Bridging the Skills Gap:
Essential Skills for Success
Across Key Industries

SHL.

Contents

Introduction

Purpose and Goals

The purpose of this paper is to bridge well-known industry skills frameworks with SHL's Skills Taxonomy as measured by the Global Skills Assessment (GSA), which measures 96 distinct skills through a brief 15-minute assessment. By mapping these frameworks to the skills assessed in the GSA, we aim to create a better understanding of how candidates' skill sets align with industry expectations and requirements. This alignment allows for a more detailed view of candidates' readiness and highlights key areas for development. Beyond hiring decisions, these insights can also inform internal career development, helping organizations reskill and redeploy employees into emerging roles.

The goals of this study are:

Industry Skills Mapping: To align recognized skill frameworks for the IT, Retail, Financial Services, and Healthcare industries with the GSA and provide clarity on how industry-specific skills map to the skills measured by the GSA.

Performance Analysis: To analyze the GSA assessment data of candidates applying for roles in these industries and compare their results to those of the broader general population of candidates. This will reveal insights into how well prepared these candidates are for the essential skills demanded by that industry.

Skill Gaps and Strengths: To identify strengths and gaps in candidates' skill sets and provide a foundation for targeted development strategies that organizations can use to support workforce readiness in these industries.

Overview of Selected Industries

This paper focuses on four prominent industries: IT, Retail, Financial Services, and Healthcare. Each of these industries has established frameworks that outline the essential skills for success. Below is a brief overview of the sources used for the industries' respective skill frameworks:

Information Technology (IT): The skills framework for IT was derived from the Skills Framework for the Information Age (SFIA), a globally recognized standard that defines and categorizes IT-related competencies. The SFIA framework provides a structured view of the skills needed across a variety of roles in the IT industry.

Retail: The retail industry skills framework was sourced from CareerOneStop's competency model for retail, which identifies essential skills ranging from customer service and sales to inventory management and merchandising. This framework helps define the capabilities required to succeed in a fast-paced, customer-oriented environment.

Financial Services: For the financial services sector, the skills framework was obtained from the Financial Services Skills Commission. This framework outlines key skills such as financial analysis, risk management, compliance, and customer relationship management, which are essential for roles within banking, insurance, and investment management.

Healthcare: The healthcare skills framework was taken from workforce competencies for healthcare quality, as published in The Journal of Healthcare Quality. This framework emphasizes clinical expertise, patient safety, quality improvement, and collaborative care, reflecting the competencies needed to deliver high-quality healthcare services.

Methodology

Four raters from SHL's psychometrics team mapped the skills in SHL's Universal Competency Framework (UCF) with Skills Taxonomy to the essential skills frameworks for each of the four industries. Using their extensive knowledge of the Skills Taxonomy, they linked skill statements from each industry-specific framework to one or two of the 96 skills in the UCF.

Once mappings were completed, results were consolidated across raters for each industry. To determine the most important UCF skills for each framework, those most frequently linked to skill statements were identified and designated as the essential skills for success within this paper.

Power of the Global Skills Assessment (GSA)

The UCF, as measured by the GSA offers a highly effective approach to mapping skills across industries, which helps to address the complexities and redundancies that are often found in industry-specific skill frameworks. While these skill frameworks provide insights into the required skills for success in these respective industries, they are frequently characterized by duplication and are difficult to measure. By leveraging the GSA to measure skills within the SHL Universal Competency Framework, organizations can achieve better consistency and precision in their skill assessment and development journey.

Our analysis demonstrates that the 96 discrete skills can effectively align with the detailed skill statements in industry-specific frameworks. By focusing on a more concise and measurable set of skills, the UCF with Skills Taxonomy reduces complexity without compromising the accuracy or relevance of skill mapping. A summary of how well the UCF aligns with these frameworks can be found below:

IT Industry:
The IT skills framework contains 121 skill statements. Using the GSA, we identified 13 key skills that map to 92% of the framework.

Retail Services Industry:
The retail services skills framework, with 257 skill statements, was effectively mapped using 11 skills, which covered 58% of the framework.

Financial Services Industry:
In financial services, 130 skill statements were mapped to 15 skills, covering 72% of the framework.

Healthcare Industry:
The healthcare skills framework, comprising 29 skill statements, mapped to 14 skills, covering 93% of the framework.

IT and Digital Industry

Essential Skills for Success

Success in the IT industry relies on a combination of technical expertise, strategic thinking, leadership, and adherence to standards. At the core, professionals must possess strong technical and functional expertise, with skills in software engineering, specialized knowledge applications, and the ability to build, design, or create new tools and systems. This technical creativity drives innovation and ensures that organizations remain competitive and efficient.

