness by:</p> <p>A1. Sensing contexts or situations</p> <p>A2. Monitoring and guiding reactions</p> <p>A3. Judging impacts</p>
<p><b>B. Interacting and relating</b> – capacity to negotiate interpersonal, organisational and intercultural relationships by:</p> <p>B1. Negotiating boundaries</p> <p>B2. Communicating verbally and non-verbally</p> <p>B3. Connecting across cultures</p>
<p><b>C. Coordinating</b> – capacity to organise your own work, link it into to the overall workflow and deal with disruptions by:</p> <p>C1. Sequencing and combining activities</p> <p>C2. Interweaving your activities with others'</p> <p>C3. Maintaining and/or restoring workflow</p>

## What capacities do the skill elements describe?

### A. *Shaping awareness*

The capacity to shape awareness is an ability to focus attention and build an understanding of contexts, situations, reactions and impacts.

The shaping may be of one's own awareness, or the awareness of colleagues or customers. The jobholder draws from experiences inside and outside the workplace, in order to shape awareness in the ways set out below.

#### A. **Shaping awareness**

- A1. Sensing contexts or situations – capacity to notice and understand the significance of work contexts or changed workplace situations
- A2. Monitoring and guiding reactions – capacity to monitor and guide your own reactions and those of others and to manage situations where awareness levels vary
- A3. Judging impacts – capacity to evaluate the impacts of your own or the work group's actions in the workplace and on clients or community

Points to note when thinking about these kinds of skills:

- Shaping covers the capacity to see things from another person's perspective and to guide that person's awareness, for example, by using cues. Awareness-shaping is a little different from non-verbal communication as it involves modelling and shared learning rather than exchange of ideas.
- Contexts may be past, present or future, and outside or inside the work unit. They may involve physical, social and cultural environments, emotional climates and resources. They can be summarised as roles, rules and tools (tools may be physical and mental).
- Situations include emerging events, changing circumstances and small but significant signs of change in environments, people or wider communities.
- In working with other people, jobholders need to be aware of their own perspectives and the impact they are having on other people.

### B. *Interacting and relating*

This element describes the capacity to:

- manage short-term interactions and longer-term relationships
- listen open-mindedly
- use verbal and non-verbal communication in a range of media
- negotiate with and ethically influence others
- work across boundaries, for example, managing up or gaining cooperation from people outside the work unit
- connect across cultures.

#### B. **Interacting and relating**

- B1. Negotiating boundaries – capacity to set your own boundaries and respect those of others and to influence or negotiate within and across authority lines
- B2. Communicating verbally and non-verbally – capacity to respond to and use non-verbal and verbal communication adaptively
- B3. Connecting across cultures – capacity to deepen your understanding of diverse cultures and of your own cultural impact and/or to build intercultural relations

Some points worthy of note when identifying interaction and relationship skills:

- Communicating may involve or combine a range of purposes, for example, commercial, educative, therapeutic, supportive, cultural, custodial, collaborative, managerial.
- Work using communication skills is likely to involve a combination of information work, emotion work and aesthetic work.
- Jobholders may need to manage themselves and to maintain their own boundaries and those of the job, and to respect the boundaries of others.
- Skilled activities may involve negotiation and ethical use of influence, inside or outside formal authority lines.

### **C. Coordinating**

The skills of coordinating involve the capacity to organise one's own work and to link it with the overall workflow. They include the skills of:

- scheduling, balancing and prioritising job demands
- collaborating with others
- keeping the work process running smoothly.

#### **C. Coordinating**

C1. Sequencing and combining your own activities – capacity to organise your work by prioritising, switching and refocusing attention, and combining and linking activities

C2. Interweaving activities collectively – capacity to follow up tasks, follow through on undertakings and interlink activities with those of colleagues

C3. Maintaining and/or restoring workflow – capacity to maintain, balance or restore workflow, deal with emergencies, overcome obstacles, or help put things back on track

The following points may be useful to consider when analysing coordinating skills:

- The time element of coordinating skills is two-fold, involving managing work at each point in time and managing work over periods of time.
- Whilst sequencing and combining elements of their own work, jobholders also need to mesh their own activities and outputs with those of colleagues and people inside and outside authority lines, such as contractors.
- Particular skill is required when working with people who have a different approach to time.
- There is a skill in integrating short-term tasks and longer-term work assignments and sequences.
- Coordinating skills are also required in responding to emergencies, deadlines and disruptions, and working around barriers, obstacles and resource constraints, keeping things on track.
- If things do go off the rails, jobholders may use the skills of rectifying breakdowns, putting things back on track or picking up the pieces to restore purpose, targets and quality outcomes.
- Finally, there are preventative skills used in foreseeing potential obstacles and averting potential break-downs, technical or relational.

