

Applying for a Job

Learning Resource

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Introduction

This learning resource is designed for those of you applying for vacancies advertised on the “Civil Service Jobs” website.

The job may be a progression, a lateral move, a new job role or a redeployment opportunity.

It has been designed to help you with the completion of your competency examples with a focus on how to select and write your evidence to demonstrate the required competencies/skills.

To Begin

How familiar are you with the Competency framework and the Indicators?



There are ten competencies in the generic Civil Service Competency Framework.

Information on the Civil Service Competency Framework is available through the Civil Service Learning portal.

<https://civilservicelearning.civilservice.gov.uk/>

Have a look at the grade level version for the role you are applying for.



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**Welcome to
The Civil Service
Competency Framework**

Introduction to the new Civil Service Competency Framework by Sir Bob Kerslake, Head of the Civil Service

Quick Links

- [The Civil Service Competency Framework - summary \(PDF\)](#)
- [The Civil Service Competency Framework - full versions \(PDF\)](#)
- [The Civil Service Competency Framework - Level One \(AA and AO or equivalent\)](#)
- [The Civil Service Competency Framework - Level Two \(EO\)](#)
- [The Civil Service Competency Framework - Level Three \(HEO and SEO\)](#)
- [The Civil Service Competency Framework - Level Four \(Grade 7 and 6\)](#)
- [The Civil Service Competency Framework - Level Five \(Deputy Director\)](#)
- [The Civil Service Competency Framework - Level Six \(Director and Director General\)](#)



Your Framework

➤ Access the competency framework for your current role and grade



How to use the Civil Service Competency Framework

➤ Guidance



Search Learning Opportunities

➤ Access learning opportunities by grade and/or competency



If you are applying for a role that also has a professional framework you need to ensure you know where to find that information.

Your professional framework on the Civil Service Learning portal lists all of the cross government professions.

Have a look at the one that is relevant for you.

You might find it helpful to complete the **Civil Service Competency Framework Self Assessment tool** for the level that you wish to apply for. This will give you insight into your existing level of capability against each of the ten competencies.

<https://civilservicelearning.civilservice.gov.uk/civil-service-competency-framework-self-assessment>



Step 1: Create an Account on the Civil Service Jobs website

You will need to create an account on the Civil Service Jobs website and search for the vacancy.

<https://jobsstatic.civilservice.gov.uk/csjobs.html>

Talk to your line manager in order to

- Discuss your evidence – can you demonstrate evidence at the appropriate level?

You need to be aware that it takes some time to gather the necessary evidence that is required and to complete the form.

When you apply the appropriate forms will be provided for you, together with the details of the competencies you are to be measured against.

Step 2: Personal Details

You will need to complete the personal details section on the application form. This will include previous work history and experience.

Step 3: Writing Competency Examples

It is possible that you will have to complete the Supporting statement and Competency examples.

The following sections give some guidance on how to do this.

WRITING THE SUPPORTING STATEMENTS

Statements need to be short and snappy. As there is a limit on the number of words it is essential that you use the space as effectively as possible. The word count may seem small but drafting statements that are comprehensive yet succinct is part of the skill being assessed. To prepare good strong statements to include in your application, you need to:

- Base your examples on a previous experience which has broad enough scope to enable you to demonstrate you have completed the actions that make up the competency
- Tell the truth - don't make things up. You may well be asked about the examples at the interview so will get tripped up if you have written about something that you are not familiar with
- Do a first draft then refine, refine, refine



-
- Check everything is there that is needed
 - Use the word count facility on your computer – you don't want to exceed the word count
 - Think about presentation – would bullet points work as opposed to paragraphs of text
 - Be succinct – make sure you cover the key points
 - Draft in clear language that is grammatically correct, including the spelling
 - Do not use jargon, abbreviations or specialist terms
 - Use your own words, preferably those that enhance the impact of your application

WRITING THE COMPETENCY EXAMPLES

Top Tips for getting started

- Write down all the things that you have done well in your job over the past 2 years
- Your previous performance reports may help here
- For each of these things note down how you achieved what you did, what skills and behaviours did you use
- For each bit of work, note which competencies it might cover

It is a good idea to familiarise yourself with your own competencies and indicators before you start.

