

The Elite MBA CV

Executive Impact

Peter Fennah



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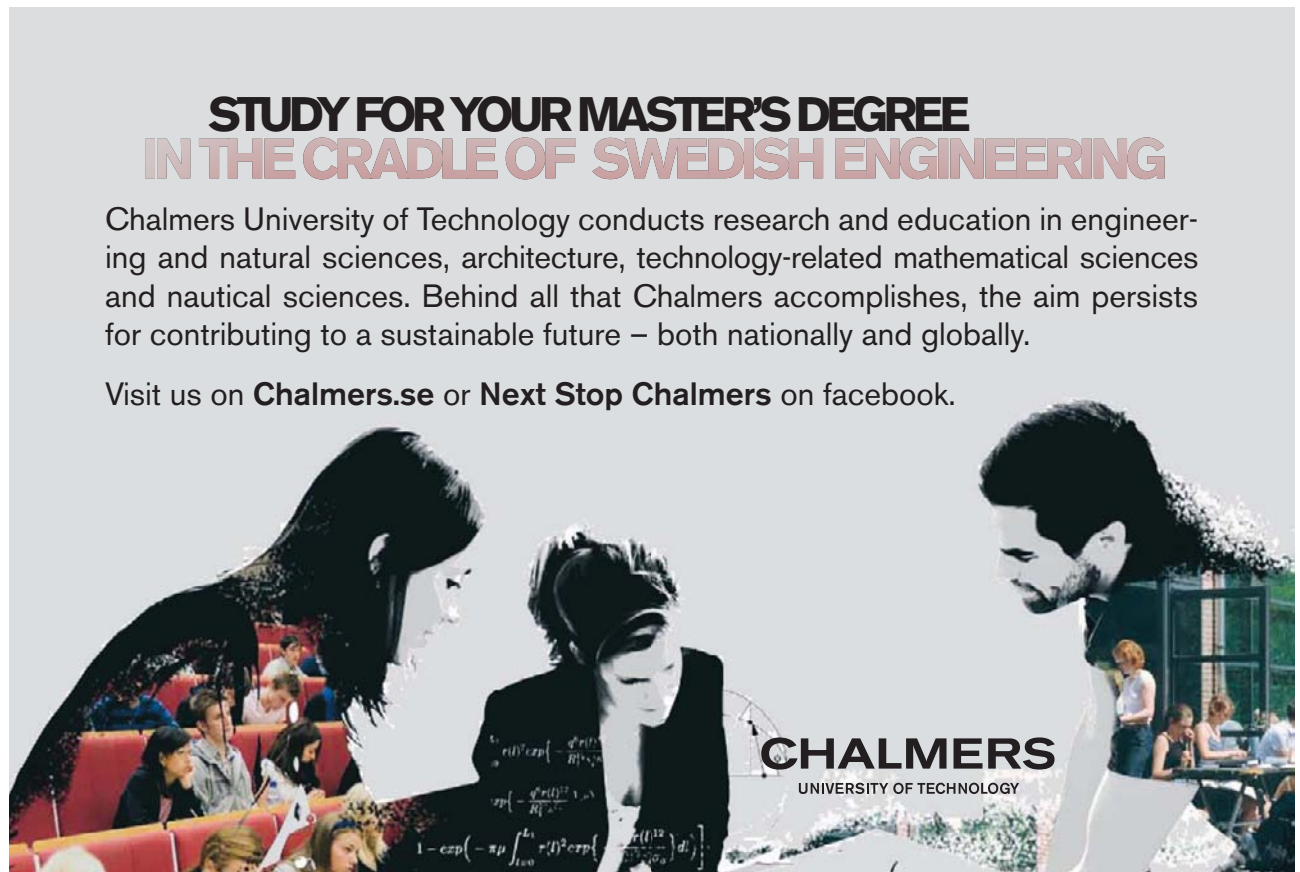


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The advertisement features a collage of images: students in a lecture hall, a woman looking at a laptop, and a man working on a laptop. Overlaid on the images are several mathematical formulas, including:

$$\frac{L_1}{\sigma} r(t)^2 \exp\left[-\frac{q^2 r(t)^2}{4t^{1+\frac{1}{\sigma}}}\right]$$

$$\exp\left[-\frac{q^2 r(t)^2}{4t^{1+\frac{1}{\sigma}}}\right] \cdot \frac{1}{\sigma}$$

$$1 - \exp\left(-\pi \mu \int_{t=0}^{L_1} r(t)^2 \exp\left[-\frac{q^2 r(t)^2}{4t^{1+\frac{1}{\sigma}}}\right] dt\right)$$

$$\frac{r(t)^{12}}{12^{12} \sigma^2}$$

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Preface

"Who ever tells the best story wins." Annette Simmons

"Brands are built around stories. And stories of identity – who we are, where we've come from – are the most effective stories of all.
Bill Dauphinais, PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP

About the book

Everyone I spoke to who had written a book told me that many years had gone by for it to finally emerge. This book is no different though perhaps 12 years is a little long.

For the last 15 years, I have worked with thousands of international MBA students, alumni and executives helping them to strategically manage their careers. This is a specialist area that has received a lot of confused, though well-intentioned, contributions.

Career management, of which CV writing is but one part, is not formally taught at school, college or university. However, it is critical if you are ambitious and seeking to advance through recruitment formal and informal hurdles. Demonstrating your value in a fierce market, where competition is high and sophisticated talent assessment systems operate, takes an integrated job search strategy. Far too frequently MBAs adopt a 'good enough' approach to their applications. This only changes when they face consistent feedback that, though eligible, they were not deemed suitable. Overcoming this flawed thinking inspired this book.

About the author

Career background: I first worked as an occupational psychologist in the public sector before working as a management consultant and coach with FTSE 100 companies engaged in organisational change. I became Director of Careers at a top business school before the age of 30, transformed the delivery model achieving the highest and fastest MBA employment rate of any top one-year MBA programme, reaching 7th in the world for MBA placement success (FT) and assisting in creating the N° 1 EMBA for 'aims achieved' (Economist). In leaving a legacy of integrated personal, career and leadership development, commonly cited as a best practice benchmark, I continue to work with global business schools, companies and individuals as founding Director of Career Synergy Ltd, a consultancy providing career and leadership transition training and executive coaching services.

Professional background: Chartered and Registered Occupational Psychologist holding two Masters in Psychology. Accredited executive coach with the Association of Executive Coaches & Supervisors (APECS). Former Co Chairman and Fellow of the Association of Career Professionals International UK; Founding Board Member and Legacy Fellow of the Career Development Institute; Founding Member of the Association of Business Psychologists; Associate Fellow of the British Psychological Society; Founding Member of the Special Group in Coaching Psychology (SGCP) and former Co-Chair of the Cambridge SGCP.

www.careersynergy.com



1 Aims of the e-book

“Doesn't matter how good your bullets are if you don't aim carefully.”