### **What is the basis of the Spotlight skill levels?**

The skill levels were developed by applying theories of learning to people's descriptions of how they carried out their jobs and define the following capacities:

- Familiarisation – building experience through practice, reflection and learning from others.
- Automatic fluency - applying experience automatically and independently.
- Proficient problem-solving - using automatic proficiency while solving new problems.
- Creative solution-sharing - helping create new approaches through shared solutions.
- Expert system-shaping - embedding expertise in an ongoing work system.

## ***Jobs and people***

The five learning levels can be used to indicate both the skill demands of the job and the level of proficiency of individuals:

- Jobs make different levels of skill demand on their incumbents, depending on their design.
- Jobholders move through skill levels by building a combination of experience, understanding and practical proficiency.

The movement from level 1 to level 5 is based on increasing levels of participation in work activity. Thus level 2 builds on level 1, and so on.

**Table 1.4: The five learning levels – definitions and basis**

1. Familiarisation	2. Automatic fluency	3. Proficient problem-solving	4. Creative solution-sharing	5. Expert system-shaping
<b>Basis:</b>				
Participating as a novice by building expertise through observation, practice and reflection.	Participating as a practised performer, independently applying operational knowledge to the point where activity is automatic.	Participating as an experienced problem-solver, carrying out operations already learned, whilst applying experience to creating new solutions.	Participating as a sharer of practical knowledge in the exchange of stories or notes about trial and error solutions.	Participating as a knowledge creator or system innovator, helping to spread or change a system of work or knowledge.

## ***The levels in action***

**Level 1** – Through observation, asking and reflection, the jobholder works out how to use existing knowledge or experience in learning a new job. Example: By trial and error, a beginning caseworker identifies who to go to for trustworthy advice and when and how to ask them for help.

**Level 2** – Through practice, the jobholder gains what looks like automatic proficiency in performing an activity. Apparently routine work may involve subconscious use of learned and practiced skills. Example: A radiographer automatically applies techniques she has learned for talking and acting in a way that relaxes anxious children.

**Level 3** – An experienced worker can perform previously learned activities automatically, whilst simultaneously addressing unfamiliar problems. At this skill level, the jobholder can integrate the subconscious application of practised proficiency with a conscious focus on the creative solving of new problems. Example: A call centre worker uses automatic keyboard skills to navigate screens whilst conducting an interview. With practice, her questioning skills also become automatic, allowing data input and interviewing to be done whilst working out new solutions to callers' problems.

**Level 4** – Jobholders contribute to the workplace pool of shared practical knowledge, helping to embed practical knowledge in system shortcuts (for example, the automation of a spreadsheet function) or in shared tricks of the trade. Example: Early childhood teachers and education support workers exchange information about very small signs of development in children with severe cognitive and mobility issues. They develop easy to remember strategies such as 'count to ten before helping'.

**Level 5** – Jobholders may contribute to the embedding of their expertise in a new system of knowledge or practice. This may occur in forums, networks or action research. Example: A group of IT workers anticipate where systems may come under pressure and design back-up systems and criteria for their use.

### **What is the function of the Spotlight activity examples?**

Skills are capabilities applied in carrying out purposeful work activities, so whilst activities are not skills, they provide the evidence through which skills are recognised.

To help identify the use of the nine skill elements, comprehensive tables of activity examples are provided (see User Guide 2, Table 2.1). These examples were drawn from field research. For each skill element, they provide illustrations of work activities using the skill at different levels.

Crucially, these activity examples are only guides. They are not part of the Spotlight grid, but aids to using it until the practitioner is fully familiar with the conceptual basis of the Spotlight tool.

The focus in the activity examples is not on the activity as such, but the way it is carried out. For example, if the words 'learn to' were dropped from the descriptions of activities carried out at skill level 1 (familiarisation), these examples could describe activities performed at level 2 (automatic fluency).

Not all activities can be carried at all five levels, but within the many activity examples provided, the Spotlight user should be able to match a skill and level for the work activity being reviewed.

The activity example may suggest further activities more relevant to the job being analysed or to a particular individual's skill set. The relevant skills and levels can be read off the similar example in the Spotlight activity lists.

Practitioners are strongly encouraged to compile further activity examples relevant to specific jobs. One element of the toolkit is a workbook for jobholders to use in identifying relevant activity examples from those listed and in adding further examples that are important in their jobs.

Some activity examples, being drawn from interviews, are quite detailed. The Spotlight user may want to combine several, or re-express them at a more general level.

Relevant activity examples can be added to job descriptions.

As a result, activities such as teamwork or personal qualities such as empathy can be described more accurately, and their skills and skill levels can be identified.

### **How do we identify the level of the skill element?**

The skill level depends on the range of activities required in the job. In every job, people are able to progress from level 1 to level 2 – the level of fluent proficiency. Many jobs allow or require jobholders to move further – to solve new problems, share solutions or help modify the work system. So, to decide the skill level, we look at activities using the skill.