- Gather your evidence together and analyse it before you start writing examples – you probably have more evidence than you think.
- Use evidence from work if you can.
- Talk through your evidence and examples with your line manager or a colleague – a second or third pair of eyes is always useful.
- Practice - you will not get it right first time.
- Take time – writing good examples takes days or weeks - not hours.

Which Competencies

During the Selection process you may be asked to provide a number of competency examples.

Many people find this to be the most difficult part.



It is essential that you get this part right. Failure to provide good evidence will not get you through a sift or an interview.

The vacancy holder has 3 options to consider when they choose competencies for an exercise;

- Generic competencies only
- A blend of generic and professional competencies
- Generic competencies with additional professional or technical requirements such as qualifications specified in the vacancy

Vacancy holders would also need to consult departmental recruitment and selection for guidance on how competencies are used in recruitment.

Usually you will be asked to provide evidence against the required competencies with a word count of 200-250 words per competency. Any evidence over the stated word count will be discounted.

Competencies describe particular knowledge, skills and behaviours that you need to demonstrate to the vacancy holder.

They should be written in a way that helps managers assess your suitability for a vacancy or promotion exercise.

Competencies are used because if you have done something in the past – you can do it in the future.

How to choose your examples

They should be tailored to the behavioural indicators that you feel are most relevant to the advertised post.

When deciding which examples to use, keep referring back to the **Key Tasks** and **Person Requirements** that are described in the advert, and in the effective behavioural indicators within the competency.

Underline any key words and phrases in the job advert to include in your examples.

THE WHO MODEL

Competency based selection requires more than just information about what you did, it requires you to explain. The method below is known as the WHO model. This is a useful technique to apply when writing your evidence.



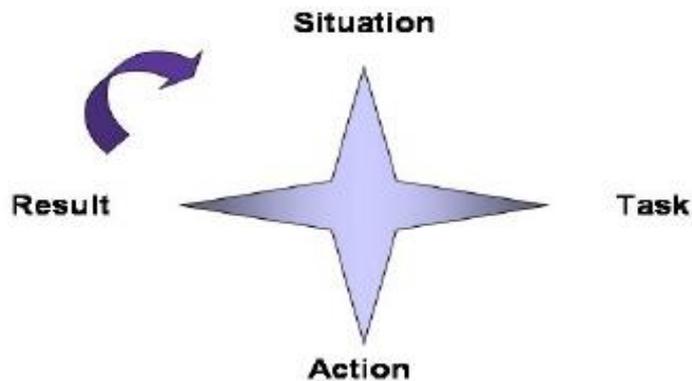
What - your personal role

How - you did it and

Outcome - placing an emphasis on the successful outcome

THE STAR APPROACH TO PRESENTING YOUR EXAMPLES

The **STAR** approach may also help you to present your evidence more successfully, providing structure and focus to your answers to questions about what you have done in the period the review covers.



- **Situation** – briefly describe the context and your role.
- **Task** – the specific challenge, task or job that you faced.
- **Action** – what you did, how and why you did it.
- **Result** – what you achieved through your actions.

Keep the **situation** and **task** parts brief. Concentrate on the action and the result. If the result was not entirely successful describe what you learned from this and what you would do differently next time.

STAR may help you to cover all the points you need to make. It may help you approach drafting your application in a positive way and ensure that you cover what you personally have done. Make sure you focus on your strengths.



One example per competency would be best practice to use the full STAR explanation within the required word count of 200- 250 words. Some departments may already have guidance on the number of competency examples and word limits so the applicant should check with the advertising department.

Hints and tips

- Allow yourself plenty of time for writing your examples – avoid leaving them until the last minute.
- Writing it down is the safest way to ensure all your examples are fully considered.
- Don't assume the sift panel has any knowledge of the situation. They may not know everything you have done.
- It's all down to you. The sift panel cannot infer what is not included in the example and can only assess what you have actually written.
- Make sure you include how you overcome problems / obstacles.
- Keep looking back at the competency bullet points and cover the key points.
- Describe your thoughts, actions and feelings rather than just describing what happened.
- Don't get caught up telling a story in your example. Just give enough to show -
 - how you went about the task
 - why you did it the way you did and
 - describe any obstacles you encountered.
- Don't forget to include results and show why your actions were effective and/or how you could have improved on what you did.
- **Use 'I' not 'we'**. This is about your role in the task and how you affected the outcome.
- Use short statements that show the value you added.
- Use your own words. Consider using active verbs to create greater impact (see Annex A).
- Choose your most powerful examples – demanding/challenging situations that have lots of substance.



