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The Competency Framework: Design Your Future (Part 3)

By Richard Junker and Curtis Lee Robbins

Editor's note: This is the third and final article in a series covering the Society of Actuaries (SOA) Competency Framework. The first and second articles appeared in issues November 2016 and May 2017 at https://www.soa.org/news-and-publications/newsletters/actuary-of-the-future/pub-actuary-of-the-future-newsletter-details.aspx.

In the first article, we addressed:

- What is the Competency Framework?
- Why the Competency Framework?
- Where are we today?
- Where will *you* be in five years?

In the second article, we addressed gearing up for designing your future.

In this culminating article, we will take up the final two questions of our quest for *Complete Actuary* competency to illustrate that the SOA Competency Framework is a powerful tool to enable you to design your future:

- How do I create my Personal Development Plan?

- How will the Competency Framework help me design my future?

HOW DO I CREATE MY PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN?

To build on the foundation of the earlier articles, recall your "why" and your "noble purpose" for inspiring the creation of your Personal Development Plan. Let us consider concepts from "design science" and "design thinking."

Recently, a colleague introduced me to concepts presented by R. Buckminster Fuller regarding specialization and generalists. In the 1960s, Fuller used a metaphor of "The Great Pirates" from several hundred years ago as an illustration of the idea that overspecialization leads to a risk of extinction. To quote from an article by Zann Gill, "Fuller placed historic responsibility for specialization on the Great Pirates, whose 'divide and conquer' strategy fostered increasing specialization as a means to control and exploit others." Gill further describes Fuller's concept of "design science" in the following excerpt from his article "Buckminster Fuller's Great Pirates: The Origins of Specialization:"[1]

> Fuller proposed "design science" as an antidote for over-specialization, a method to recognize or envision a big picture. In the 1980s we tried to develop expert systems, which failed to realize this prediction. It was not yet time for man to be displaced as a specialist by the computer. Buckminster Fuller personally exemplified the design science principles he described. His vision for "comprehensive, anticipatory, design science" (CADS) embraced the potential for emergence of collaborative intelligence, progressing through iterative pattern recognition toward coherence. He conceived the general framework for CADS in a world where the two key elements needed to implement his vision, ubiquitous computing and the internet, did not yet exist.

> Now, several decades downstream, Fuller's prediction has come true with a twist that would probably surprise and delight him. The Internet as society's global brain can potentially enable us to overcome many of the traps of over-specialization. Fuller predicted, far ahead of the internet that could realize his prediction, a second antidote: "Suddenly, all unrecognized as such by society, the evolutionary antibody to the extinction of humanity through specialization appeared in the form of the computer."

Further, the concept of "design thinking" is the foundation for another inspiring resource—a book published in 2016, *Designing Your Life*, by Bill Burnett and Dave Evans, Silicon Valley innovators and Stanford University design educators. In the book's introduction, the authors note that "aesthetics, or the way things look," is an example of "a problem with no one right solution that designers work on." The authors continue that "Each company works in its own way," noting as an example that "a Ferrari has an unmistakably passionate Italian look, and a Porsche a fast, exacting German sensibility," which is "why, in some ways, aesthetics is the ultimate design problem." The authors conclude that "Aesthetics involves human emotion," and they "discovered that when emotions are involved, design thinking has proved to be the best problem-solving tool."[2]

The SOA Competency Framework

A "design science" and "design thinking" resource is available for you via the SOA Competency Framework. The entry point for creating the Personal Development Plan is a simple click on the "SOA Member" link in the Octagon (see Figure 1). It will direct you first to the Self-Assessment tool, then to the Personal Development worksheet.

Stage 1: The Self-Assessment Tool

When you begin the exercise, the "Self-Assessment Tool: Instructions" page outlines the six steps you will take:

1. Log in, or else your work will not be saved, and allow yourself 45 minutes to do the assessment, which may be divided over multiple sessions.

2. Rate each of the 100 statements according to (a) its importance to your work and (b) your ability to perform.

3. View your results.

4. Save and print your results.

5. Review and interpret your results.

6. Use the SOA Competency Framework Personal Planning Workbook to create a personal plan.

You will rate the 100 statements on the questionnaire to assess their importance to your work and your ability to perform them by clicking on the dots on a five-point scale from *Very Much So* to *Not at All*. The questionnaire begins with statements such as the following:

• Demonstrate an understanding/knowledge of the client's environment and the issues the client is facing.