Equally vital is the ability to analyze information and critically evaluate processes. IT professionals must break down complex data, identify patterns, and develop solutions to optimize operations. This analytical mindset allows them to address challenges proactively and improve existing systems. Coupled with this is the need for strategic planning, in which professionals plan ahead, maintain a strategic vision, and seek out new business opportunities. These skills are essential for ensuring long-term success and aligning projects with broader organizational goals.

Additionally, leadership and collaboration play a key role in IT environments. Professionals are often required to support and coach others, define clear roles and responsibilities, and coordinate team activities. Effective leaders foster a collaborative atmosphere that promotes productivity and innovation. Alongside leadership, a focus on performance monitoring and improvement is crucial; regularly assessing progress and driving enhancements ensures that teams remain efficient and deliver quality results.

Finally, a commitment to compliance is non-negotiable. Adhering to industry standards, regulations, and internal policies not only safeguards the organization but also builds trust with clients and stakeholders. Together, these skills form a comprehensive skill set that enables IT professionals to thrive in an ever-evolving and competitive field.

To evaluate the potential of candidates applying for roles within the IT industry, Global Skills Assessment (GSA) scores from a sample of over 12,000 candidates from the IT industry were analyzed and compared to general population norms. Standardized mean difference effect sizes (Cohen's d values) were used to assess differences in scores, as a way to highlight where the IT industry talent pool offers strengths and skill gaps compared to the broader candidate pool.

Skills for Successful IT Professionals and their Strengths and Skill Gaps

This table outlines the key GSA scales that strategically align with the skills needed to perform successfully in the IT and digital industry, as well as which skills IT candidates demonstrated strengths or skill gaps.

| Skill	Strength or Skill Gap
Leadership	
Defines roles and responsibilities	No meaningful difference
Monitors performance	**Skill gap**
Coordinates others' work	**Skill gap**
Supports and coaches others	No meaningful difference
Applying Expertise and Technology	
Applies functional expertise	No meaningful difference
Builds, designs, or creates new tools or systems	**Strength**
Critical Thinking	
Analyzes information	No meaningful difference
Critically evaluates	No meaningful difference
Strategic Thinking	
Considers strategic vision	No meaningful difference
Drives improvement	No meaningful difference
Planning and Organizing	
Plans ahead	**Strength**
Dependability	
Complies with rules and regulations	No meaningful difference
Commercial Thinking	
Develops new business opportunities	No meaningful difference

It is noteworthy that some strengths align with GSA scales identified as critical for IT professional success. For instance, "Builds, designs, or creates new tools or systems" and "Plans ahead" were both highlighted as key skills for success and areas of strength among IT candidates, suggesting these are common areas where they excel.

Organizations hiring within the IT industry might consider targeted upskilling in areas where opportunities for improvement were observed. Specifically, additional support may be needed to help IT professionals enhance their leadership skills, such as "Monitors performance" and "Coordinates others' work," as these were identified as essential skills for success in the IT sector, yet candidates scored lower in these areas compared to the general population.

Skills Comparison of IT Candidates Against the general Population

The spider graph below illustrates all the GSA scales where there was meaningful score differences between candidates applying for roles in the IT industry compared to GSA scores in the general population. Those skills in red indicate this is a skill gap when compared to performance of the general population, and those in green represent skill strengths of candidates applying to this industry.