## A. Shaping awareness

**Example 1:** A community care nurse has a client who does not want to hear the details of his deteriorating condition. The client's son starts to turn up during the nurse's visits to try and gain information and get his father to face reality. The nurse must solve the problem of how ethically to manage this context of competing awareness levels and needs.

SKILL ELEMENTS	LEVELS				
	1. Familiarisation	2. Automatic fluency	3. Proficient problem-solving	4. Creative solution-sharing	5. Expert system-shaping
<b>A. Shaping awareness</b>					
A1. Sensing contexts or situations					
A2. Monitoring and guiding reactions			Solving disclosure problem on the run		
A3. Judging impacts					

**Analysis:** The community nurse is aware of the conflicting wishes for awareness on the part of the father and son. The nurse is also judging the impact of the situation on the client. So the situation calls for skill set A – shaping awareness. Specifically, skill elements A2 and A3 are required – the capacity to be aware of and hide the nurse's own feelings about the father, an awareness of the reactions and needs of both father and son and an assessment of the consequences of breaching the father's confidence. If there are disclosure rules for handling such situations, awareness of the relevance of professional contexts (A1) may also be involved.

The skill has been defined at level 3 – the capacity to work out a solution to a problem whilst continuing to carry on with some activities automatically. If the nurse was not familiar with the routine aspects of the job, it would be hard to think about how to handle this situation – just as it is important to be able to ride a bicycle automatically before going into heavy traffic.

## B. Interacting and relating

**Example 2:** A telephone advisor efficiently handles a series of calls, by retaining control of each interaction, letting callers ramble or vent just long enough to find a point at which to begin focusing on a solution and restraining any feelings of sympathy.

SKILL ELEMENTS	LEVELS				
	1. Familiarisation	2. Automatic fluency	3. Proficient problem-solving	4. Creative solution-sharing	5. Expert system-shaping
<b>B. Interacting and relating</b>					
B1. Negotiating boundaries		Putting boundaries around interaction			
B2. Communicating verbally and non-verbally					
B3. Connecting across cultures					

**Analysis:** The telephone advisor is practising the B1 skill element of boundary negotiation. This involves setting tight limits around interactions, keeping control of the duration of calls, having the self-restraint not to be drawn into callers’ ploys or emotional displays and picking the right moment to come in with a solution.

The level is at least 2 – automatic fluency – as this skill, learned by practice, appears to have become almost effortless. Depending on how much problem-solving is involved, the level could be 3.

**C. Coordinating**

**Example:** A project team may be required to produce results, despite the risks of false starts and potential conflicts over methodology. Often, team members may drop out. Part of the skill in getting a result lies in the capacity to pool ideas, overcome obstacles, regroup and come up with a new approach.

SKILL ELEMENTS	LEVELS				
	1. Familiarisation	2. Automatic fluency	3. Proficient problem-solving	4. Creative solution-sharing	5. Expert system-shaping
<b>C. Coordinating</b>					
C1. Sequencing and combining activities					
C2. Interweaving your activities with others’					
C3. Maintaining and/or restoring workflow					Rebuilding team, creating new system

**Analysis:** Success involves maintaining and/or restoring workflow (C3), both in putting the project back on track (rectification) and in maintaining or rebuilding a team (resilience).

Skill level 5 has been chosen because a new system is being created.

**How do we identify Spotlight skills in ongoing work activities?**

In practice, the distinct skills are used in conjunction. The three skill sets and their elements are distinct from each other and yet interdependent (Figure 1.4).

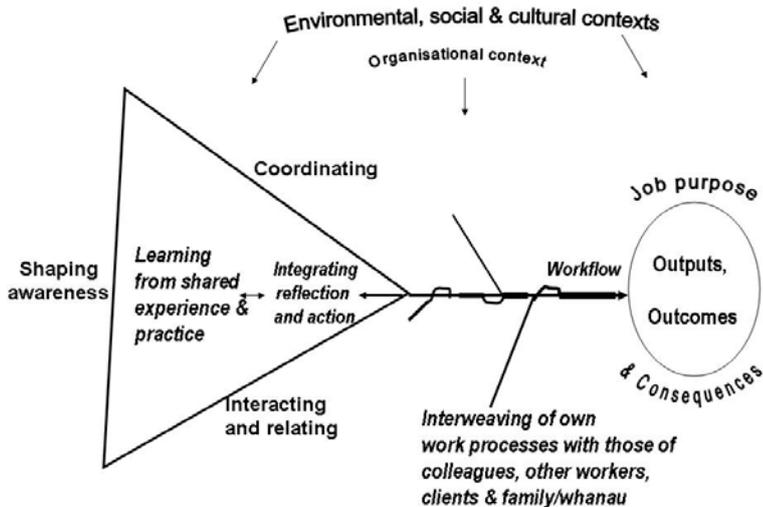
Effective interaction depends on awareness of oneself and of one’s impacts on others, as well as awareness of other people’s awareness, thus awareness-shaping skills include both a focusing of the jobholder’s own awareness and subtle guidance of others in focusing their awareness.