This e-book fundamentally challenges flawed thinking about how you project executive impact through the CV and cover letter. It will focus your efforts to create a tailored CV for each role, differentiating you as an outstanding candidate. In addition, advice is offered, such as when not to use a CV and how to write a painkiller cover letter.

If you are seeking to break the cycle of being perceived as a bit average or eligible for the role but not suitable then this e-book offers you a stand out strategy to gain executive attention – in a positive way!

Three specific offerings in this e-book are:

1. To redefine your thinking on how to position yourself
2. Strategic focus to reward your efforts
3. Executive advice to tell your differentiated story with impact

1.1 Key questions asked

You will have a range of questions about CV's and cover letters. Particular examples that often weigh heavily on the minds of MBAs are grouped below and are addressed within this e-book and online support link [here](#):

Why are CVs and cover letters important?

- Is the CV relevant when people can check out my social media footprint? Blogs don't lie.
- Should I make use of CV writing services?
- How do you write a CV if you lead a portfolio career?
- I'm too old for CVs. When should I send an impact letter instead of a CV?
- When to use a short bio or my LinkedIn profile rather than a CV?

How to breakthrough glass ceilings?

- How do you position your CV to outperform the internal or external competitors?
- How do you know which jobs are too big a jump?
- How do you write a CV if you are changing industry, function and country?
- I have never done the job that I am applying for so how can I sell myself into the role?

What changes and what stays the same now I have an MBA?

- What should I put in a Finance/Management Consultancy/e-commerce/MBA leadership programme CV?
- What changes when applying for a senior leadership role?
- Are there any changes when writing a cover letter to a recruitment consultant?
- Recruitment consultants ask me to re-write my CV into their format – should I?

What do you need to address when you change culture & levels of responsibility?

- What cultural differences are there between CVs?
- What are the best practice approaches to writing a cover letter?
- What advice do MBA alumni offer for CV writing?
- What should I include in a CEO CV?

2 Introduction: When good isn't good enough

"Sometimes doing your best is not good enough. Sometimes you must do what is required."
Winston Churchill

There are hundreds of CV books on the market that will help you to generate a good CV. But what do you do when good isn't good enough?

So you have a CV, perhaps copied from a friend, but it isn't working for you. You have followed conventional wisdom and matched all the skills asked for in the job description but for some reason you just aren't getting the call for interview. Frustration and a touch of anxiety at the lack of progress might be seeping in, particularly when you have so much to offer but no one seems to be listening. In looking at your work, you know something is missing but no one is able to define it for you in a structured way, people may make suggestions but they feel superficial. You want a reliable strategy and formulae that can be reproduced across the different jobs that you are applying for which helps you stand apart from your competitors.

This e-book focuses on that 'missing something' to help you create a recipe which hits the spot and allows you to differentiate yourself from your competitors. Interested in this magic bullet? Could it be a strange skill that will transform your CV? Is it a new layout that uses crisp bullet points to highlight special skills? In short, will it be a two-hour quick fix to transform your current CV and marketing approach? You probably already know the answer... it will be more involved than that but, with some focused reading of this e-book, you could reasonably expect that:

- In less than 15 minutes, you will understand why your CV hasn't been successful
- In 30 minutes, you will understand the gap between what you are marketing and what the employer really wants
- In 60 minutes, you will have had enough of your assumptions challenged to result in the initial formation of a new mindset and self-marketing strategy
- In 90 minutes, you will have redrafted your key CV achievements to show the beneficial value you hold

What will take a little longer is refining your CV and cover letter to a fully customized approach. You know that to write in a concise and powerful way you have to go through many practice versions. You will also need to spend some time quantifying the impact of your achievements. And, you need to speak with people to gain insight, e.g. to identify the difference between your perceptions of the role and those held by job incumbents. This will help position both your cover letter as well as your whole recruitment approach and is not to be ignored, especially if you are making multiple transitions, e.g. changing function, sector, responsibility level and country. Being curious about the new role and speaking to potential colleagues or future line managers can be fun. If you are hungry enough for a change in your circumstances then the best route is to pick up the phone. If you are shy or want to deliver a polished impact do some preparation and practice first.

Remember, sustainable high rewards come to those who plan and invest. Take the time to experiment with the different configurations of what you have to offer and how these meet the needs of your ideal employers. Producing quality-marketing documents (CV & cover letter) truly tailored for each role requires strategic insight and attention to detail (checking for errors and spelling mistakes, etc.). If you only have six hours to apply to McKinsey before the deadline closes you might be better off waiting for the next opportunity rather than being blacklisted for 12+ months because your initial submission was of a low quality. When applying to prestigious firms the strategy of 'it's a numbers game', i.e. if you send enough CVs one will get you in, does not apply. Quality of offer, fit, who you know and a compelling story are required.

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2.1 Accelerated Learning:

As MBAs or alumni you are all up against tight deadlines. Seeking quick fix solutions makes sense. Like 99% of MBAs you will probably go through at least 4-6 versions of your CV before you grasp how to fully leverage your marketing approach. (The other 1% come from backgrounds where they have learnt the art of writing with precision and power for different audiences.) The iterative approach of, following the advice contained here, making changes and receiving feedback before repeating the loop again, is the fastest way to learn. Speaking with informed people to gain feedback on how your marketing approach may be received is a transformative experience; it also greatly helps you build confidence! (Helpful online templates are also provided [here](#) as a quick start aid.)

The compelling urgency to have an outstanding CV in order to remove uncertainty and gain a well-paid job can drive us to behave very strangely at times. Managing this stress and living in a state of ambiguity is the hardest component of the recruitment process, particularly when you typically don't get feedback on your applications. If you knew you could start a job in six months time you would really enjoy the time you have between now and then. Because it is not certain, you may be locking yourself away from other people and distracting yourself from the task at hand as a way of trying to cope with the anxiety of it all.

A useful analogy is seeking to accelerate your car to cover a 1,500 mile journey. Do not expect to drive on just one road to get to your destination without making deviations, braking or stopping for fuel and directions. You have to slow down, reflect, gather data, interpret to achieve insight and reconfigure your story in order to arrive at your destination. Any other activity is a dangerous distraction. This doesn't mean it will take you months to learn, though remember your competitors will include previous MBA alumni with a year plus head start as well as internal candidates, so 'good' just isn't good enough when writing your CV. Still wanting a magic bullet solution? What was the last skill in your life you mastered within 24 hours? Which MBA assignment did you complete in a weekend that got you a distinction and the top mark in the class on the first go?