Comparing GSA Scores of IT Candidates to the General Population
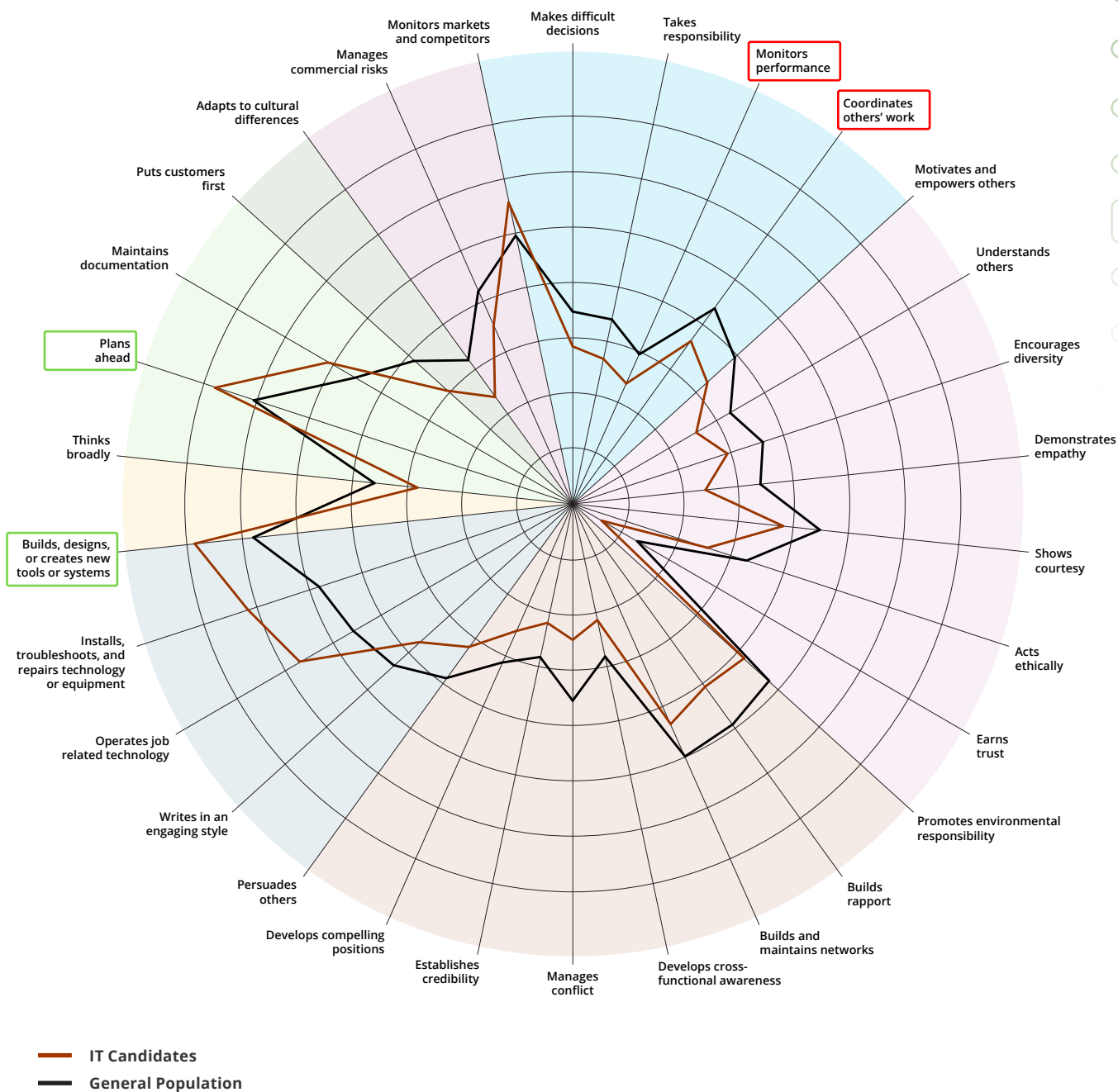
— IT Candidates

— General Population

Color Key for the Great Eight Factors

Leading and Deciding	Supporting and Cooperating	Interacting and Presenting	Analyzing and Interpreting	Creating and Conceptualizing	Organizing and Executing	Adapting and Coping	Enterprising and Performing

Retail Industry

Essential Skills for Success

Achieving success in the retail industry relies on a combination of technical and functional expertise, leadership, and organizational skills. Professionals should demonstrate proficiencies in numerical and mathematical reasoning, merchandising, and utilizing computer systems, with strong skills in dependability and customer service. Such qualities are essential for navigating the fast-paced retail environment, with a focus on delivering quality customer experiences.

The ability to carefully manage inventory and allocate resources effectively is crucial to facilitate seamless business operations. Retail professionals must continuously gather information to consider factors such as flow of merchandise, strategic planning, and stock organization to ensure product availability while meeting consumer demands. With the right skills insights, businesses can identify high-performing employees who are ready for supervisory or management roles, improving retention and career growth.

Additionally, retail professionals must be able to operate job related technologies, including relevant software, devices, equipment, and digital platforms, with proficiency in computer-based interactions. A solid understanding of these tools allows professionals to streamline workflows and enhance productivity.

Lastly, retail professionals must adhere to and comply with industry rules and regulations while maintaining a strong focus on safety awareness. Given the high traffic and the customer-facing nature of the retail industry, professionals must remain vigilant in managing risks that could disrupt operations or result in harm to themselves, other employees, or customers. In addition, they must consider the financial impact of their actions to ensure continued profitability and long-term business success. This comprehensive skill set equips retail professionals with the ability to meet industry demands and contribute to sustainable organizational growth.

To evaluate the potential of candidates applying for roles within the retail service industry, GSA scores from a sample of over 2,000 candidates were analyzed and compared to general population norms.

Skills for Successful Retail Service Employees and their Strengths and Skill Gaps

This table outlines the key GSA scales that strategically align with the skills needed to perform successfully in the retail industry, as well as which skills retail candidates demonstrated strengths or skill gaps.

