

Programmers and software development professionals

General competency framework · Professional level · 5 competencies · approx. 75 minutes

How to use this guide

- Focus on these 5 competencies — the behaviours that matter most for this role — not a chronological career history.
- Ask every candidate the same core questions, then probe. Allow around 15 minutes per competency.
- Ask for real examples and use STAR — the Situation, the Task, the Action they took, and the Result.
- Stay neutral, capture what they say, and judge later. Gather evidence on one competency at a time.
- Rate each competency 1–5 against the positive and negative indicators, and note the evidence.

5 Outstanding **4** Good **3** Acceptable **2** Marginal **1** Poor

1. Technical Capability

Has the necessary knowledge, skills and proficiency to conduct their role. Demonstrates mastery in their area of technical capability. Stays up to date with advances in their field and commits to their continuous development.

Why this matters for Programmers and software development professionals: SFIA Programming/software development (PROG), Software design (SWDN) and Systems design (DESN) all require deep technical mastery. DDaT Software Developer skills cover programming and build, prototyping, system design, systems integration, and testing. BCS chartered status is assessed against SFIA. The technical floor is high and continuously evolving.

What have you done to develop your knowledge, skills and abilities to help you achieve in your role?

- In what ways would you say you have developed?
- What opportunities have you taken/created?
- What improvements have resulted? How have these helped you?
- Talk to me about your development plan? How are you building your technical capability? What will doing these things give you?
- What is the next step for you in your career? How will you get there?

What do you do to ensure that you have all of the information you require to perform effectively in your role?

- Where do you get the information from?
- How does this assist you in your role?
- How do you keep up to date with developments in/outside the business?
- Why is it important to do this?
- What do you see as the key challenges/changes in the industry over the next 5 years?

What aspects of your technical capability are you particularly proud of?

- Why are you proud of these aspects?
- How do they help you perform your role?
- What have you done to create these strengths?
- Which aspects of your technical capability need the biggest improvement?
- What are doing to improve them?

NEGATIVE INDICATORS	1 · 2 · 3 · 4 · 5	POSITIVE INDICATORS
Fails to identify development needs in technical capability or does so superficially		Can clearly articulate strengths and development needs in technical capability
Identifies needs but waits for these to be addressed – does not proactively create or seize opportunities to build technical capability		Acts on development needs – creates and seizes opportunities for continuous professional development
Is guarded about own development needs		Is open about own development needs
Is focused on development in the here and now. Is unable to articulate a development plan to support longer term career goals		Considers development for both current role but also future career aspirations
No evidence of really understanding the nature of the industry, the market and the competition		Understand the industry, the market and the competition
Fails to keep self up to date with the necessary knowledge to perform in role		Stays abreast of trends/changes in the market place and applies these to their role
Cannot articulate the key challenges/changes facing the business/industry		Demonstrates a sound appreciation of the medium/ long term challenges facing the business
No strong profile/network/reputation in their field or in the industry – has not capitalised on wider networking opportunities		Has built a strong network and profile in the industry – seen as a thought leader
Lacks essential knowledge of subject area for effective performance in the role		Possesses the knowledge necessary to carry out the role. Demonstrates mastery of their subject areas.
Lacks some of the necessary skills/proficiency for success in the role		Skilled and proficient in their area

Summary of evidence: _____ Rating (1–5): _____

2. Analytical Skills

Breaks a problem down into its core elements. Draws on different data sources to inform their thinking, identifying the most pertinent issues within this. Incorporates the emotive elements of a situation into their thinking, before making sound inferences based on the available information.

Why this matters for Programmers and software development professionals: SFIA Problem management (PBMG) and the verify dimension of PROG centre debugging, root-cause analysis, and reasoning from logs and data. Breaking complex problems into elements is the daily craft.

Describe a time when you were faced with a complex problem to solve/the last time you had to analyse a lot of information or data.

- What made the problem complex?
- How did you go about analysing the situation/data?
- What information did you need? Where did the information come from?
- What kind of information is easiest for you to work with/most difficult?
- What were the key issues/angles that needed consideration?
- What information was most relevant?
- How did you ascertain what was relevant?
- What did you learn from the analysis?

Tell me about a time when your analysis into a situation revealed something unexpected or surprising.

- Why was this unexpected/surprising?
- What did you do to uncover it?
- What did you do with this revelation?
- How did it change your response to the situation?
- What lessons did you learn from the process?

Can you tell me about a time where you feel you took the wrong approach to problem solving?

- What led you to take this approach?
- With hindsight, what would have been the better approach?
- What was the outcome?
- What key lessons have you learned about problem solving?