• Provide timely analysis to reach a recommendation, sometimes with incomplete data.
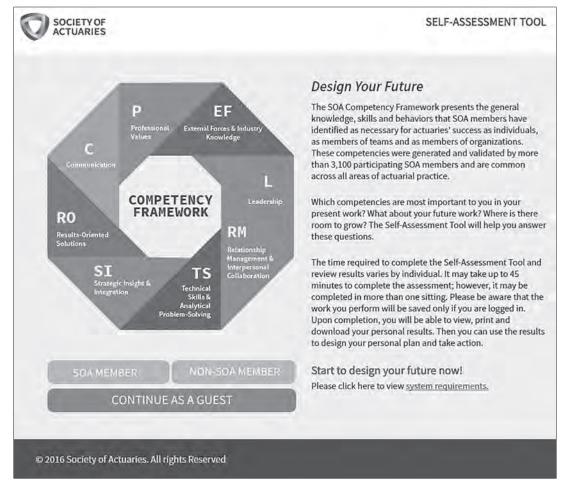
Figure 1
The Competency Framework

Figure 2
Self-Assessment Summary Scores

SUMMARY DETAILS USING YOUR RESULTS DOWNLOAD PLAN

● Importance to Your Work   ▲ Your Ability to Perform

Competency Assessment

	Importance to Your Work	Your Ability to Perform	Gap
Communication	4.80	4.70	0.10
Professional Values	5.00	5.00	0.00
External Sources & Industry Knowledge	4.90	4.20	0.70
Leadership	4.40	3.80	0.60
Relationship Management & Interpersonal Collaboration	5.00	5.00	0.00
Technical Skills & Analytical Problem Solving	4.70	3.70	1.00
Strategic Insight & Integration	4.80	4.00	0.80
Results-Oriented Solutions	5.00	4.80	0.20

- Demonstrate superior analytical skills that are combined with (but not overshadowed by) the ability to communicate technical concepts to a nontechnical audience.

When finished and viewing your results, consider each question to help identify specific dimensions of development needs/gaps for each competency.

Stage 2: The SOA Competency Framework Personal Planning Workbook

The Personal Planning Workbook is your plan to address gaps identified in the Self-Assessment in Stage 1.

The Download worksheet provides the gaps to feed into the My Plan worksheet of the Personal Development Plan workbook. Figure 2 shows sample results from the Self-Assessment workbook, contained in the worksheet Download, with rows hidden to display the gap scores for each of the eight competencies compactly.

The following six steps in the Welcome worksheet of the Personal Development Plan workbook will help you create your Personal Planning Workbook.

- **Step 1:** Transfer the gap values from the Competency Framework Self-Assessment Tool to Column B on the worksheet "My Plan."

- **Step 2:** Starting with the largest gap, formulate one to three objectives that will help you reduce the gap for that competency. Write these in Column C on the worksheet "My Plan."

- **Step 3:** Continue with the remainder of the competencies. You may want to limit your plan to the three or four competencies with the largest gaps.

- **Step 4:** Write a plan that will help you meet the objectives for reducing each gap. Worksheets in this workbook list possible activities and their sources for each competency.

- **Step 5:** Enter the date you want to start each plan in Column E of the worksheet "My Plan."

- **Step 6:** Periodically review your objectives and plans. As you complete a plan, record the date in Column F and the results in Column G of the worksheet "My Plan."

Figure 3
Sample Summary Worksheet

Society of Actuaries
Competency Framework - Personal Panning Workbook

My Plan - Sample 9/2016						
Competency	Gap*	Objective	Plan	Start Date	Date Completed	Results
Communication	2.3	Improve ability to present at Division training sessions	Listen to SOA meeting session - Getting Your Point Across to Non-Technical Audiences, SOA Meeting Session	October 1, 2016	October 1, 2016	Listened to session and viewed PowerPoint slides. Material provided good insight into how to present numbers to a non-technical audience. I need to follow the speaker's suggestions in this area. I will apply the suggestions to the presentation I am making for the underwriting.
		Improve oral presentation skills to small groups.	Join and participate in the downtown Toastmasters Club	December 1, 2016		
Professional Values	1.5					
External Forces & Industry Knowledge	0.3					
Leadership	0.4					
Relationship Management & Interpersonal Collaboration	0.1					
Technical Skills & Analytical Problem Solving	-					
Strategic Insight & Integration	0.8					
Results-Oriented Solutions	1.0					

* Transfer values from SOA Competency Framework Self-Assessment Tool

| Welcome | My Plan | My Plan - Sample | Communication | Professional Values | External Forces & Industry K | Leadership | Relationship Management & |

Your Plan to Address and Prioritize Significant Gaps Identified in the Self-Assessment

The summary worksheet for your own plan will expand to three or four objectives for each of the competencies you judge to require the most attention. The worksheet for each respective competency contains useful additional sources for enhancing that competency (see Figure 3).