Skill	Strength or Skill Gap
Leadership	
Coordinates others' work	**Strength**
Supports and coaches others	No meaningful difference
Applying Expertise and Technology	
Applies functional expertise	No meaningful difference
Operates job related technology	No meaningful difference
Learning	
Gathers information	No meaningful difference
Planning and Organizing	
Sets objectives	No meaningful difference
Manages resources	**Strength**
Delivering Results	
Puts customers first	**Strength**
Dependability	
Complies with rules and regulations	No meaningful difference
Shows safety awareness	No meaningful difference
Commercial Thinking	
Considers financial impact	**Strength**

In the retail service industry, success is reliant on the ability to blend technical proficiency, leadership, and organizational skills. Four key skill areas have been identified as strengths that align with the GSA scales critical for retail industry success. These are, "Manages resources," "Coordinates others' work," "Considers financial impact," and "Puts customers first." These competencies reflect the ability to navigate the complex demands of retail operations.

Skills Comparison of Retail Candidates Against the General Population

The spider graph below illustrates all the GSA scales where there was meaningful score differences between candidates applying for roles in the retail industry compared to GSA scores in the general population. Those skills in green represent skill strengths of candidates applying to this industry.

Comparing GSA Scores of Retail Candidates to the General Population
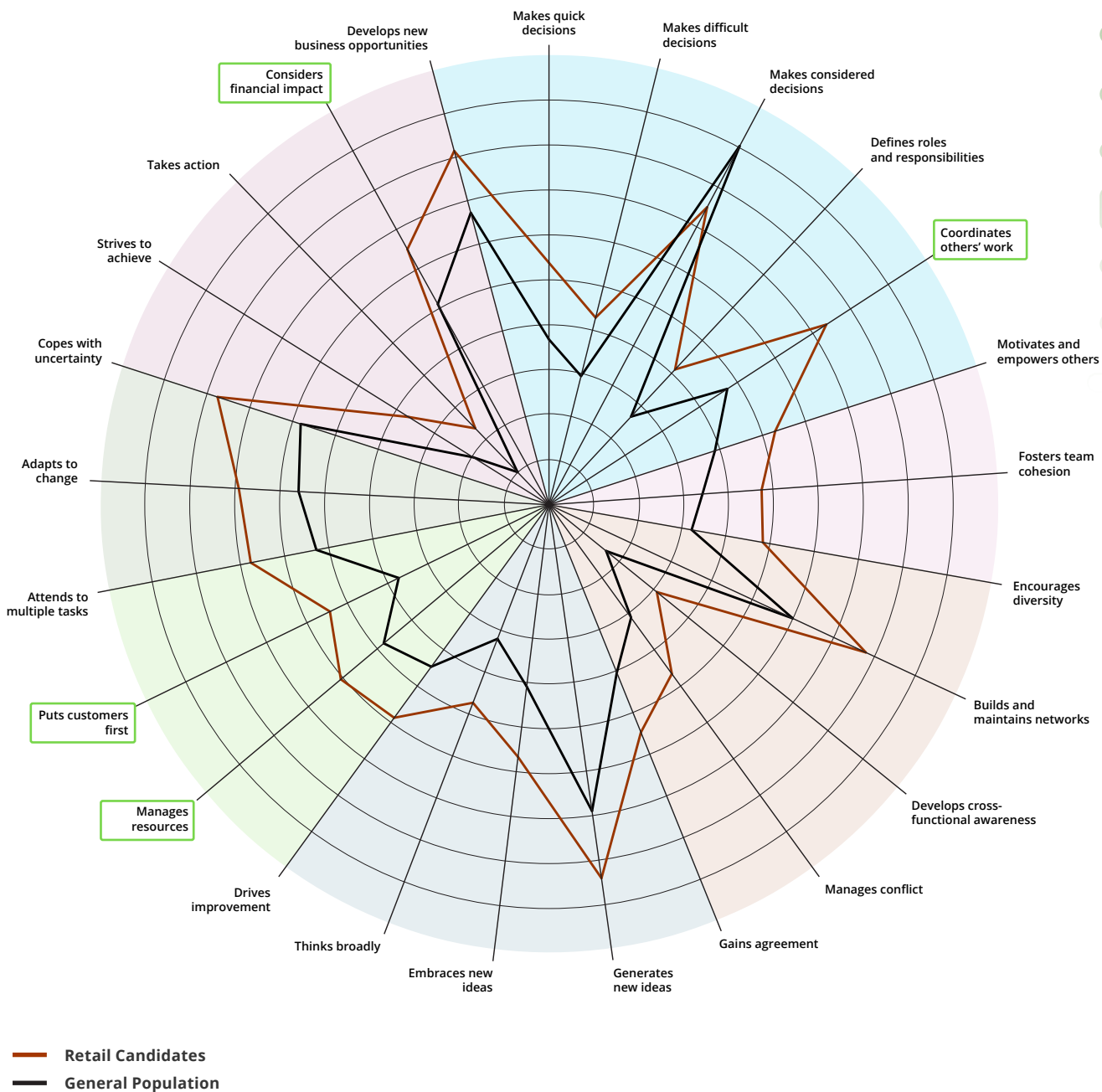
— Retail Candidates