Ok, so now you have begun to swallow the reality pill, here is some good news. The fastest way to learn to write an outstanding CV and cover letter is first by understanding the rules of the game. Just like Chess you have a lot of pieces on the board (your experience and achievements) but it is important that you deploy them with a smart strategy. For this reason this e-book takes the time to help you understand how to think about the recruitment game and the way to position yourself to greatest effect. We will then cover how to articulate your prioritized messages drawing upon relevant past experiences in the achievement section of the e-book leaving the delicate writing of your profile and cover letter till last.

As you will appreciate finding an articulate CV writing buddy will also help you as you complete your applications. Gaining the highest quality feedback accelerates your ability to find the best configuration of your experience for the job you are applying to. Expecting to identify the best configuration first time is unlikely. The more insights you have into the performance of the role within your desired sector you are interested in the easier the task will become.

The key milestones in writing your application are:

1. Establishing a winning mindset (see exercise 1) and understanding of the rules of the game
2. Re-writing your achievements (this often takes 2–4 attempts)
3. Positioning your winning story in your profile and cover letter
(this often takes 3–5 attempts)

2.2 Online CV templates:

To make life just a bit easier you can find word document templates for: management consultancy; finance; energy; manufacturing; IT, etc. at www.careersynergy.com
Go there now and download a document that most closely fits your needs.

Feel free to change the format based on the advice in this e-book as well as your target audience. The Golden Rule is adapt to meet the employer's needs whilst leveraging your own relevant strengths. Getting the right balance here (the employer's needs will always be dominant) will create variation from the base templates.

2.3 The confidence paradox & how to build it

When facing a substantial change we often lack our usual levels of confidence. It is natural to be uncertain of what is required of you in a new role. Plus working with new people who hold as yet undefined expectations can be unsettling. Yet the paradox is, you need robust confidence when seeking to sell yourself. By speaking with people doing the role in another organization you can close the gap on your fears through learning more about the context that they operate in. By finding commonalities with your prior experience and developing coping strategies to deal with big issues you will assert control over the ambiguous future. Ideally, you can find people who come from a similar background and have already made the transition that you are interested in. Find out how they reconfigured their past experience to sell it into the new sector/function – it could save you a lot of personal experimentation.

“Success is not final, failure is not fatal: it is the courage to continue that counts.”

Winston Churchill

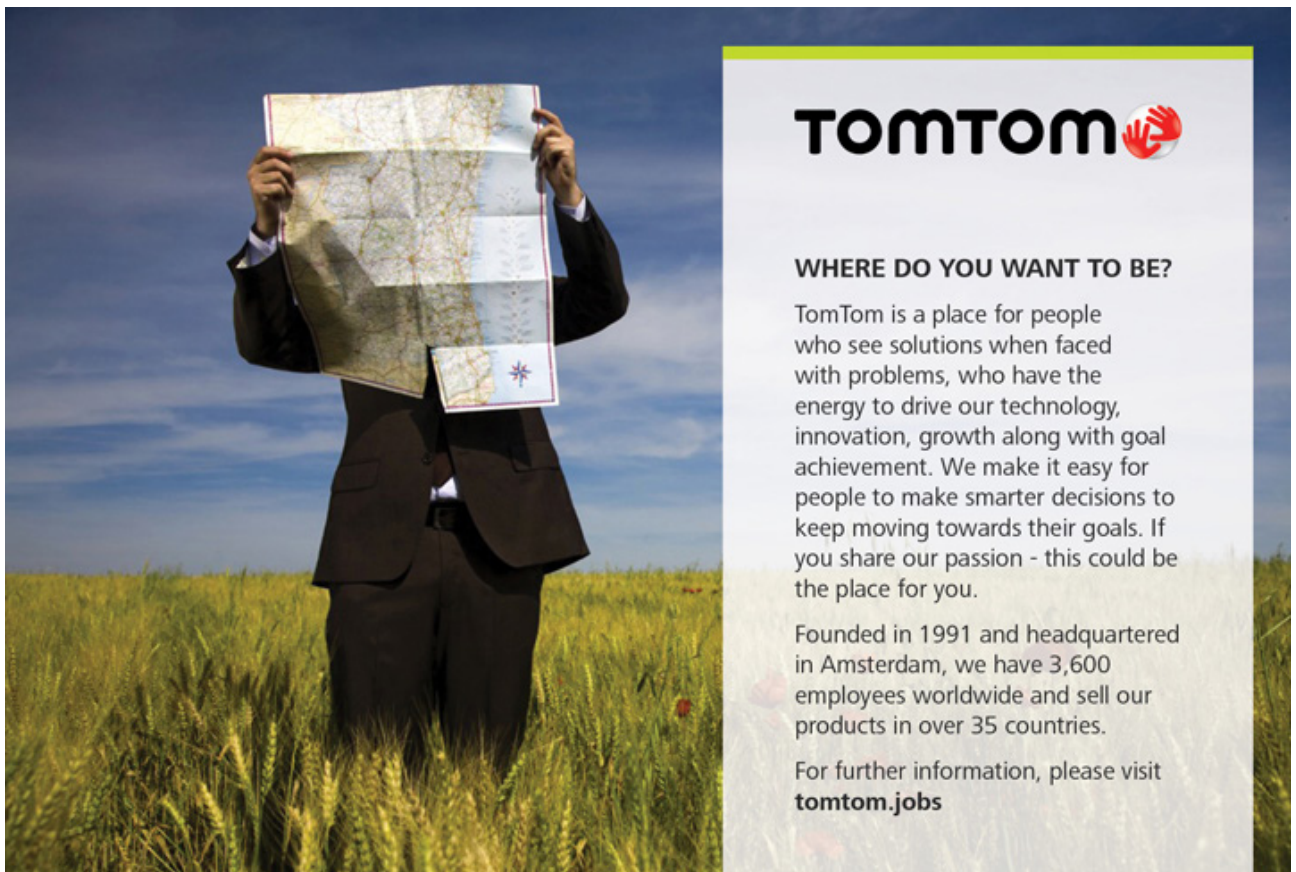
Confidence, like most bank robberies, is an inside job. Active and frequent self-reminders of what you have to offer and how these create benefits to your employer/customers is healthy. Writing the CV is an explicit form of this process; if you learn your CV achievements then, like an actor, you can deliver your lines with gusto and this will massively improve your self-confidence. Yet, even actors get anxious so managing the negative self-talk that arises is vital if you are to take a step forward into a less familiar future. Whether you are making an impact via your cover letter and CV or in a meeting, keep your focus on this fundamental truth.

Check the key concerns of the other party and then define how you will meet or ideally exceed these.

In summary, to fundamentally realign your approach to writing a managerial or professional CV you need to go beyond the strategy of CV skill matching. Whilst this process is the backbone of most CV books it is a flawed approach. After all, the MBA CV needs to do more than meet the expected needs of employers as defined in the job description. Every applicant will be measuring his or her submission against this target. So, if you raise your aim you will lift yourself instantly away from your competitors and you will improve your self-confidence at the same time.

