The Spotlight Tool

Purpose

- The Spotlight tool set is a supplementary job analysis tool designed specifically to bring to light invisible, tacit skills that would otherwise be un-named and unrecognised. Its use helps ensure the completeness of the job data needed to generate accurate and unbiased job evaluation, job grading or work value assessment.

- [Spotlight tools](#) help managers and HR personnel to write position descriptions, select employees, manage performance and encourage individual and career development

- The Spotlight framework is the centrepiece of the toolkit. It helps document skills (learned capabilities) enabling less tangible work processes. These skills are used, for example, in the work roles characteristic of predominantly female service occupations. Failure to 'unpack' these intangible skills is now recognised as having contributed to gender-based undervaluation. The Spotlight framework is designed to identify skills that are easily overlooked, un-named, or undervalued, or that tend to be confused with personal attributes.

The Spotlight taxonomic framework

3 Categories of commonly under-reported skills, and their elements, defined at five levels through which skills are extended or deepened through life and work experience.

	The Spotlight skill levels				
The Spotlight skill sets and their elements	**Orienting**	**Fluently performing**	**Solving new problems as they arise**	**Sharing solutions/Applying expertise**	**Expertly creating systems**
	Building experience through practice, reflection and learning to work with others	Applying experience in a practiced and self-reliant way	Providing resourceful solutions to problems as they arise in the course of work activity	Sharing developed expertise with colleagues or team	Embedding new solutions in work processes
	Illustrative examples of work activities enabled by each skill at each skill level *				
Contextualising/Building and Shaping awareness *Capacity to:* • Perceive contexts or situations • Monitor and guide reactions • Judge impacts	Map unfamiliar job contexts	Consistently monitor job contexts and situations	Solve unfamiliar problems in interpreting contexts	Share new approaches to interpreting situations	Set up shared processes for monitoring contexts
	Learn to monitor & guide own and others' reactions	Consistently monitor and fluently guide own and others' reactions	Solve new problems in monitoring and guiding reactions	Share solutions to monitoring and guiding own and others' reactions	Introduce new approaches to monitoring and guiding reactions
	Learn to judge impacts	Consistently judge impacts	Solve unfamiliar problems in judging impacts	Share solutions to judging impacts	Establish new methods for evaluating impacts
Connecting/ Interacting and relating *Capacity to:* • Negotiate boundaries • Communicate verbally and non-verbally • Work across diverse cultures and communities	Find ways to negotiate work roles and boundaries	Negotiate work roles and boundaries effectively	Resourcefully solve problems in/by negotiating roles & boundaries	Share solutions in/by negotiating role boundaries	Implement shared processes for negotiating role boundaries
	Learn effective methods of verbal & non- verbal communication	Effectively communicate, verbally and non-verbally	Solve problems of/by effective verbal and non-verbal communication	Share solutions for effective verbal and non-verbal communication	Implement shared approaches to communication or relationship-building
	Learn to communicate across cultures	Communicate effectively across cultures	Solve problems of inter-cultural communication	Share solutions for inter-cultural communication	Establish systems for building inter-cultural relationships
Coordinating *Capacity to:* • Sequence and combine activities • Interweave one's activities with others' • Maintain or restore workflow	Develop methods for organising your own work	Fluently link up your own tasks into a smooth work process	Solve new problems in scheduling and managing own work	Share new approaches to organising personal work roles	Create or improve systematic approaches to integrating individual work activities
	Develop ways of linking into the overall workflow	Interweave your activities fluently with those of colleagues	Solve problems in/by interweaving your activities with those of others	Share approaches to interweaving individual & team activities	Create or improve systematic approaches to integrating team work activities
	Learn approaches to preventing/ dealing with disruptions	Deal fluently with potential or actual workflow disruptions	Solve problems in maintaining/ restoring workflow	Share approaches to stabilising workflow	Create systems for stabilising workflow

*The illustrative examples are just that – illustrative: the framework itself consists of the 9 skill elements, grouped into the 3 sets, and the 5 skill levels.

Types of gender bias that the Spotlight Tool may help address

The Spotlight methodology is designed to address the following links between skill invisibility and gender undervaluation:

- giving undue weight to the most visible or frequent aspect of a job, rather than the most essential
- using loaded language such as 'routine'
- attributing the performance of delegated work to the person delegating, rather than the person performing
- underestimating the coordination skills of 'support' work
- naturalising skill as an inherent personality trait
- trivialising/minimising skills or taking them for granted
- assuming consistency and under-recognising contingency management
- gender-differentiated inflation of job titles
- halo effect from one job demand to all.