- Consider completing a Competency Example Prompt (see Annex B) using information about the business challenge, ministerial importance and strategic risks. What value did you add and what was the outcome and impact on the business? Complete one form for each competence you are asked to provide evidence for. You can use this form to help shape evidence for the application and for the interview.

Summary

- Use no more than about two sentences on the 'what'.
- The bulk on the 'how'.
- Followed by a brief summary of the 'outcome'.
- Remember the majority of your words should be on the 'how'.

Here are some examples on how to write your evidence.

Example One – Applying for a Level Two (EO) role - Managing a Quality Service Level 2 (EO)

First of all, look at the effective behavioural indicators for the competency:

Explain clearly to customers what can be done
Work with team to set priorities, create clear plans and manage all work to meet the needs of the customer and the business
Ensure that levels of service are maintained – flag up risks or concerns in order to meet customer requirements
Keep internal teams, customers and delivery partners fully informed of plans and possibilities
Promote adherence to relevant policies, procedures, regulations and legislation, including equality and diversity and health and safety
Identify common problems or weaknesses in policy or procedures that affect service and escalate these

Now look at the competency example:

When I took responsibility for my operational delivery team I ensured our services and requirements were explained and communicated, throughout including:



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- *presentations to other management teams and divisions*
 - *messages relayed outwards and back to the team using established networks including L&D, finance, intranet, SMT, and Continuous Improvement*

I ensure evaluation data and feedback is used continuously to evolve services and products, and explain when it is not possible to meet the desires of customers.

I have introduced a new evaluation process designed to raise local awareness of customer satisfaction targets and measure our success, effectiveness and value for money. I achieved a 95% customer satisfaction rating.

How could this be improved?

Suggestions:

This example might be better split into one for Leading & Communicating and one for Managing a Quality Service which focussed more closely on the approach to customer service.

It also reads as a list of “what” – there is not enough “how”.

Now look at this rewrite of Example **One**

As the customer service lead for a large operational office with 2,000 customers, I improved customer satisfaction levels and reduced levels of complaints.

I publicised existing service standards and customer requirements via existing channels e.g. posters and face to face interviews. I ran customer focus groups, listened to views and explained what was and was not possible. I fed back the outcomes to internal teams and agreed actions with them to make service improvements e.g. the need to communicate waiting times clearly to customers.

I reviewed the complaints received so far and identified common themes e.g. customers felt ignored at times. I asked for customer and staff views on how to address this and agreed behaviours were identified including saying hello and good morning to customers waiting.

I amended and relaunched the office customer service standards as a result of this work. This included a new evaluation process which raised awareness of customer satisfaction targets and measured success. I achieved a 20% increase in customer satisfaction targets and a 15% reduction in the number of complaints.

This is 176 words - look back at the indicators for this competency.

How could this be improved?



Suggestions:

Include a link to plans and priorities and explain how you ensured you took into account legislative responsibilities and this is shaping up to be a great piece of evidence.

Example Two - Applying for a Level Three (HEO & SEO) role - Leading & Communicating level 3 (HEO & SEO)

Again, look first at the effective behavioural indicators for the competency:

Take opportunities to regularly communicate and interact with staff, helping to clarify goals and activities and the links between these and Departmental strategy
Recognise, respect and reward the contribution and achievements of others
Communicate in a succinct, engaging manner and stand ground when needed
Communicate using appropriate styles, methods and timing, including digital channels, to maximise understanding and impact
Promote the work of the Department and play an active part in supporting the Civil Service values and culture
Convey enthusiasm and energy about their work and encourage others to do the same

Now look at the competency example:

My first task was to turn a high level re-organisation strategy into reality by running a selection exercise that followed Departmental workforce management policies.

I engaged with DTUS and devised a process, selection tools and concise operational guidance. I prepared a timeline, engaged key implementation & marketing resources, launched the exercise, monitored progress and ensured regular, open communications. I coached colleagues in a variety of roles (junior through to most senior managers) through the procedures. I continually evaluated the exercise and used this feedback to refine and improve the process as it rolled out. This approach influenced and engaged individuals, managers and DTUS, lowering initial robust resistance and gaining engagement to the re-organisation.