“Shoot for the moon. Even if you miss, you’ll land among the stars.”

Norman Peale

An advertisement for TomTom. On the left, a person in a dark business suit stands in a field of tall yellow grass under a blue sky, holding up a large, unfolded map. On the right, a white rectangular box contains the TomTom logo (the word 'TomTom' in black with a red hand icon) and the heading 'WHERE DO YOU WANT TO BE?'. Below this, a paragraph describes TomTom as a place for people who see solutions when faced with problems, who have the energy to drive technology, innovation, and growth along with goal achievement. It states that TomTom makes it easy for people to make smarter decisions to keep moving towards their goals. A second paragraph mentions that TomTom was founded in 1991, is headquartered in Amsterdam, has 3,600 employees worldwide, and sells its products in over 35 countries. At the bottom of the box, it says 'For further information, please visit tomtom.jobs'.

3 Breaking CV myths

"Can someone please tell me what does a good CV look like?
And, why it doesn't always work?"

The CV, cover letter and resignation note are amongst the most important financial documents of your career. When they work, so do you. They are variations of your best-reflected self in the specific context of the employer's vacancy. They are not a self-focused autobiography.

There are many CV myths that can disrupt your ability to present yourself effectively. Have a look at the list below and consider which ones have influenced your writing style to date.

1. **Apply on impulse.** Most busy people will stop when something of interest grabs their attention. With limited time they will then 'have a go' at the opportunity. This usually reflects the methodology that they have used before or that is deemed accepted good practice. This could look like:

- Rely heavily upon your academic qualifications to differentiate you
- See opportunities as a law of numbers, apply to enough and something will come off
- Avoid difficult areas, such as calling up the line manager (where the number is listed or able to be researched) for fear of not knowing what to say
- Wait till the employer contacts you before researching the opportunity further

There is nothing wrong with taking advantage of opportunities and using a 'have a go' strategy. There is a problem if this is your only approach. In this situation you are very likely to send out hundreds of CV applications for little result. If you do get a call to interview, your depth of research may follow the same 'have a go' approach resulting in falling at the first rigorous interview. Few positions of quality will be secured by this approach as deep research and tailoring is expected to meet the expectations of highly competitive positions.

2. **Generic CV & tailored letter.** A misconception, often originating from undergraduate experiences, is that you get a job with one generic CV and a tailored cover letter. As soon as you gain more experience than just your academic qualifications, you need to remodel your CV offering to meet the needs of the employer. This requires a tailored approach throughout. Employers, much like people on Valentine's Day, do not like generic love letters.

3. **Size matters.** In the UK, a one page tailored cover letter and a two page tailored CV are expected as standard when applying for an MBA job. For very high volume applications, such as management consultancy, finance, MBA leadership programs, or if you have limited work experience, you need to use a one page CV. There are exceptions to this, so if you are seeking senior/executive or academic positions 3+ pages are appropriate. Overall, 80% of the CV needs to demonstrate how your relevant strengths address the key needs of the company and position. Ensure you have the right balance
4. **The power of Human Resources (HR).** To improve hiring decisions and to ensure meritocracy, the HR process seeks clear evidence from cover letters, application forms and CVs before they progress you to the interview stage. Although personal connections may get your CV read by the decision maker, without writing a high quality submission you may not move any further through the HR process. Cross-culturally, many international students under appreciate the power of the HR process in large organizations. HR seeks to use scientific principles to refine the recruitment of the 'right' people for the company. It is the border guard and will ensure you have the correct documents before being granted access to the organization. You need to understand the serious rules of the recruitment game if you seek to enter prestigious organizations. If you are unable to meet approximately 70% of the job description's competencies then your application will likely be rejected for highly competitive roles. IT software searches your CV for key words taken from the job description so they need to be present. Note: A PDF version of your CV stops the search software and your CV will be rejected.
5. **Learning feedback.** Do not expect to receive any feedback on why your CV application was declined; you will need to arrange your own support to accelerate your learning of how to improve your applications. Remember HR is a cost centre to the business. Even global companies offering a dedicated MBA leadership programme may only have one HR person plus an admin support staff member to process thousands of applications each year. Their performance is not measured upon the quality of feedback that they provide to unsuccessful candidates, many of whom are rejected by IT systems without ever coming to the attention of HR.
6. **Speedy recruitment?** As Director of the Career Development Service at Cranfield School of Management, I asked MBAs how long it took them to gain a job offer from the time that they seriously started to search for a role. The average time was 4.8 months reflecting their common multiple transitions. Speed of hiring is relative. High paying roles are less frequent and typically take longer to secure, e.g. a job earning £100k will take approximately 10 months. From a processing perspective, employers will usually take three months from the time of advertising a role to making a job offer to the successful candidate in the UK. This contrasts with other high-growth economies, such as India, where closing a job within two weeks is commonplace.

7. **Skills and qualifications are all that matter...** The CV gets you to the interview and it is there that you differentiate yourself. It is at this time that you do your company research. After all, if you are applying to 50 companies you don't have the time to do everything. This line of thinking, if it was ever true, might describe recruitment 20 years ago when there were far fewer MBAs but the world has moved on.

If the transactional elements of recruitment were all that matters you would just put your skills, qualifications and suitable experience into a spreadsheet. Employers are curious about how you blend your background to create a high impact and compelling story that meets their wishes. You do need to cite the eligibility criteria for the role but you need to go beyond this if you wish to get the call to interview.

8. **There will be time to research later.** Employers are also conducting first round telephone or Skype interviews in shorter time periods, e.g. within 48 hours of the application deadline in order to find out how prepared you are. They know about practice effects and wish to evaluate how ready you are to work for them. This requires you to run your research, applications and interview practice in parallel if you wish to convert early opportunities.
9. **Vague objective.** 'Seeking a challenging position in (insert industry)...' This wastes space as it fails to tell us anything helpful about you. All roles will also be challenging in some way to someone. What the employer wants to know is what makes you the best person they should see tomorrow morning for an interview. They are interested in people who want to address their specific needs; most aspirations are either too vague to be relevant or overly selfish.
10. **'We regret to inform you...'** Ironically companies struggle to find candidates that stand out. Everyone has good academics nowadays and MBAs typically say the same thing, 'good analytical skills', 'results orientated', 'hard working', etc. The reasons for declining your CV can vary from spelling mistakes, a lack of aligned values to just being plain boring. Employers want to see your best work; their thinking is that if there are errors on just 2–3 pieces of paper what will your company report be like? Your ability to differentiate yourself and overcome the negative emotions arising from setbacks are inevitable aspects of your recruitment journey. Build your support group around you now to help you in tough times.