— General Population

Color Key for the Great Eight Factors

▢ Leading and Deciding	▢ Supporting and Cooperating	▢ Interacting and Presenting	▢ Analyzing and Interpreting*	▢ Creating and Conceptualizing	▢ Organizing and Executing	▢ Adapting and Coping	▢ Enterprising and Performing

Financial Services Industry

Essential Skills for Success

Success in the financial industry is driven by a unique combination of specialized expertise, strategic thinking, and innovation, particularly in adapting to regulatory changes, implementing new technologies, and developing customer-centric products and services. While often seen as a traditional field, the financial industry increasingly relies on innovative approaches to enhance operational efficiency, security, and client engagement. These abilities are further enhanced by well-developed skills in collaboration, creativity, and adaptability, which are essential for success given the dynamic nature of the financial sector.

Just as essential is the ability to generate and embrace new ideas. This perspective of creativity and innovation enables professionals to produce novel approaches to challenges, while also experimenting with new and unconventional insights. They must also think critically and analyze relevant data to develop and enhance existing processes. These skills are crucial for keeping up with emerging market trends and ensuring the organization remains competitive in an ever-changing industry.

As mentioned, collaboration plays a vital role in the financial workplace. Professionals must possess robust interpersonal skills to understand others' needs, display empathy, actively listen, and demonstrate acceptance. These skills are critical to build trust with clients and stakeholders, communicating effectively, ensuring goal alignment, and facilitate seamless coordination across teams, ultimately strengthening collaborative efforts to drive organizational success.

Lastly, professionals should display a commitment to uphold ethical standards, ensuring trust and accountability remain at the core of their work. Alongside this, they should actively pursue opportunities to gain experience, improve performance, and achieve organizational goals. This blend of integrity and continuous development provides a solid foundation that allows financial professionals to excel in a rapidly evolving and challenging field.

To evaluate the potential of candidates applying for roles within the financial services industry, GSA scores from a sample of over 36,000 candidates were analyzed and compared to general population norms.

Skills for Successful Financial Services Employees and their Strengths and Skill Gaps