The selection exercise was completed to deadline with a 15% reduction in the workforce achieved.

This is 128 words – look back at the indicators for this competency.

How could this be improved?

Suggestions:

Make a link to the bigger picture – why were the reductions required?

The output could benefit from additional evidence like;

-Whether you led/communicated with others who were working with you on completing this task.

-How you evaluated and used the feedback to refine and improve the process and lower the resistance.

-What did you change or improve or learn in doing this?

-What other outcomes were there? E.g. measures of staff engagement levels in the re-organisation and/or performance outputs delivered.

Example Three – Applying for a Level Three (HEO & SEO) role - Building Capability for All level 3 (HEO & SEO)

Again, look first at the effective behavioural indicators for the competency:

Identify and address team or individual capability requirements and gaps to deliver current and future work
Identify and develop all talented team members to support succession planning, devoting time to coach, mentor and develop others
Value and respond to different personal needs in the team using these to develop others and promote inclusiveness
Proactively manage own career and identify own learning needs with line manager, plan and carry out work-place learning opportunities
Continually seek and act on feedback to evaluate and improve their own and team's performance

Now look at the competency example:

With my support, coaching and encouragement a junior member of my team secured attendance at



Summer School. He is now part of a project led by a colleague looking at customer innovation and is leading a Community 5000 initiative.

I commissioned a Skills Gap Analysis exercise and these results and the staff survey results influence priority areas for improvement. A key one is performance management. I have led HR Business Partner team to devise implementation plans for workshops to raise the skills and knowledge of line managers and to support these full sessions with bite size awareness sessions. In addition I have devised simple reference flow charts showing learning and guidance and engaged intranet colleagues to publicise and publish material.

This is 118 words - look back at the indicators for this competency.

How could this be improved?

Suggestions:

It is best to focus on one example rather than two. There are two good stories to tell here - focus on just one and keep the other for the interview. By describing one example in more detail and appropriately using the word count as a guide, you are giving yourself more chance to demonstrate a greater breadth of the competency behaviours.

Example Four – Applying for a Level Four (G7 & G6 role) - Managing a Quality Service Level Four (G7 & G6)

Again, look first at the effective behavioural indicators for the competency:

Exemplify positive customer service behaviours and promote a culture focused on ensuring customer needs are met
Establish how the business area compares to customer service expectations and industry best practice and identify necessary improvements in plans
Make clear, pragmatic and manageable plans for service delivery using programme and project management disciplines
Create regular opportunities for staff and customers to help improve service quality and demonstrate a visible involvement
Ensure the service offer thoroughly considers customers' needs and a broad range of available methods to meet this, including new technology where relevant



Ensure adherence to legal and regulatory requirements in service delivery and build diversity and equality considerations into plans

Now look at the competency example:

As an Implementation Manager on a large IT Project, I needed to negotiate dates for ten releases within the challenging timescales defined by the Senior Responsible Officer. The differing proposals/priorities from suppliers and stakeholders had to be taken into account, in addition to already approved change releases.

I developed a work plan proposal which delivered business benefits for customers by taking into account resources, conflicts, system caseloads and priorities. I took into account previous lessons learned to mitigate the risk of implementing multiple large scale releases and undertook a risk analysis with mitigations.

I communicated, explained the rationale behind the proposals and negotiated the differing stakeholder impacts by having initial discussions with individual stakeholder groups. Once agreed in principle, I instigated the governance process to communicate and formally agree the release dates.

I then produced thorough project plans including a stakeholder resource profile. I instigated a programme management forum to oversee overall project status, identified issues and managed these to resolution.

The result was successful scheduling of the releases with full agreement from stakeholders despite the challenging deadline. The result delivered the implementation of the largest payment and accounting system of its type anywhere in the world.

This is 199 words - look back at the indicators for this competency.

How could this be improved?

Suggestions:

This is a great example of project delivery capability but could benefit from describing the benefits to the customer and any cost savings. You may also be able to use this example as evidence of Changing and Improving.



Step 4: The Application Form

What does a well presented application form look like?