4 Who to trust? Perceptions of CV advice

"If you're not confused, you're not paying attention." Tom Peters

Everyone has an opinion on CV's so who do you trust, particularly when the advice offered often appears to contradict what you may have learnt as good practice making writing a CV more of an Art form than a Science.

The shift in advice reflects the variability of expectations across different audiences (such as HR, line and senior management), industries, countries, levels of responsibility as well as variations in your own breadth and depth of experience.

When faced with the limited space to capture this degree of complexity, applicants are often confused how to proceed. It is tempting to do one of three things:

1. Just rely on what worked for you in the past hoping the rules of the game remain the same
2. Employ a company to write a CV for you
3. Place total trust in someone else (or in a book) to guide you through what to think and do

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What if you could build your future and create the future?

One generation's transformation is the next's status quo. In the near future, people may soon think it's strange that devices ever had to be "plugged in." To obtain that status, there needs to be "The Shift".



Here are the health warnings. Firstly, what worked in the past for you may not fit the expectations of your new target. This is particularly true when you move from specialist roles into management and again when you seek a move into the executive suite.

Secondly, companies are recommended to avoid outsourcing anything that is critical to their brand or core performance. Your CV is no different and, whilst CV writers do have their place, it really is a skill and the mental outlook that you need to master in order to progress your career.

Thirdly, advice needs to be tailored to your exact needs. Most people and indeed CV books offer advice which requires your interpretation. Understanding your own needs is greatly aided by completing exercise 1. but adaptation will continue as you deepen your knowledge of the role, company and challenges of performing in the job. The models presented in this e-book offer you ways to be agile.

4.1 Questions to ask mentors & advisors

To help you assess the relevance of advice from mentors or advisors in meeting your own needs, here are a range of questions designed to improve your understanding of the formal and informal rules of the recruitment game.

How can you discriminate the difference between your mentor's experience and the demands of *your* situation?

Ask them:

1. How did you learn to tell your story about how to fit the expectations of the role?
2. What combination of strengths did you leverage that met the key needs of the job?
3. Why was this particular combination most attractive to the employer?
4. What strategic guidance or feedback did you receive to refine your initial approach?
5. What differentiated you from your competitors to be called to final interview?
6. What key concerns did the employer have that you think made the critical difference for you to be hired compared to your competition?
7. Who else played a role in helping you get the position?

Compare these answers with your own supporters, combination of strengths, role and situational awareness. You can also consider how you would personally answer these questions regarding how you gained your last job.

5 How to hunt

Job hunting: Typical or progressive?

We often have an old-fashioned notion of job-hunting where our thinking runs along the lines of a 100m race where a series of short sprints results in the most talented person winning the long-term prize. For example, firstly read (without doing any exercises) a book on how to get a job. Secondly, spot an advertised job that looks sufficiently interesting to have a go at. Write a great CV and cover letter. Thirdly, research the company's website, interview well and negotiate a good package. Fourthly, seek a promotion within 18 months.

Reality turns out to be... a bit more awkward. If anything, job hunting is closer to a marathon than a 100m sprint. You don't want to apply the wrong strategy if you wish to survive.



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In real life you will need to: research yourself; build agility in articulating your strengths; research prospective employers; conduct a needs analysis of the job role (see Exercise 1); understand how the role accurately delivers aligned business outcomes through networking with people doing the job in similar companies; speak to the line manager; apply with a customised CV and cover letter; wait and forget the application as you get on with your life; receive an e-mail asking for your availability within 24 hours to complete the online psychometric tests and participate in a screening interview; dig out your old application and any research (good filing helps here) attend an assessment centre, complete further interviews and receive a call from HR offering you a job; resist the temptation to say “yes” straight away in order to remove the anxiety created from a protracted job search; explore a date with which to meet the team and your future line manager; explore more about the challenges of the role and negotiate your salary, package and onboarding support.

5.1 Onboarding (your first 100 days in the job)

Your progression doesn't stop with gaining the job offer. You will need to: build your relationship and working partnership with your line manager and team. Survive getting lost in the detail to build supportive peer relationships and key advocates higher within the organization whilst consistently delivering visible strategic benefits to the business. Sidestep politically driven individuals, those that harbour grudges (those that lost the job to you, etc.) and those seeking to offload their work onto you. Free up your time to reflect, develop, optimize your efforts and position yourself with key stakeholders, often via sourcing special projects in addition to your day job.

Gain a number of credible champions to support your promotion whilst demonstrating in your day-to-day behaviour that you are a role model leader already operating at the next level. Assess how much poison has been left behind in the next job opportunity for your ability to swallow it and to survive. Prepare and pass the formal HR elements required for your promotion and quickly lookout, as others will seek to destabilize you at the first sign of your supporter's attention moving elsewhere so that they can keep looking good at your expense. Expect to receive no constructive feedback from peers or management as you progress (why would they want to make your life easier than theirs). Welcome to senior management! Start building your support team now to help you regularly conduct a needs analysis when engaged in job hunting and performing in role.

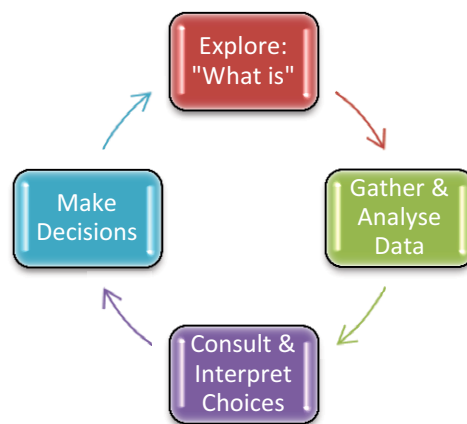


Figure 1: Needs analysis model

There is a widespread yet unfounded assumption that professionals and managers will obtain advice as and when they need it from whomever they need it from. This reliance upon the timely intervention of others inevitably results in the majority of individuals seeking support at a time of crisis. If you wish to break this reactive and passive approach to development, solicit feedback from trusted sources and regularly consult with personal advisors to continue to outperform competitors.

5.2 A predictable crisis

The shock for most MBAs is how much time it takes to research and write concisely their CV and cover letter. A common assumption is that you can leave writing your CV until the deadline of the employer approaches. For many, this reflects how they react to deadlines in their working life. Whilst leaving a project report to the last minute may result in favorable terms, e.g. an academic *pass* mark or a business fit for purpose requirement, this thinking will result in a rejection letter at best. More commonly silence. Good enough just isn't good enough.

Emotions are likely to be volatile during periods of high ambiguity, where decisions are perceived to have high consequences for future life. Recognising that it is normal to be anxious during the job search can allow you to share your feelings with others and by so doing find emotional support. Admitting vulnerabilities to trusted confidants doesn't make you a weak leader, ignoring them makes you a dishonest leader.