NEGATIVE INDICATORS	1 · 2 · 3 · 4 · 5	POSITIVE INDICATORS
Gets overwhelmed by complexity – sees the problem as a whole rather than being able to break it down into component parts		Identifies the core elements/components of a problem. Breaks down complex issues/problems into smaller parts
Takes a rather unstructured approach to analysis – lacks logical and sequential steps		Takes a logical and systematic approach to analysis
Manages the symptoms of the issue rather than seeking to understand the root cause (superficial analysis)		Insightful – able to get to the root cause of issues and tackle these rather than deal with the symptoms
Gets lost in the detail and is unable to identify the pertinent information		Identifies relevant/pertinent information rather than getting lost in the detail
Is narrow in approach – fails to consider a range of angles or draw on different sources of data		Draws on different sources of data to inform their thinking – views issues from a broad range of angles
Fails to integrate data from different sources and spot themes, trends and patterns. Views different pieces of data in isolation		Integrates data from different sources, spotting themes, trends and patterns
Does not move beyond analysis to making interpretations and drawing conclusions from the data		Looks beyond analysing to interpreting the information they are presented with – e.g. identifying implications and causal links
Misinterprets or draws inappropriate conclusions from data		Makes sound inferences based on the information available
Fails to appreciate the people/emotive aspects of a situation. Focuses exclusively on the hard facts		Incorporates how people think feel and behave into their considerations – considers not just the facts but the people/emotive aspects of a given situation

Summary of evidence: _____ Rating (1–5): _____

3. Collaborative Working

Looks to understand others' perspectives and objectives. Respects different styles/approaches, whilst adapting their own style to enable them to work effectively with others.

Why this matters for Programmers and software development professionals: SFIA Level 4 generic responsibility characteristics include business skills (communicates fluently, contributes to wider business understanding) and the modern software profession is paired/squad-based, agile, multi-disciplinary. DDaT user focus reinforces this.

Tell me about a time when you proactively sought the views of/engaged others to resolve a business issue.

- How did you ensure that the right people were engaged?
- How did you demonstrate that you had understood their views?
- How did their input inform and shape the final decision?
- What feedback did you receive?
- With hindsight, what might you do differently next time?

Describe a situation where your personal views/objectives were at odds with the team/key people around you?

- How did you react?
- How did you demonstrate you understood/respected their perspective whilst being clear about your own?
- What was the outcome?
- What did you learn about how best to engage with others?

Describe a situation where you have had to work hard to really understand the perspective of another person?

- What was the reason for the lack of understanding?
- What made it difficult to gain this understanding/get under the skin?
- How did you manage this?
- How have applied the learning from this situation to enhance your interactions with others?

NEGATIVE INDICATORS	1 · 2 · 3 · 4 · 5	POSITIVE INDICATORS
Fails to engage and seek the views of others. Is more directive in approach and therefore may gain compliance rather than commitment to action/ideas		Proactively seeks the views and opinions of others when dealing with business issues – adopts a more collaborative/democratic approach to problem solving
Seeks to be seen to engage rather than actually demonstrating that they have heard the views and ideas of others (e.g. by adjusting their path or shifting their perspective in the light of the information gleaned)		Listens carefully to the thoughts and ideas of others and demonstrates that they have listened to and heard their views (e.g. by shifting own perspective in the light of the information given)
Adopts a “my way or the highway approach” – has strong views and may be less respectful of counter views or arguments		Shares own ideas/opinions willingly whilst recognising and respecting the views and opinions of others
Fails to manage conflict/divergent views or styles and approaches		Effectively manages conflict and potentially divergent views to get positive outcomes for all parties. Appreciates the need to work with others with different styles and approaches to their own
Seeks to be understood rather than truly understand the needs/objectives and perspectives of others. Transmits own views rather than questions to better understand		Takes steps to really understand the goals and objectives of others
Adopts a one style fits all approach. No evidence of adjusting/adapting style based on the needs of the situation and audience		Adapts style effectively based on understanding of the needs and objectives of others
No evidence of reflecting on the impact of their own style or of considering how they might be contributing to the breakdown of working relationships		Aware of the impact of own style on others and the need to check out assumptions they make about others and their style of working/needs/preferences

Summary of evidence: _____ Rating (1–5): _____

4. Innovation

Willing to challenge existing mind-sets and ways of operating, exploring alternative ways to address a problem. Generates a range of options and ideas, whilst building on the ideas of others. Prepared to take a degree of risk in implementing new ideas.

Why this matters for Programmers and software development professionals: SFIA Level 4 expects 'creates new value for customers'; DDaT modern standards approach explicitly emphasises continuous improvement, adoption of new techniques, and challenging existing ways of working. The role is creative, not just executive.

Describe a situation where you challenged the merit of a tried and tested method or process.

- Why was it important for you to challenge this established way?
- How did you raise the challenge? What was the response?
- How did this make you feel?
- What happened next?
- How do you feel about challenging now? What have you learned?

Can you tell me about a time when you decided to try a different approach to solve a day to day business issue?