This table outlines the key GSA scales that strategically align with the skills needed to perform successfully in the financial services industry, as well as which skills financial services candidates demonstrated strengths or skill gaps.
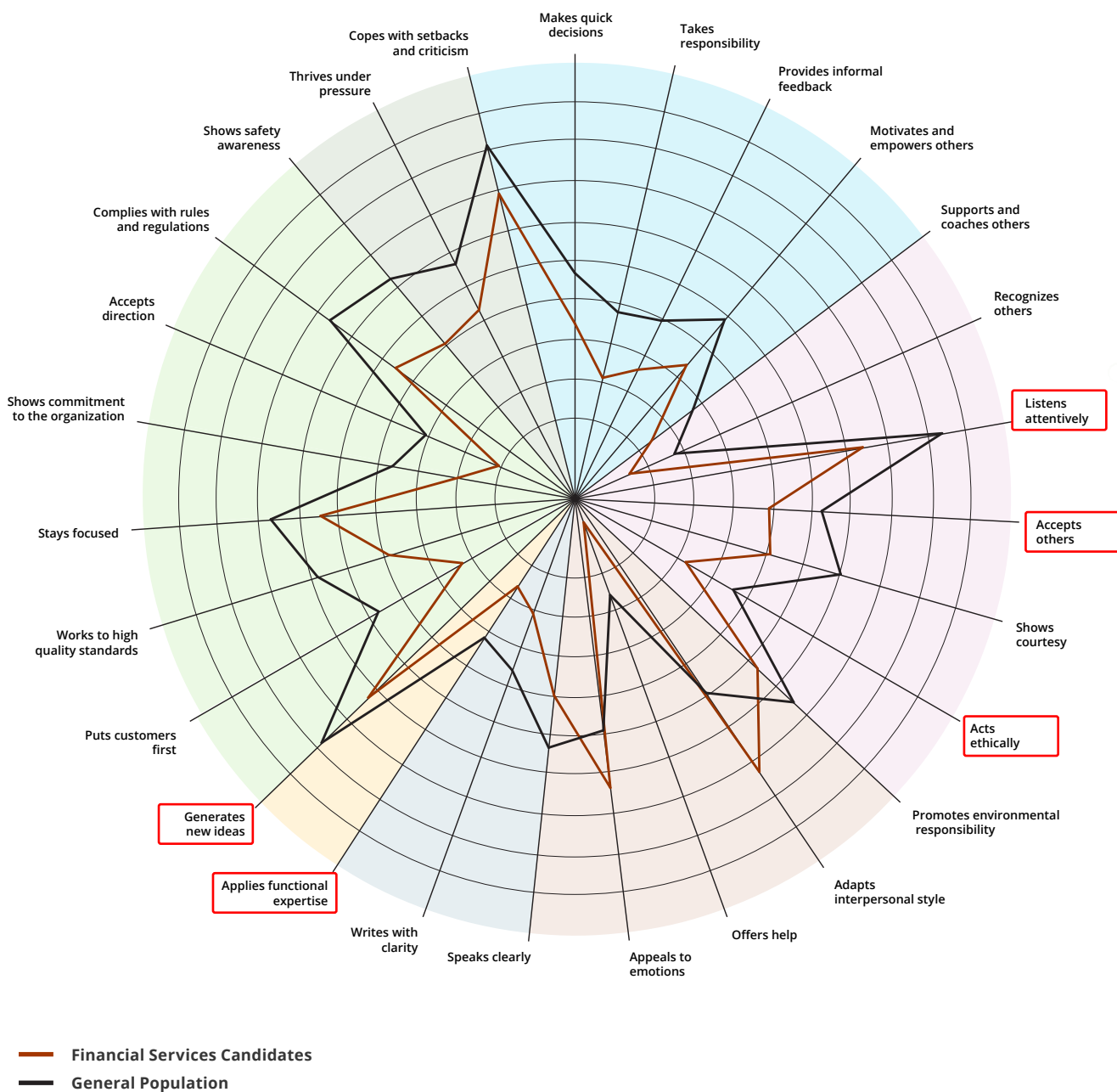
Skill	Strength or Skill Gap
Collaboration	
Understands others	No meaningful difference
Listens attentively	**Skill gap**
Accepts others	**Skill gap**
Demonstrates empathy	No meaningful difference
Ethics and Values	
Acts ethically	**Skill gap**
Applying Expertise and Technology	
Applies functional expertise	**Skill gap**
Operates job related technology	No meaningful difference
Builds, designs, or creates new tools or systems	No meaningful difference
Critical Thinking	
Analyzes information	No meaningful difference
Critically evaluates	No meaningful difference
Creativity and Innovation	
Generates new ideas	**Skill gap**
Embraces new ideas	No meaningful difference
Strategic Thinking	
Drives improvement	No meaningful difference
Adaptability	
Adapts to change	No meaningful difference
Initiative	
Focuses on self-development	No meaningful difference

Here we see five skills areas identified as moderate skill gaps compared to the general population. There were no skills where financial services candidates scored better than the general population. This could indicate a need for additional support allowing candidates to develop these important skills, or the organization may potentially consider recruiting from non-traditional resources to find people who do have these valuable skills already.

Skills Comparison of Financial Services Candidates Against the General Population

The spider graph below illustrates all the GSA scales where there was meaningful score differences between candidates applying for roles in the financial services industry compared to GSA scores in the general population. Skills highlighted in red indicates this is a skill gap when compared to performance of the general population.

Comparing GSA Scores of Financial Services Candidates to the General Population

Legend:
- **Financial Services Candidates**
- **General Population**

Color Key for the Great Eight Factors

Leading and Deciding	Supporting and Cooperating	Interacting and Presenting	Analyzing and Interpreting	Creating and Conceptualizing	Organizing and Executing	Adapting and Coping	Enterprising and Performing*

*There were no meaningful score differences within this factor for financial services industry candidates.

Healthcare Industry

Achieving success in the healthcare industry depends on a blend of clinical expertise, leadership, strategic thinking, and adherence to ethical and safety standards. Professionals should demonstrate advanced capabilities in technical and functional expertise, with strong skills in communication and collaboration. These qualities ensure that patient care and related processes are delivered with efficiency, compassion, and precision, while also fostering a collaborative environment amongst healthcare professionals.

The ability to analyze and critically evaluate information is essential for making informed decisions and solving complex problems. Healthcare professionals must thoroughly evaluate data, identify patterns, and weigh potential outcomes to guarantee that solutions are evidence-based and tailored to evolving challenges.

