

Skills and IT (core competencies)

Not many organisations understand the value of core competencies, or how to analyse them within their own operational framework and we certainly do not want to look at them within that context. However, their rationale can be applied to how IT is used effectively in your organisation. The appendix at the end of this document gives you a brief theoretical description of core competencies. We are going to consider IT competencies, which may help you use staff and technology more effectively in your own organisation. We will focus on skills, but in passing mention technology infrastructure (or what computers have you got and what do you use them for?)

Technology infrastructure.

The technology used your organisation needs to reflect your activity, and so needs to be appropriate rather than high technology. Before deciding on what technology you need, you should consider what purpose the technology is going to be used for; for example, if you have more than one member of staff, do you want to share facilities such as the Internet and printing. Do you want e-mail access, and do you want a website? Having decided what it is you want, you then look at what are the appropriate technologies to achieve your objectives. Consequently you can identify the cost of implementing these technologies and incorporate those costs into the capital and operating costs of the organisation. Remember that all equipment requires a degree of support and maintenance. These become revenue costs, which must be budgeted for on an annual basis.

Obviously, there may be a number of technical questions, and a variety of solutions to the same problems. You are not expected to have the answers, but **Virtual Riders** is here to offer you a variety of solutions. Your job is to know what you want (to achieve). Call us and we will help you where we can, so enabling you to make the correct decisions, which will enhance your IT infrastructure. By deploying the right technology you will improve your service delivery and reputation with funders.

In most cases, organisations have a certain amount of computer equipment, printers and fax machines, etc. Does all this equipment do what you want it to? Assess what you want to achieve before buying any new equipment.

Staff skills

The skills of your staff are often neglected when it comes to IT. Most people can now use a computer and a mouse, surf the net, and word process. They can also send and receive e-mail and save files. However, in many instances, these skills are self taught and have gaps, which means that often, the smallest of problems requires “technical support”. In addition, self teaching is often a slow, and in effective method of skill acquisition. However, traditional qualifications in IT are not necessarily the solution to the problem.

If a member of staff is expected to use a computer for a variety of different tasks, then it is only natural for those skills to be defined within the job's skill specification. However, in many cases, "*must be able to use a computer*" is never tested or assessed or measured. For example, which of the following skills do you and your staff need to do your jobs: [Databases](#), [Desktop Publishing](#), [E-mail](#), [File Management](#), [Graphs and Charts](#), [Internet Browsing](#), [PDF Creation](#), [Presentation](#), [Spreadsheets](#), [Web Mail & Word Processing](#).

Supervision or appraisal are often used as staff development tools within organisations. Training may be a topic of discussion, but not often is an assessment of skill undertaken. This can be done in a formal or informal manner, and can involve standardised competency testing at different levels in a variety of subjects.

Traditionally IT office skills have been measured through qualifications such as ECDL, RSA/OCR word-processing, and CLAIT. A simpler, shorter and less threatening option is [eDCC](#), the e-Digital Competence Certificate scheme, which assesses in electronic office skills, communications and media (and is accredited by OCR -Oxford, Cambridge and RSA Examination Board - www.ocr.org.uk). The scheme offers over 70 different assessments in computer-based applications such as word processing, spreadsheets, e-mail, digital photography and editing, video production, computer-based presentations, desktop publishing and web site design. With assessments at different levels, these readily downloadable core competency assessments enable you to demonstrate skill levels quickly and effectively. Click on each of the links below to see the competency checklists.



- [Computer Arts](#)
- [Database](#)
- [Digital Photography](#)
- [Desktop Publishing](#)
- [E-mail](#)
- [File Management](#)
- [Flash](#)
- [Graphs and Charts](#)
- [Hardware](#)
- [Image Editing](#)
- [Internet Browsing](#)
- [PDF Creation](#)
- [Presentation](#)
- [Spreadsheets](#)
- [Video Production](#)
- [Web Design - Beginner, Intermediate](#)
- [Web Design - Advanced Parts I and II](#)
- [Web Mail](#)
- [Windows Computer Management](#)
- [Windows XP](#)
- [Word Processing](#)
- [Word Processing Extension](#)

As an exercise, **Virtual Riders** have produced a wordprocessing beginner's core competency training document to be used with Microsoft Office and the EDCC beginners core competency word-processing, assessment. Try the assessment yourself and see if you can do it! You can formalise the process by [registering](#) as a centre with EDCC which is both cheap and straightforward, simply use the competencies in an informal manner, or go to an accredited centre.

Appendix 2 provides an IT skills self-assessment document, which is available for separate download. This document has been adapted from a number of sources and enables people to identify their own levels of ability in different areas of using technology. It is short and the separate download is a word document that can be edited to meet your needs. If you want a more comprehensive analysis, look at LASA's [knowledgebase article](#) and their [10 page questionnaire!](#) Getting staff to complete this exercise will enable your organisation to build up a skills matrix and consider how to tackle any IT skills gaps.