- What made you decide to try a different approach?
- How was this received? How did you manage this?
- What did you see as the benefits/risks of adopting this approach?
- How did you manage/mitigate the risk?
- What was the outcome?

Can you give me an example of where you came up with an imaginative solution to a problem at work?

- Where did the idea come from?
- What other options were there?
- How did you get your idea heard? What feedback did you receive?
- How involved were you in the implementation?
- What did you learn about implementing changes to ways of working?
- In what situations are you less inclined to be creative?
- What stops you in these situations? How can you overcome this?
- List some of the other ideas you have had a work recently?

NEGATIVE INDICATORS	1 · 2 · 3 · 4 · 5	POSITIVE INDICATORS
Sticks with the tried and tested and is reluctant to challenge the established way and/or outdated working practices		Prepared to question and challenge existing wisdom and traditional ways of doing things in order to improve working practices
Raises challenge in a less constructive manner – as such may not always get their ideas heard		Raises challenge constructively – presenting a clear business case for their argument
Tends to be constrained by existing paradigms and fails to see the possibilities or alternative approaches		Is not bound by conventional thinking – introduces fresh insights and is prepared to experiment and try new approaches to address challenges
Is less imaginative or radical in approach. Ideas are likely to be more evolutionary than revolutionary. Generates few alternatives		Comes up with new and imaginative ideas and alternatives
Generates many ideas but does little to turn these into tangible plans for implementation – as such the thinking may be lost		Works hard to ensure that ideas are followed through and put into practice

Little experience of introducing new ways of working/ implementing change		Has experience of introducing new ways or working/ implementing change
Lacks the entrepreneurial spirit/courage to pursue opportunities as a result of the potential cost of failure		Has the courage to pursue opportunities and is prepared to take a degree of personal risk in order to exploit the opportunities for new ways of working
Likes to be the originator of all things creative. Struggles to work with/build on/promote the thinking of others		Is able to build on/promote/enhance the ideas of others

Summary of evidence: _____ **Rating (1–5):** _____

5. Dependability

Conscientious and thorough in their approach to work, delivering what they promise to the necessary standard. Behaves in line with the organisation's values and ethical principles.

Why this matters for Programmers and software development professionals: SFIA Level 4 generic — accountable for own work; DDaT — quality and standards. Code reliability, build integrity, peer-review discipline. Personal accountability for what ships matters and is framework-supported.

At times we all fail to deliver what's required or struggle to keep our motivation to see things through to completion. Describe a time when this has happened to you?

- Why were you unable to deliver/what caused you to lose motivation?
- How did you feel?
- What did you do to try to overcome the problem?
- What feedback did you receive? What did you learn?
- What have you done to prevent the same situation occurring?

Give an example of a time when you've had to compromise on quality in order to get a task completed on time?

- How did you feel about the compromise on quality?
- What were the issues that you anticipated as a result of this?
- What did you do to address these issues? Who did you consult/inform?
- Can you describe a time when you have not been prepared to compromise on quality/standards and have pulled out all of the stops to deliver to expectation?

Day-to-day, how do you monitor the quality/standard of your work?

- What measures are in place to allow you to do this?
- How useful is the information from the measures?
- How have you used the feedback to assist you in providing and maintaining high quality/standards in your work?

NEGATIVE INDICATORS	1 · 2 · 3 · 4 · 5	POSITIVE INDICATORS
Lacks personal accountability – prepared to let things slip or leave issues unresolved where this would require additional/discretionary effort		Takes personal accountability for performance and shows tenacity and commitment in the pursuit of goals. Works hard to self-motivate and maintain motivation
Quickly loses focus/enthusiasm or energy for a project/ activity when the going gets tough		Shows determination to see things through to completion. Remains focused on the task in hand when the going gets tough

Is prepared to cut corners to meet deadlines (or lets deadlines slip in the pursuit of perfection) – no evidence of weighing up the needs by context/ circumstances		Appreciates the balance between delivering to time and delivering to quality standards and consciously works to get the balance between these right
May not deliver on commitments – may over promise or under deliver. Trivialises the importance of delivery and honouring commitments to others		Delivers what they commit to – can be relied upon to deliver on promises
Is focused on quantity rather than quality of output. Completes tasks to tick the box rather than to ensure that quality standards are adhered to		Is focused on standards and quality of output
No evidence of measuring/assessing the quality of outputs either via formal or informal measures		Keeps a check on the quality and standards of work via formal and informal checks and measures
Is prepared to stand by rather than challenge behaviour that is not in line with organisational values. In doing so pays lip service to the values		Is prepared to put self out and challenge behaviour that is not aligned to the values of the business. Takes the values seriously and can make the link between the values and the success of the business
Cannot articulate the organisations values or give examples of how they have role modelled the values through their own behaviour		Seeks to role model the organisations values in all that they do – can provide clear examples of how the values have driven decisions/behaviour

Summary of evidence: _____ Rating (1–5): _____