Furthermore, initiative and dependability are qualities that are indispensable in healthcare, as they enable professionals to drive continuous improvement and maintain consistent performance. Since healthcare is patient-care oriented, professionals must prioritize ongoing learning and development to adhere to high quality industry standards and adapt to dynamic circumstances.

Lastly, healthcare professionals must ensure strict compliance with rules, laws, and regulations. Adhering to these guidelines is vital not only for patient safety but also for the integrity of the healthcare organization. Maintaining best practices and upholding ethical safeguards and values helps mitigate safety and commercial risks, while placing patient welfare at the forefront. This holistic skill set enables healthcare professionals to contribute to the ongoing success and advancement of the healthcare industry.

To evaluate the potential of candidates applying for roles within the healthcare industry, GSA scores from a sample of over 1,400 candidates were analyzed and compared to general population norms.

Skills for Successful Healthcare Employees and their Strengths and Skill Gaps

This table outlines the key GSA scales that strategically align with the skills needed to perform successfully in the healthcare industry, as well as which skills healthcare industry candidates demonstrated strengths or skill gaps.

| Skill	Strength or Skill Gap
Leadership	
Monitors performance	No meaningful difference
Collaboration	
Fosters team cohesion	No meaningful difference
Consults others	No meaningful difference
Ethics and Values	
Acts ethically	No meaningful difference
Applying Expertise and Technology	
Applies functional expertise	No meaningful difference
Critical Thinking	
Analyzes information	**Strength**
Critically evaluates	**Strength**
Learning	
Gathers information	No meaningful difference
Strategic Thinking	
Considers strategic vision	No meaningful difference
Drives improvement	No meaningful difference
Delivering Results	
Works to high quality standards	No meaningful difference
Dependability	
Complies with rules and regulations	**Skill gap**
Shows safety awareness	No meaningful difference
Initiative	
Focuses on self-development	No meaningful difference

These results demonstrate that some strengths align with GSA scales identified as critical for healthcare employee success. For instance, "Analyzes information" and "Critically evaluates" were both highlighted as key skills for success and areas of strength among healthcare industry candidates, suggesting these are common areas where they excel.

Organizations hiring within the healthcare industry might consider targeted upskilling in areas where opportunities for improvement were observed. Specifically, additional support may be needed to help healthcare employees enhance their ability to comply with rules and regulations. This skill was identified as essential for success in the healthcare industry, yet candidates scored lower in these areas compared to the general population.

Skills Comparison of Healthcare Candidates Against the General Population

The spider graph below illustrates all the GSA scales where there was meaningful score differences between candidates applying for roles in the healthcare industry compared to GSA scores in the general population. Skills highlighted in red indicates this is a skill gap when compared to performance of the general population and skills highlighted in green represent skill strengths of candidates applying to this industry.