A well presented application form will;

- Conform to normal business standards – Arial 12 font or as per instruction in job advert or application form
- Have been checked for spelling, typo errors
- Have been checked for the correct use of punctuation and capitalisation
- Avoid the use of jargon
- Make use of the past tense e.g. achieved, verified. Use active verbs (see Annex A).
- Contain examples which provide evidence to meet the competency requirements in the context of role.

Summary

The examples you use must meet the competency requirements of the job.

It should reflect what the advertising manager is looking for.

You should specify your role not the role of the team.

The structure should clearly show what the example was and;

- Why you tackled it
- How you went about it
- What behaviours did you employ
- What was the outcome? This could be what you learned or the impact of your intervention
- The structure should be clearly shown
- The bulk of your words should be on the “How”.



Step 5: The Sift Process

A sift panel is an optional tool for the vacancy holder to use to either ensure all applicants meet a minimum standard or reduce the numbers of applicants to a manageable size.

A sift panel is assembled with the chair being at least one grade above the vacancy grade.

The other sift panel members may be of the same grade as the vacancy.

The chair and panel members must be at least EO grade.

The purpose of the sift panel is to assess and score the evidence provided by the applicants and to determine who has the strongest evidence for each competency.

The sift panel will discuss and agree standards against which they assess each application and ensure that sifts are in line with equal opportunities.

You may find that on occasions you are sifted in or sifted out with the same evidence.

This could happen because each exercise is a separate competition with different standards being set.

Each panel member will read the evidence provided by individuals and then rate the evidence against the required competency level.

Every application is rated by all panel members who then discuss their individual scores before agreeing on a final score. Scoring systems vary across departments but the principle is the same.

The sift panel will rank applications where individuals have attained a pass rating in merit order.

Unsuccessful applicants will be notified at this point and may be given feedback to help them in future job applications.

Step 6: The Interview

Once you have passed the sift stage you will be invited to attend an interview.

A good interview requires excellent preparation, good listening skills and the ability to answer the question that is asked. Practice before the interview by preparing and rehearsing questions to possible answers.

How can you prepare for the interview?

Here are some useful tips.

- try to arrange a 'mock interview' with a manager
- research the business unit you are applying for
- try and talk to someone on the team you are applying for, if possible



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- REMEMBER to apply the 'WHO' model when relating your examples to the questions

Interview duration

Typically the interview will last for about 45 minutes.

The purpose of the interview is to:

- Test the candidate's suitability for the requirements of the role
- Guarantee fair treatment at the interview for all candidates by treating them in a demonstrably equal manner
- Give all candidates an opportunity to express their views and present their evidence
- Score candidates based on the requirements of the job
- Recommend which candidate should be offered the position and produce an order of merit based on scores achieved.
- For the candidate to decide if the role and the Department/Agency are right for them.

Competency Based Interviewing

The interview will be based on the competencies that were defined in the job role and, in line with the policies of most departments, these will have been the competencies used to sift the interview candidates. The number and choice of competencies against which interviews will be conducted will be based upon the determination by the vacancy holder of the business priorities and departmental policy requirements which apply. However in practical terms it is unlikely that more than 6 competencies could be assessed in a standard 45 minute interview.

Competency based interview question examples

The example interview questions below are based on the Civil Service Competency Framework competencies.

Managing a Quality Service

- How do you and your team understand what the standards required by your customers are?
- Give me an example of how you have demonstrated an understanding of customer needs
- What steps have you taken to understand how you and your team perform against performance/customer standards?
- How do you respond to customer feedback?
- Can you describe a time when you have been proactive in finding a solution to a problem encountered by your customers?



Leading and Communicating

- When communicating to staff how have you ensured your communication is clear, well structured and tailored to your audience?
- Can you give an example of how you have engaged your team in discussions about changes taking place in your unit, business area or Department?
- Tell me about a time when you have had to influence a senior manager, stakeholder or partner and how you went about this?
- Tell me about a time when you have had to use written communication to successfully influence someone? How did you go about structuring your written communication?