The frustration of articulating what you have to offer can turn creative individuals into boring candidates on paper. Equally humble and consultative leaders may become egocentric dictators. The strategic expert may come across as obsessed with detail. Those that normally follow a process diligently ignore the job description when writing their CV and wonder why junior HR professionals following procedure reject their submission. Unmanaged stress leads to strange behaviours.

Gaining a balance and authenticity in how you project yourself through the CV and cover letter takes strategic planning, self-insight and a strong focus on meeting the critical needs of the employer. It also takes many practice drafts along with constructive feedback. Working alone in isolation it will take you a *lot* longer to locate a meaningful job.

5.3 Career switching: multiple changes?

If you are seeking to change multiple elements such as country, sector, function and level of seniority, then you have a harder argument to appear credible for positions of responsibility. The more responsibility, the more pay, so if you are looking for that well paid job but are struggling to construct a compelling reason why the employer should hire you then you will need to adopt a very progressive job search.

Your route to success will be through speaking to people who are risk takers. Conservative individuals will be unlikely to risk their reputation with you. So, finding open individuals who value your diverse background and like you will be key to locating a new role. Equally important is being well informed. Again, your depth of insight can only occur through conducting research interviews with people in similar roles.

The typical job searcher spends far too long scanning the internet or advertised job market searching the perfect fit.



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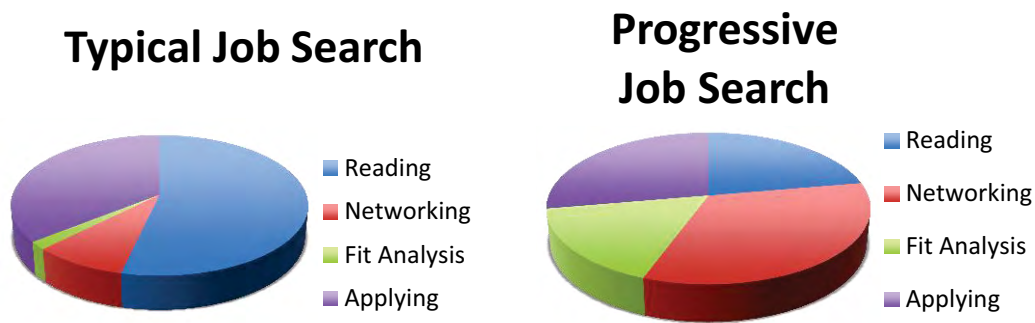


Figure 2: Job Search

Ready-made perfection is extremely rare, more commonly you will shape a good role into a dream job through conducting a fit analysis followed by a campaign of influence.

Elements of fit analysis may include:

- Determining value alignment
- Short and longer term likely company success, likely restructure, merger or acquisition by a more favourable company allowing you to be part of a grander organisation
- Opportunities to engage in stretch assignments and network to a higher level
- Resources for growth aligned to your talents and motivations
- Quality of management processes and role models
- Alumni number and power within the company to potentially support you

Whilst searching advertised jobs is part of your job campaign it is going to draw the most competition as others use the same tactics (unless you are looking at specific company websites that struggle to attract talent). This remains the typical passive approach to job-hunting in combination with using recruitment consultants.

5.4 Recruitment consultants


Recruitment consultants are paid by employers to generate a long list (approx. 10–15 candidates) from which the employer, and/or, recruitment consultant again may select via first round interviews five or less candidates to go through to the employer panel to be interviewed and assessed.


Recruitment consultants are most helpful if you are changing sector but keeping your job function. E.g. if your function is logistics within the pharmaceutical industry and you wish to change industry to food retail and perhaps at a more senior level then you will come across as a credible candidate. The potential benefits of good recruitment consultants are:

- They expose you to challenging questions and their response to your prepared pitch can be informative
- You'll gain some feedback on your state of readiness based upon the clarity of your search and what you have to offer
- In discussion, the weighting of employer criteria and expectations becomes clear as well as important sector/role trends
- If you are suitable they will put you forwards, along with other candidates they think will be attractive to the employer. NB Any of you may gain the role; they have loyalty to meeting the employer's needs not the desires of a specific individual.

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5.5 Become attractive to recruitment consultants by:

1. Brand alignment. Having a social media, e.g. LinkedIn presence that is consistent with the job opportunity that you are actively seeking. You can increase your visibility through posting intelligent comments on a relevant forum, writing for industry magazines or newspaper articles, re-tweeting insightful links, etc. All this activity shows you are an informed player in the market. If you have multiple job targets, select the common competencies and business benefits that you can offer an employer. Package these so that they make sense and promote these in your profile. This will help you to resonate with the needs of the employer, rather than appearing unfocused or indecisive.
2. Be referred by someone who is credible and known to the recruitment consultancy practice. Many of your colleagues or alumni will use recruitment consultants, ask them who they rate and gain an introduction.
3. Be ready. Recruitment consultants would like to put you in front of employers quickly. You will need to start work within three months so don't approach them for a job if you can't start for another 6–10 months. Your goal is to create a memory with the recruitment consultant that you are credible for them to invest time in you. Participating on an MBA course or having an MBA are not sufficient. If you can't answer the following questions with well reasoned answers then it may be too early to meet with them (though you may wish to put your contact details onto their database):
 - What are the five most interesting companies that you want to work for?
 - What key trends and business models are shaping these companies business decisions today?
 - What culture will you thrive in?

NB Be careful that your answers show case deeper thinking. If you have chosen five companies with totally different sets of values what is it that makes these companies appropriate for you to work there? The status of the company alone would be a superficial answer.

 - What challenges are you looking for?
 - How should I sell you in? Or more bluntly: Specifically, what do you offer that makes you the strongest candidate for me to put forward?
 - What salary are you expecting and how have you come to this figure?

5.6 Common errors

The seven common errors in using recruitment consultants are:

1. Thinking that they will give you informed and unbiased feedback or careers advice
2. Believing that they have more influence with the employer than the reality of their role
3. Expecting them to find your unique selling proposition
4. Hoping that your MBA will set you apart from other candidates
5. Expecting them to remember you and prioritize their search based upon the urgency with which you want a job (they may receive a 100 CVs a day from potential candidates)
6. Trusting that your potential is more important than an established track record
7. Lack of taking them seriously. Failure to prepare; listening; projecting confidence and providing a consistent story are all examples of how people often leave a poor first impression when meeting a recruitment consultant.

For many MBAs the expectation that recruitment consultants will put you forward as an unusual maverick (e.g. with no relevant country, industry, functional experience) and that the employer will see the truth about your potential is a naïve dream. In businesses that are critically assessed by short-term results there is very little time to realize potential in positions of responsibility. You have to demonstrate it through stretch assignments. In these situations, recruitment consultants will often highlight where you can earn the maximum salary (and their own commission) by returning you to familiar sectors/functions.