Comparing GSA Scores of Healthcare Candidates to the General Population
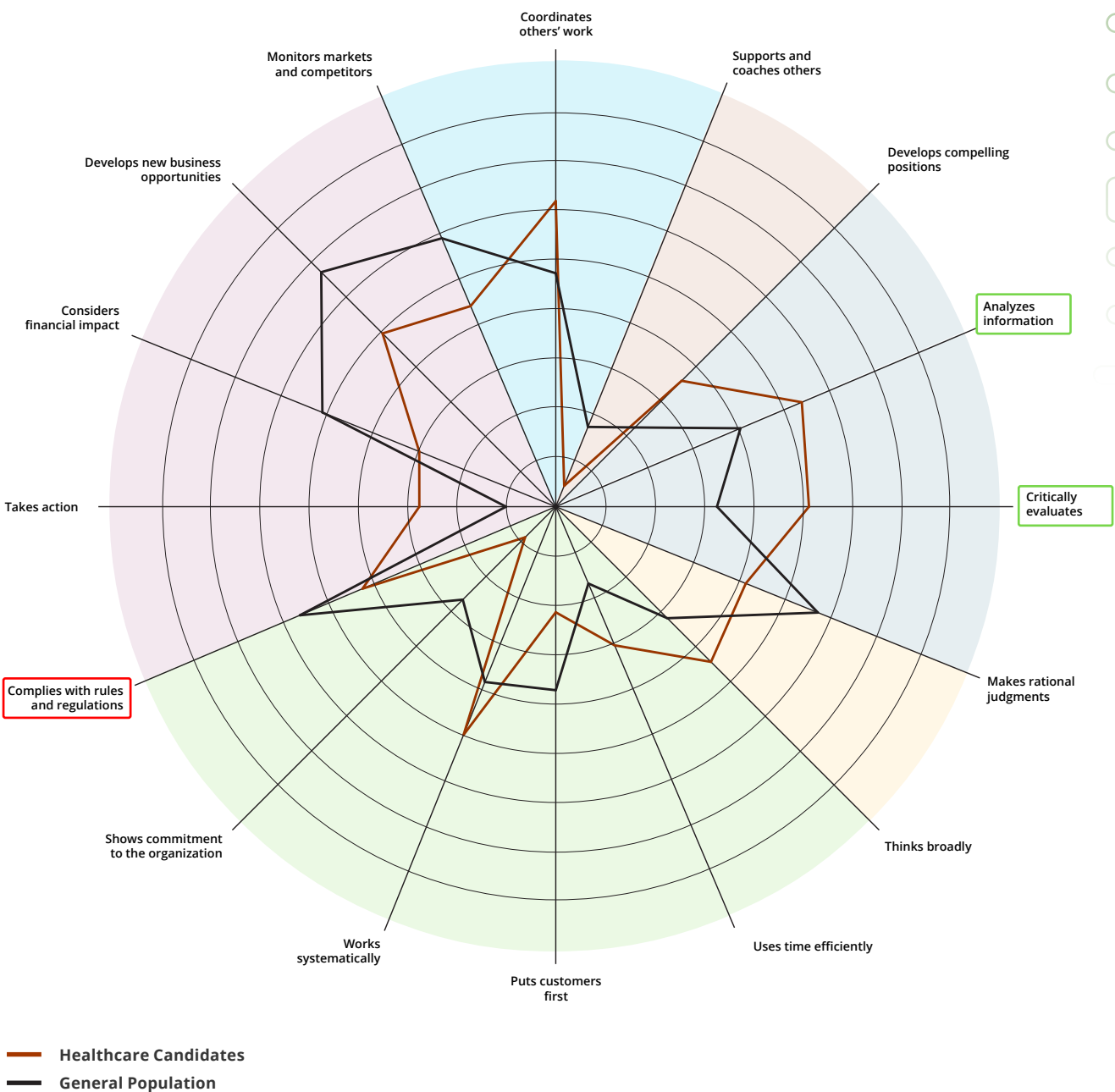
Legend:
— Healthcare Candidates
— General Population

Color Key for the Great Eight Factors

Leading and Deciding	Supporting and Cooperating*	Interacting and Presenting	Analyzing and Interpreting	Creating and Conceptualizing	Organizing and Executing	Adapting and Coping*	Enterprising and Performing

Conclusion

Common Skill Trends and Overlaps

Across these four industries, several skill trends emerged. While each industry has unique demands, an overlap was observed in skills such as "Analyzes information," "Applies functional expertise," and "Critically evaluates," highlighting the universal need for employees who can process information effectively, make informed decisions, and adapt and utilize their technical skills.

Another trend was an emphasis on compliance and adherence to rules. Whether it's maintaining safety standards in healthcare or following financial regulations, compliance emerged as essential for ensuring integrity across industries. Additionally, the need for strategic thinking was evident, with skills such as "Considers strategic vision" being vital for success in these industries.

Recommendations

Organizations need to understand the skills that their individuals, teams, and the company as a whole possess. This understanding can guide not only external hiring but also internal reskilling efforts, ensuring that existing employees are considered for new opportunities before looking externally.

Once organizations understand their talent, they can form development plans to close skill gaps, targeting specific populations that need additional support. For example, IT professionals could benefit from additional leadership and collaboration training, while financial services candidates might improve with further compliance training. To maximize investments in training programs, emphasize foundational skills that will help candidates become more adaptable and effective, regardless of their specific role. Employees want to learn and grow professionally, so framing training as opportunities to develop will resonate with them, particularly if the organizations has a culture that empowers its people to take control of their own learning and careers.

Additionally, organizations can foster cross-industry learning through initiatives like industry workshops or collaborative projects that bring together professionals from different fields to share insights. Understanding the skill requirements and strengths of professionals across industries can also inform talent mobility decisions, allowing organizations to better allocate resources, leverage untapped talent pools, and create structured career pathways to help employees transition into new roles. This approach is especially valuable for filling roles in areas where suitable candidates are typically hard to find, ensuring that valuable skills are fully utilized across sectors.

Lastly, digital transformation is permeating every industry, so enhancing digital competency should be a priority. Organizations could see substantial benefits through improving digital literacy and technical skills in their workforce, helping them adapt to new technologies and add operational efficiency. Employers should support ongoing professional development through training and learning resources to help employees remain competitive. In conclusion, while each industry has unique demands, there are significant overlaps in essential skills that organizations can leverage to build a more resilient workforce.

By focusing on both universal competencies and industry-specific development areas, companies can better prepare their employees for the future of work.

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