Collaborating and Partnering

- How have you created a good team spirit within your teams?
- Tell me about a time when you have been faced with resistance or negativity and how you have responded to this?
- Give me an example of how you have motivated others to do their job better?
- Tell me about a time when you have collaborated with individuals or teams outside of your business area in order to deliver a positive outcome

Seeing the Big Picture

- How have you ensured a team understands how its work connects into the work of the Department?
- Tell me how your current role fits into the overall objectives of the Department
- Tell me about a time when you have developed and updated good practice in your area of work?
- Give me an example of when you had to make a change in your work area. How did you ensure it fitted with the strategic direction of the Department or your business area?

Building Capability for All

- Can you describe a time when you have had to address underperformance and how you went about this?
- Can you give me an example of how you have nurtured a talented member of your team?
- How do you increase your own knowledge and expertise and that of your team?
- What are your own development areas and what are you doing to address these?

Using non-verbal behaviour

Use non-verbal communication throughout the interview although be aware that non-verbal behaviour can be prone to cultural differences. Broadly, non-verbal behaviour can be broken down into five main areas;



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- posture (covering position, direction, degree of movement, etc)
 - facial expression (covering expression, eye contact, eye movement, head movement etc)
 - gestures (hand, leg and arm movements)
 - voice and breathing (pace, depth/tone of voice etc)
 - energy level (more subjective, but the degree of energy that the above are showing and the nature of that energy, e.g. enthusiasm, capacity or anxiety).

Points to Note

Diversity & Equality

All that we do is underpinned by Diversity and Equality. The Civil Service is committed to providing services which embrace diversity and equality of opportunity. This is underpinned by the Equality Act 2010 and must be adhered to at each stage of the application process.

The vacancy application process has to treat everyone equally and ensure that Civil Service policies and legislation are adhered to and no applicant is treated any less favourably.

Guaranteed Interview Scheme

The Guaranteed Interview Scheme (GIS) provides individuals with disabilities the right to proceed to the next stage of the selection process if they meet the minimum criteria at the previous stage.

Links to other Learning Resources

There are hints and tips on using Competencies on the Civil Service Learning portal;

<https://virtual.ashridge.org.uk/en-GB/materials/learningguides/CBILG/pages/In-depth.aspx>

There is also a case study on Applying for a Job on the Civil Service Competency Framework pages

<https://civilservicelearning.civilservice.gov.uk/competency-framework/case-study-2>

External websites providing guidance on STAR technique and use of language;

http://www.open.ac.uk/careers/_pdp-star-technique.php

http://www.prospects.ac.uk/job_applications_power_words.htm

Good Luck



ANNEX A: THE USE OF ACTIVE LANGUAGE

When completing your competency examples consider using active verbs which give your application greater impact and make a stronger impression. Using the past tense also gives the sense that you have completed or achieved your goals. As an added bonus you will use fewer words.

Don't use: I was responsible for organising a programme of speakers.

Do use: I organised a programme of speakers.

Here is a list of active verbs that you can use;

A - accomplish, achieve, adapt, administer, advise, analyse, apply, appoint, appraise, approve, assess, attain, arrange, assist

B - broaden, budget, build

C - calculate, capture, centralise, check, coach

D - decrease, define, delegate, deliver, demonstrate, determine, develop, devise, diagnose, direct, distribute, document, drive

E - earn, edit, eliminate, encourage, engineer, ensure, establish

F - facilitate

G - generate, guide

H - help

I - identify, implement, improve, improvise, incorporate, increase, influence, initiate, innovate, inspire, instigate, instruct, interpret, interview, investigate, introduce

L - lead, liaise, launch

M - mentor, manage



N - negotiate, network

O - organise, operate, obtain

P - participate, persuade, plan, present, produce, prompt, propose

R - reinforce, research, revitalise

S - shape, sell, solve, specify, streamline, supply, support

T - teach, test, train, transform

U - understand, undertake, urge

V - validate, value, volunteer

W - weigh up, widen, write



ANNEX B: COMPETENCY EXAMPLE PROMPT

COMPETENCY EXAMPLE:		
BUSINESS CHALLENGE		MINISTERIAL IMPORTANCE
STRATEGIC RISKS	MY STRATEGIC THINKING	WHAT WAS HARD ABOUT IT
WHAT I DID		MY UNIQUE VALUE ADD
OUTCOME AND IMPACT TO BUSINESS		WHAT I LEARNT FROM IT