Curriculum for Relationship Management and Interpersonal Collaboration

The Relationship Management and Interpersonal Collaboration competency is shown in Figure 4 as an example. For each of the eight competencies, a dedicated worksheet is provided to link to relevant meeting sessions. In turn, the entries feed into the summary worksheet that consolidates all competencies.

SOA Meeting Sessions for 2010–2016 on Each Competency

Finally, we arrive at the ultimate granular level of learning materials, hooking into all meeting sessions from more than a half-decade of instruction by preeminent actuaries. The Personal Planning Workbook (Figure 5) contains worksheets for *all*

2010–2016 meeting sessions, with every professional development offering listed by its primary competency.

Many valuable learning resources are also available in addition to these relevant actuarial events. The various educational sections have outstanding knowledge tools in their websites, for example:

- Technology Section website, *https://www.soa.org/sections/technology/technology-landing/* and

- Technology Section Learning Center, *https://www.soa.org/sections/technology/technology-learning-center/*

You will also find tools far removed from the actuarial universe as well, such as TED Talks, Toastmasters and Dale Carnegie courses. Beyond that, look to the References links at the end of this article.

HOW WILL THE COMPETENCY FRAMEWORK HELP ME DESIGN MY FUTURE?

Given that the Personal Development Plan Excel file can be updated any time you wish, you will have a continuously current tool to plan your career and personal development throughout your entire working life. In other words, you can design your future.

Figure 4
Sample Curriculum for Relationship Management and Interpersonal Collaboration

Society of Actuaries
Competency Framework - Personal Planning Workbook

Relationship Management & Interpersonal Collaboration

Creating mutually beneficial relationships and work processes toward a common goal.

Possible Activities	Vendor	Venue	Cost	Link
Listen to relevant meeting sessions from recent SOA meetings.	Society of Actuaries	Audio recording with slides	$	Go to the Meetings worksheet in this workbook for a list of meeting sessions by competency, select relevant sessions, and then go to the SOAweb site to purchase recordings: http://www.soa.org/Professional-Development/Archive/audio-recordings.aspx
View handout materials of relevant meeting sessions from recent SOA meetings.	Society of Actuaries	Slides	Free	Go to the Meetings worksheet in this workbook for a list of meeting sessions by competency, select relevant sessions, and then go to SOA web site to view the slides: http://www.soa.org/professional-development/archive/detail.aspx
Read relevant articles	Actuarial Profession	Articles	Free	http://www.soa.org/careers/career-resources/career-articles/management.aspx

List is illustrative of resources that are available.

$ < $50
$$ < $200
$$$ < $500
$$$$ > $500

Figure 5
Competency Framework—Personal Planning Workbook

Society of Actuaries
Competency Framework - Personal Planning Workbook

2015 SOA Meeting Sessions

Life & Annuity Symposium, Health Meeting, Valuation Actuary Symposium, Annual Meeting Sessions with slides or audio

n.a.:not available

Competency	Session Title	Session Number	Meeting	Overall Session Rating	Slides	Audio
Communication	Effective Risk Reporting for Life Insurers	149 PD	2015 Annual Meeting	3.70	x	x
External Forces & Industry Knowledge	Actuaries and the International Market	55 PD	2015 Health Meeting	n.a.	x	x
External Forces & Industry Knowledge	Creating Better DC Plans, 1.50 EA Noncore	79 PD	2015 Annual Meeting	4.53	x	x
External Forces & Industry Knowledge	Small Group Medical Workshop	101 WS	2015 Health Meeting	4.52	x	
External Forces & Industry Knowledge	Late Breaking Developments for U.S. Retirement Plans, 1.50 EA Core	78 PD	2015 Annual Meeting	4.47	x	x
External Forces & Industry Knowledge	FASB/IASB Developments: Insurance Accounting	118 IF	2015 Annual Meeting	4.46		x
External Forces & Industry Knowledge	New Developments in Pension Fund Investments, 1.50 EA Noncore	180 IF	2015 Annual Meeting	4.45	x	x
External Forces & Industry Knowledge	Company Tax Update	84 PD	2015 Life & Annuity Symposium	4.44	x	x
External Forces & Industry Knowledge	Appointed Actuaries Boot Camp	54 L	2015 Valuation Actuary Symposium	4.44	x	x
External Forces & Industry Knowledge	Company Tax "Hot Topics"	185 PD	2015 Annual Meeting	4.44	x	x
External Forces & Industry Knowledge	Upcoming Developments in Annuity Valuation	39 WS	2015 Valuation Actuary Symposium	4.41	x	
External Forces & Industry Knowledge	2014 VBT/CSO Impact Study Update 1: Stat Reserves and Nonforfeiture	55 PD	2015 Life & Annuity Symposium	4.41	x	x
External Forces & Industry Knowledge	Aiming for Population Health	35 L	2015 Health Meeting	4.39	x	x
External Forces & Industry Knowledge	Latest on the ACA: From the Industry, Congress, and the Supreme Court	12 PD	2015 Health Meeting	4.37	x	x
External Forces & Industry Knowledge	Mortality Table Update on the 2014 VBT/CSO	46 PD	2015 Annual Meeting	4.36	x	x
External Forces & Industry Knowledge	Overview of IRS Directive on Tax Accounting for Variable Annuity Hedges	63 PD	2015 Valuation Actuary Symposium	4.36	x	x
External Forces & Industry Knowledge	Tax Considerations for the Life Actuary	32 PD	2015 Valuation Actuary Symposium	4.34	x	x
External Forces & Industry Knowledge	Risk Adjusters in Medicaid	88 PD	2015 Annual Meeting	4.33	x	x
External Forces & Industry Knowledge	Health Home Initiatives	64 L	2015 Health Meeting	4.33	x	x
External Forces & Industry Knowledge	Bridging the Gap between Simplified Issue and Fully Underwritten	156 PD	2015 Annual Meeting	4.31	x	x
External Forces & Industry Knowledge	Medicare Advantage Risk Score Basics	121 PD	2015 Annual Meeting	4.30	x	x