Appendix 1

Core competencies are capabilities that serve as a source of competitive advantage for an organisation over its rivals. Core competencies emerge over time through an organisational process of accumulating and learning how to deploy different resources and capabilities. Examples of capabilities include management (ability to envision future activity, effective organisational structure), marketing (effective promotion of services, effective customer/client relations, an innovative approach to reaching service users), human resources (motivating, empowering and retaining employees), management information systems and research & development.

The accepted criteria for determining whether a capability is a core competency is whether it is capable of producing sustainable competitive advantage. A capability can deliver competitive advantage without meeting all of the required criteria, but this will only be for a limited time.

Suggested criteria are:

1. *Value*: the capability allows the firm to exploit opportunities or neutralise threats in its external environment
2. *Rare*: capabilities that few, if any, of its competitors possess
3. *Costly to imitate*: capabilities that other organisations cannot easily develop. Take note however, this does not simply mean it is expensive to imitate, it means it is difficult to imitate (i.e. the capability developed through unique historical conditions, the capability itself is ambiguous or the relationships that underpin the capability are complex to understand and imitate).
4. *Non-substitutable*: the capability does not have a strategic equivalent. One example is R&D, the objective of which is obtaining new technology. To obtain new technology you could develop it internally, or you could monitor the external environment for developments then acquire them - these are strategic equivalents

Appendix 2
ICT Skills within (your organisation)

NAME: DATE:

Please indicate your skill level in the grid provided according to the following scale -

1. I have no skills in this area
2. I have a few skills in this area
3. I feel fairly confident in using this skill
4. I am completely confident

1. General Desktop Skills	1	2	3	4
a. Run an application using Desktop or Start menu shortcuts or the Programs Menu				
b. Run several programs simultaneously and switch between them (multi-tasking)				
c. Minimise, maximise, restore, move, resize and close windows				

2. General Applications Skills	1	2	3	4
a. Create a new file				
b. Save, Save As, and Open a file				
c. Save a file in different formats and earlier versions				
d. Save a file on different device, eg CD's and floppy disks, and in different folders				
e. Print a file				
f. Cut, copy and paste within a file, between files and between applications				
g. Capture screen dumps				
h. Use the on-line Help menu				

3. Disk/File Management Skills	1	2	3	4
a. Understand disk and directory/folder structures				
b. Create new folders in a hierarchical structure to create a filing system				
c. Use drag and drop to copy, move, rename and delete file and folders				
d. Create Back-up files				
e. Copy floppy disks/use memory sticks				

4. Word Processing Skills	1	2	3	4
a. Save, Load and Edit documents				
b. Save in different formats, including HTML and earlier versions of Word				
c. Use formatting techniques including headings, emphasis, font and sizes				
d. Create and use templates				
e. Insert and place graphics (copy/paste, clip art and files)				
f. Add headers and footers and table of contents/index				
g. Use a spelling checker				
h. Insert tables and hyperlinks				

5. Email (Electronic Mail) Skills	1	2	3	4
a. Send and receive emails				
b. Create a new email				
c. Send copy emails				
d. Reply to and forward emails				
e. File emails, including creation of folders, moving and deleting emails				
f. Attach files and open attachments				
g. Use address books				
h. Use distribution lists				

6. World Wide Web Browsing and Searching	1	2	3	4
a. Enter Uniform Resource Locators (URLs) - internet addresses - to access sites directly				
b. Follow hyperlinks to other pages and sites				
c. Create favourites/bookmarks				
d. Save pages from the internet				
e. Copy text and graphics from web pages				
f. Use at least two different search engines/directories				
g. Perform a simple search and a more advanced search (with AND/OR operations and text strings)				
h. Print sections from web pages				

7. Presentation Packages	1	2	3	4
a. Create presentations				
b. Embed clip art, video and sound clips in a presentation				
c. Embed URLs in a presentation				
d. Understand how to give a presentation using a projector linked to a computer				
e. Printing with note format				

8. Spreadsheets	1	2	3	4
a. Create a spreadsheet and enter data				
b. Enter text and numeric data				
c. Enter formulae and replicate entries				
d. Insert rows and columns				
e. Justify and format text				
f. Sort records numerically				
g. Change column widths				
h. Use integer and decimal format				
i. Create charts from spreadsheet data				
j. Create and link multiple worksheets and workbooks				
k. Rename sheet tabs				
l. Preview and print worksheets				

9. Basic Hardware Troubleshooting	1	2	3	4
a. Check simple connections (eg ensure cables are correctly plugged in)				
b. Clear printer jams				
c. Change printer cartridges				
d. Report computer faults				

10. Total scores	1	2	3	4
Section 1				
Section 2				
Section 3				
Section 4				
Section 5				
Section 6				
Section 7				
Section 8				
Section 9				
Total of each skill level in all sections				
Grand total of all skill levels in all sections				