How the Spotlight tool was developed

The SLT was originally commissioned by the Pay and Employment Equity Unit within the New Zealand Department of Labour in 2005–06. It was developed and trialled between 2006 and 2009 by a team of Australian and New Zealand academics and practitioners, led by two researchers, A/Prof Anne Junor and A/Prof Ian Hampson, who are now located in the Industrial Relations Research Group at UNSW Canberra. The team worked to a reference group that included government, employer, community sector and union representatives.

The Employment New Zealand Spotlight tool website identifies the tool as: '**Written for: Employers'**. It notes:

> 'The Spotlight skills tools help managers and HR personnel to write position descriptions, select employees, manage performance and encourage individual and career development.'

During the SLT development, managers and employees were interviewed to develop the taxonomy which is at the heart of the tool. Position descriptors of roles were also provided by organisations. In the subsequent 15 years of data gathering and analysis based on the Spotlight tool, the taxonomy has been tested by researchers and practitioners in different occupations in New Zealand and Australia, covering jobs from entry level to senior managerial level.

How the tool is used to identify under-recognised skills

The processes to administer the tool normally involve the following steps:

- Informed consent is obtained and jobholders are given a pseudonym, ensuring that the focus is on the job not the

individual. Jobholders are given a workbook to help them prepare for an interview. They attend the interview (often on-line and recorded with their permission). Optionally, they may also complete a time use diary covering a day close in time to the interview.

- The preparatory workbook makes no mention of skills. It consists of a list of 135 work activity descriptors, to be ticked if undertaken. The explanatory pages of the workbook contain words such as the following:

  'We are particularly interested in activities that are **necessary or important** but **invisible** and not listed in your job description.'

  'Please tick only those **work activities** that are **required in your job.'**

- The interview is undertaken in two parts — the first part is an open-ended discussion of standard narrative and critical job analysis questions:

- The second part of the interview follows up workbook responses, probing the reason for ticking activities, eliciting more detail, and identifying further examples.

- As well, the interview probes the frequency and criticality of activities identified as being performed in the job.

- Whilst the examples in the work-book have been pro-coded to Spotlight skills and levels, it the role of the trained interviewer to clarify responses, ensure their accuracy and draw out further examples.

- Jobholders are given the opportunity to see the transcript of their interview to provide further clarification if necessary. They may also provide anonymised time-use diaries.

- While the Spotlight skills framework has remained stable and robust through a succession of uses, each Spotlight project adds to the growing item bank of examples of activities pre-coded to this framework.

Objective assessment

- Unlike proprietary job analysis tools, the Spotlight methodology is transparent, clearly explained and open to use by anyone who has had training and practice.

- The Spotlight tool was originally developed to add objectivity and rigour to the collection of job data in order to avoid interpretation biases and enhance the gender-inclusivity of job evaluation processes.

- The Spotlight framework brings a uniform set of criteria to bear across occupations and industries.

- The Spotlight methodology is designed to avoid the subjectivity and biases that have been identified in other existing skill recognition techniques, by ensuring that key skills in predominantly female jobs are not overlooked.

- It is the role of those who are experienced in applying the Spotlight tool to code accounts of the work as described by jobholders. Workbook responses are separately coded by two members of the research team to enhance quality control and the objectivity of the process.

Scope and uses of the Spotlight tool

- The Spotlight tool was originally designed for purposes related to position description writing. It has subsequently proved useful in mapping job size, by enabling the building 'heatmaps' indicating the intensity and expertise level of under-recognised skill requirements of jobs.

- The Spotlight skill taxonomy helps identify under-recognised skills in jobs of varying span of control or technical complexity, ranging from entry-level to managerial. The complexity and range of Spotlight skill use may not neatly align with other job dimensions. For example, high levels, and high intensity in the use, of Spotlight skills may be required in jobs where high level technical qualifications are not currently required; whilst jobs requiring technical expertise may not require high level 'Spotlight' skills such as may be needed, for example, in personal care work.

- The skill content and use levels identified by the Spotlight tool may indicate the need to re-assess job size in terms of required effort, skill range and responsibility.

Conclusion

Skills that are hidden, under-defined and under-codified cannot be fully identified. If they are not fully identified, they cannot be assigned an accurate value. The Spotlight tool was designed to provide supplementary job data, helping correct these sources of undervaluation.