You will have the satisfaction of always making measurable progress in your continuing education effort. You will always know "What should I be doing next to advance my noble purpose, my personal inspiration, my own excellence, as an actuary?"

Looking ahead five years, you will have satisfaction in having brought into congruence your *ability* to perform each competency with its *importance* to your work and your clients' needs.

CONCLUSION

Your call to action is to

- Complete the Self-Assessment if you have not done so.

- Create your Personal Development Plan using the Society of Actuaries' tool.

- Speak with your manager about your Professional Development Plan, and integrate the Competency Framework into your company's personal performance appraisal and staff development process. You will be doing your part to accomplish on all three fronts: success as an individual, success as a team, success as an organization.

Now, after arduous travels, on, to pithy summation:

> We EXHORT you, we implore you, we importune you, we entreat you, we adjure you, we cajole and conjure you . . . that is,
>
> *We recommend, we suggest, we earnestly encourage* YOU to delve into the Competency Framework tool to
>
> ### DESIGN YOUR FUTURE.

We welcome your feedback. Our goal is to have this series address your questions and needs and to help all actuaries of the future design a future that they will find meaningful and rewarding. ∎

Richard Junker, FSA, MAAA, CLU, is an actuarial consultant at Greenwood Consultants in Tampa Bay, Florida, and can be contacted at *richardjunker41@gmail.com*.

Curtis Lee Robbins, ASA, ACA, MAAA, is an actuarial consultant at Greenwood Consultants in Poinciana, Florida. He can be contacted at *curtisleerobbins@earthlink.net*.

ENDNOTES

1 Zann Gill, "Buckminster Fuller's Great Pirates: The Origins of Specialization" (2011), Deephaven Centre for Survival Research, *http://deephaven.ca/buckminster-fullers -great-pirates-the-origins-of-specialization/* (accessed September 4, 2017).

2 Bill Burnett and Dave Evans, *Designing Your Life: How to Build a Well-Lived, Joyful Life* (New York: Knopf, 2016), pp. xiv–xv.

REFERENCES

SOA Competency Framework for Actuaries, *http://www.soa.org/Professional -Development/Competency-Framework/default.aspx*

Self-Assessment Tool and Personal Planning Workbook, *http://www.soa.org/ professional-development/competency-framework/self-assessment-tool.aspx*

Road to Success . . . How the Competency Framework Developed, *https://www .soa.org/Library/Newsletters/The-Actuary-Magazine/2009/June/act-2009-vol6-iss3 -eadie.aspx*

How to Become a Better Actuary, *http://www.soa.org/files/Soa/comp-framework -bubke.pdf*

How Toastmasters and the Competency Framework Can Benefit Actuaries, *https:// www.soa.org/files/Pd/comp-framework-worrell.pdf*

Competency Framework concepts from other disciplines, *https://www.google.com /search?q=Competency+Framework&sourceid=ie7&rls=com.microsoft:en -US&ie=utf8&oe=utf8&rlz=1I7GGNI_enUS603&gws_rd=ssl*

RECOMMENDED READINGS

Burnett, Bill, and Dave Evans. *Designing Your Life: How to Build a Well-Lived, Joyful Life.* New York: Knopf, 2016.

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TED Talks: 2500+ Talks to Stir Your Curiosity. *https://www.ted.com/talks*.