Recruitment consultancies have their place but will they continue to be so dominant in the future? If HR departments are given more authority to identify external talent, rather than sourcing internal staff, then we could see a shift in the role of recruitment consultancy. Visibility through social media offers HR departments, line managers and other staff greater ease in approaching potential new staff.

Many organizations offer a reward scheme to internal staff for identifying talent. You may wish to build your credibility with internal staff where such schemes exist; management consultancies are one such example, in order to be referred into the recruitment process with greater backing.

6 Market intelligence

"If you don't have a competitive advantage, don't compete." Jack Welch

"It is not the strongest of the species that survive nor the most intelligent, but the most responsive to change." Charles Darwin

Just take one moment to consider how you collect, sift, review and draw conclusions about the job and the environment within which it is located. Are you using a critical needs analysis method or exploring the market in a reactive or intuitive fashion?

The Market Intelligence System outlined below can be helpful when you're engaged in researching new fields of work. It helps you to develop an organized approach, the benefit of which is in giving you focus to your search. This will save you time and help you to form more intelligent interpretations of the data leading to more informed decision making.

When you are working sporadically over a period of time there are a lot of advantages to planning and regularly reviewing what you have learnt about those new sectors, functional roles, levels of responsibility, cultures, etc. that interest you. Elements of the model are explained below to assist you.

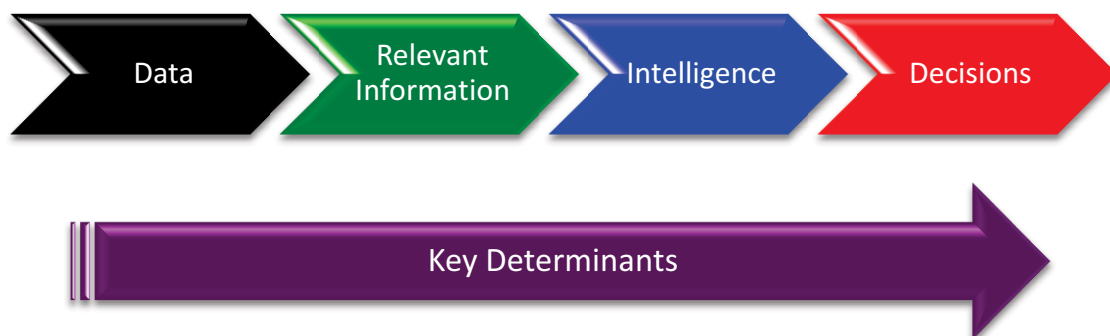


Figure 3: Market Intelligence System

1. **Data:** There are different forms of data addressing the tasks, people, systems, situational context and market forces. To answer the question: What data is most useful? put yourself into the shoes of the hiring panel and consider what data is rated as most important to them in the delivery of the role that you are exploring. As an example, this could be the financial key performance indicators of the role, customer satisfaction and a happy team climate.
2. **Relevant information:** Review the job description (see Table 1 below), explore blogs and professional groups (Linked In, etc.), customers who have experienced the product or service, and finally speak to the hiring manager.

3. **Intelligence:** Insight into what is most relevant is most easily found through speaking with those doing the job or indeed line managing the job incumbent. This will help you to prioritize the needs of the role allowing you to determine the degree of match with what you have to offer.
4. **Decisions:** A framework composed of criteria that you know to be accurate and important to you will help you evaluate your options. You can then consciously determine what your preferences are and what criteria you may be weighting more heavily than others. It is at this point you may well benefit from checking your assumptions by speaking with someone who can act as a sounding board as well as to challenge your thinking. In this way you are likely to make a high-quality decision rather than a snap judgment.
5. **Key determinants:** The greatest difficulty when operating in a complex, ambiguous and unfamiliar area is maintaining a sense of perspective. Frequent reflection and consideration of what is critical to performance in the role can guide your thinking, questions and decisions. Exploring key determinants with your advisors and network contacts will also save you time and heartache. It is not enough to know about a game, you must understand the rules by which others play the game in order to win.

What key determinants for the selection of the suitable candidate lie inside and outside of the formal job description?

6.1 Reading job descriptions

How do you read the job description to gain relevant information from it? Most people will read a job description asking themselves as they go if they tick the requirements laid out. This gives an overall impression of what is a good fit, a stretch or possible areas of panic where they have little to offer. Having done this they seek to match their CV to those areas that they can instantly address. Then the job is done and the CV and cover letter is sent off.

The risk of this approach is that you pitch yourself to the obvious but basic elements of the role. This is important but not sufficient. The next couple of chapters highlight ways that you can overcome this limiting strategy. As a precursor Table 1 below offers a range of questions and structure to help you identify relevant information about the job. Structuring the information in this way can allow you to be more intelligent in your application as well as your critical analysis of the market.

Table 1: Reading the job description

As you read the job description ask yourself the questions in column 1. Then consider the questions in column 2 before highlighting specific examples from your experience that would fit these needs.

1) Job description and research data	2) Suitability assumptions	3) My evidence
<p>Do you have the basic eligibility criteria, e.g.:</p> <p>Qualifications</p> <p>Amount of experience</p> <p>Know-how required to do the job well</p> <p>Knowing how people operate at this level</p>	<p>What will the recruiter be seeking from the <i>successful</i> candidate?</p> <p>Are there any unstated assumptions from the level of responsibility that are important? E.g. hiring & firing of staff experience for a middle manager may be assumed.</p> <p>What achievements will the interviewer be looking for from the <i>best fit</i> candidate?</p> <p>What type of achievement examples will they value most?</p>	<p>For each of the cells below consider your specific examples, e.g.</p> <p>The competencies & capabilities sought</p> <p>The demonstrated level of complexity</p> <p>The scale, impact, quality & quantity of results that match or exceed the needs of the job</p>
<p>Essential performance</p> <p>What are the core KPI's for the Job?</p> <p>What results matter most?</p> <p>What quality, quantity & speed of results are required?</p>	<p>How is performance in the role attributed to task & people based interactions?</p> <p>Where does the balance lie & why?</p>	
<p>Personality</p> <p>What characteristics will be positively sought for the successful candidate?</p> <p>What will be needed to sustain success in the role over time & further changes?</p>	<p>Emotional maturity</p> <p>Open minded & learning</p> <p>Agile</p> <p>Socially confident</p> <p>Resilient</p>	
<p>Further research</p> <p>What information is missing from the job description?</p> <p>What hidden information do you need to find out to enhance your application?</p>	<p>Is the company, and specifically the business unit, you are joining growing, stable or declining?</p> <p>Is it reliable or struggling to consistently deliver?</p>	

6.2 Competency categories

As you read the job description it can be helpful to understand the employer's different points of emphasis. Identify the weighting that the employer places upon the following competency areas:

1. **Individual competencies** – Your personal attributes: Flexibility, diligence, decisiveness, creativity, values, independence, risk taking, personal integrity, personal awareness, etc.
2. **Analytical competencies** – Innovation, analytical skills, numerical & intuitive problem solving, practical learning, strategy, detail consciousness, bigger picture, etc.
3. **Interpersonal competencies** – Communication, listening, rapport building, empathy, support, impact, persuasiveness, stakeholder management, teamwork, openness, etc.
4. **Motivational competencies** – Resilience, energy, motivation, achievement orientation, initiative, quality focus, social contribution, expertise, etc.
5. **Managerial & leadership competencies** – Leadership, empowerment, strategic planning, delegation, corporate sensitivity, project management, management control, learning agility, etc.