Communication involves aware listening and observation, as much as self-expression.

Ethical persuasion involves negotiating boundaries through communication, based on awareness of reactions and of the impacts of one’s behaviour on others.

The skill of situational awareness is also required in order to anticipate and manage contingencies (types of coordination skill).

Figure 1.4: The interdependence of the three Spotlight skill sets



Yet unless these integrated skills are unpacked, the levers for developing them as sources of effective performance remain locked within a black box of undeveloped concepts. An example of an unpacked concept is problem-solving - actually a level of all the Spotlight skills, not a skill in its own right.

### **Using the activity examples (User Guide 2, Table 2.1)**

At the beginning, an easy way to decide the Spotlight skill elements and levels in a particular job is to compare the job's activities with the research-based Spotlight activity examples that have already been classified. These are listed for each skill element and level.

#### **Case study**

An administrative officer employed in the head office of a government information service provides back-up to six executive officers who, in turn, work to the directors of six specialist units. The administrative officer *needs a general understanding of all six directors' work areas*, as she directs general telephone and email inquiries to the correct area, prepares meeting documents and helps with minute-taking, record-keeping and archiving.

Tasks include *handling telephone inquiries whilst working on the counter*. Visitors and callers from inside and outside the organisation include some high status *people from a range of language/cultural backgrounds*. Doing the mail involves maintaining tracking databases and *cajoling the directors to action correspondence*. To help keep track of tasks and information flows, this administrative assistant has *taught herself several software applications and shortcuts*. To avoid delays and backlogs, she has also *taught herself to deal unaided with problems* such as computer viruses.

She is often *loaned to one of the six work units, quickly learning specialist codes and procedures*. She is also often asked to *drop everything and help an executive officer collate materials and set up meetings called at short notice*. During a job analysis interview, she described her work as involving *doing whatever is thrown at her*.

#### **Analysis**

1. Identify activities that suggest the three skill sets – awareness-shaping, interacting/relating or coordinating. These are shown in italics in the case study above.

2. Match the highlighted statements with activity descriptors from the relevant table. Reword the statement if necessary.
3. Read off the level and check that the level is accurate. For example, if you want to use an activity example that is listed at level 1, but your job requires full proficiency, drop off words like 'learn to' and reclassify the skill at level 2.

This process is illustrated in Table 1.5.

**Table 1.5: Deriving skill elements and levels from activity examples**

<b>Skill element/level</b>	<b>Activity descriptor</b>	<b>Evidence from job</b>
<b>A1. Sensing contexts or situations</b> – level 1	Build up a general understanding of terms used by specialists in the work area.	Working with executive officers from six distinct fields, this administration officer needs a general understanding of all six directors' work areas.
<b>A1. Sensing contexts or situations</b> – level 2	Draw on wider experience of workplace(s) to fit in with the styles of different work groups.	Being often loaned to one of the six work units, this administrative assistant has been required to quickly learn specialist codes and procedures. This is being done with polished proficiency.
<b>B1. Negotiating boundaries</b> – level 2	Maintain cordial relations with people outside your authority to expedite their responses to requests.	The work involves managing up – cajoling the directors and staff in their units to action correspondence. Again, this is being done with self-assured proficiency.
<b>B3. Connecting across cultures</b> – level 1	Learn accurate pronunciation of personal and place names of different language groups.  Learn to interact easily and respectfully with people from diverse cultures.	Interactions with people from a range of language and cultural backgrounds are at a brief, transactional level.
<b>C1. Combining and sequencing activities</b> – level 1	Learn to sort your own tasks according to importance and urgency.	The job requires the administrative officer to handle telephone inquiries whilst working on the counter.
<b>C2. Interweaving activities</b> – level 1	Learn to keep notes or use electronic reminders of 'loose ends' that need to be finished off.	In being called on to work with others, the administration officer needs to keep track of tasks and information flow.
<b>C1. Combining and sequencing activities</b> – level 3	Find (or develop) and apply tools for solving the problem of keeping track of many things at once.	Getting her own work done whilst responding to short-notice requests for help with other people's deadlines involves both contingency management and interweaving skills.
<b>C1. Combining and sequencing activities</b> – level 2	Respond to a range of demands by making sense of the muddle and smoothly slotting each request into the day.	A sense of having to accept what is thrown at her suggests a need to sort and prioritise a range of demands.

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