In reviewing the critical elements that deliver success in the job role be careful to avoid overweighting the analytical competencies. Most jobs require you to fit in with the team and culture of the organisation. This could be simply working at the same fast pace as your peers or holding a very strong customer focus in your attitude to completing the work. If these components are missing then, even if you can deliver the task elements of the role based on strong analytical skills, you are unlikely to progress. Most managers generally assume it is easier to train someone to do a task than to hold a particular mindset.

7 MindSet: Is yours?

Your ability to alter course or pivot based on changing circumstances and information is probably the most important factor in sustaining a successful career.

This requires an open and informed mindset.

“We are what we repeatedly do (or think).” Aristotle

One key challenge for people who have taken pride in former roles and relate a strong sense of identity with past activities is their reticence to *let go* of their former mindset. By mindset I mean the way that we view ourselves and how we interact with the world around us. If we view ourselves as a certain thing, e.g. an engineer, then we will act and sound like one.

Going through the MBA challenges you to see people (including ourselves) and business situations differently. Writing the CV can be painful because you are leaving behind the strong identity that shaped your success and the way you worked with others in your former role. You are now asked to reconfigure yourself so that you can bring forth new potential for the next role. This can provoke feelings of discomfort as well as excitement.



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Taking time to experiment with different possible future selves is a key part of your leadership journey. Every successful leader takes time out in the wilderness to discover more about themselves. This usually relates to a higher purpose, so what is motivating you? Bill Gates gave a speech to university graduates where he emphasized the point, albeit bluntly.

“Life is not divided into semesters. You don’t get summers off, and very few employers are interested in helping you. Find yourself.”

In a similar way to the previous chapter, exploring your approach to collecting market intelligence, consider: Up until now, how have you sought to ‘find yourself’?

One way to reflect upon how you have sought an intelligent approach to discovering more about yourself and finding a fit between you and your environment is summarized in Table 2 below. What criteria best reflect you? What does this say about your preferred approach to dealing with change?

Reactive – have a go...	Proactive – reflect & integrate
Opportunistic & tactical	Systematic & strategic
Driven by crises, feelings & circumstances	Driven by values informing choices
Quality dictated by available time	Quality achieved through prioritisation
Unsupported / reliant upon others goodwill	Creates & nurtures a support network
Skills & qualification matching focus	Relevant learning focused
Seek incremental role change	Seek transformational role transitions
Short term focus	Short, medium & long term plans
Luck or control over events is random	Luck or control is self propagated
Passive with limited interest	Actively curious & questioning

If you are content with the pace of progression, learning and outcomes with either model then it is healthy to note this. For those striving for perfection be aware of the risks of burnout. For those seeking to stabilize the current situation be aware of the risks of stagnation. There are virtues in both elements as they suit the needs of the situation and time of life priorities for you.

The challenge is recognizing the degree of change you seek to achieve in your next job role and what methods will best help you realize your aspirations. Consider which mental model above will serve you best at this time. And, then identify how you will commit to doing things differently from your new mindset to take you closer to your goal. Write down what you are willing to commit to, share it with other people and monitor your progress towards it. And, don’t forget to recognize and reward yourself for taking each small step forward.

7.1 Something is missing. Doing and being

What makes writing the CV and cover letter tricky is assembling the *doing* and *being* components to represent a compelling package for the employer. The doing elements are represented by the competencies, e.g. the skills around what and how I do things. The being elements relate to values and the ways of thinking or engaging with people. The act of being committed, caring, making decisions perceived as demonstrating integrity and being a role model to others gathers increasing importance as you move up in the organization. For all managerial roles you are expected to be a role model. It is simply not enough to just *do* stuff.

Conveying a sense of how you manifest your success is hard in the CV, somewhat easier to put across in the cover letter and highly visible at interviews / assessment centres. The absence of reference to what it is to *be* a successful (insert job title) is commonly regarded as the 'something missing' component to unsuccessful applications.

As you research the job role through conducting networking interviews or speaking with colleagues about it keep track of what people identify as of critical importance to the delivery of the role from their perception. Tables 3 & 4 can help you by recording the names of the people that you speak with and how they rate (1–10 scale) the different capabilities cited in the job description (or that they share during your discussion). Example competencies are listed along with ratings in the tables below showing how overall key trends may stand out on average.

<i>DOING</i> Competencies	Contact 1 Name	Contact 2 Name	Contact 3 Name	Contact 4 Name	Contact 5 Name	Average
Business Development	7	6	8	7	7	7
Management	8	6	7	4	8	6.6
Leadership	7	8	7	6	7	7
Decision Making Quality	8	8	6	5	6	6.6
Conflict Resolution	3	6	7	6	8	6
Relationship Management	8	3	5	4	3	4.6
Results Orientation	9	9	7	7	8	8
Strategy	5	6	5	4	2	4.4
Resilience	4	5	4	9	4	5.2
Customer Focus	6	7	7	8	10	7.6
Creativity & Innovation	6	5	4	5	5	5

Table 3: Critical *Doing* Competencies

<i>BEING</i> Example of Personal Style	Contact 1 Name	Contact 2 Name	Contact 3 Name	Contact 4 Name	Contact 5 Name	Average
Taking personal responsibility to resolve problems	7	6	8	7	7	7
Understanding the way people really feel	8	6	7	4	8	6.6
Using integrity & ethics in judgements	7	8	7	6	7	7
Managing stress and conflict	8	8	6	5	6	6.6
Managing upwards & sideways	3	6	7	6	8	6
Contributing positively to company morale	8	3	5	4	3	4.6
Actively building a positive culture	9	9	7	7	8	8
Team working	5	6	5	4	2	4.4
Having compassion for others	4	5	4	9	4	5.2
Listening	6	7	7	8	10	7.6
Developing positive relationships	6	5	4	5	5	5

Table 4: Critical *Being* Capabilities

8 Executive impact: Exercise 1

**"Good is the enemy of great."
Jim Collins**

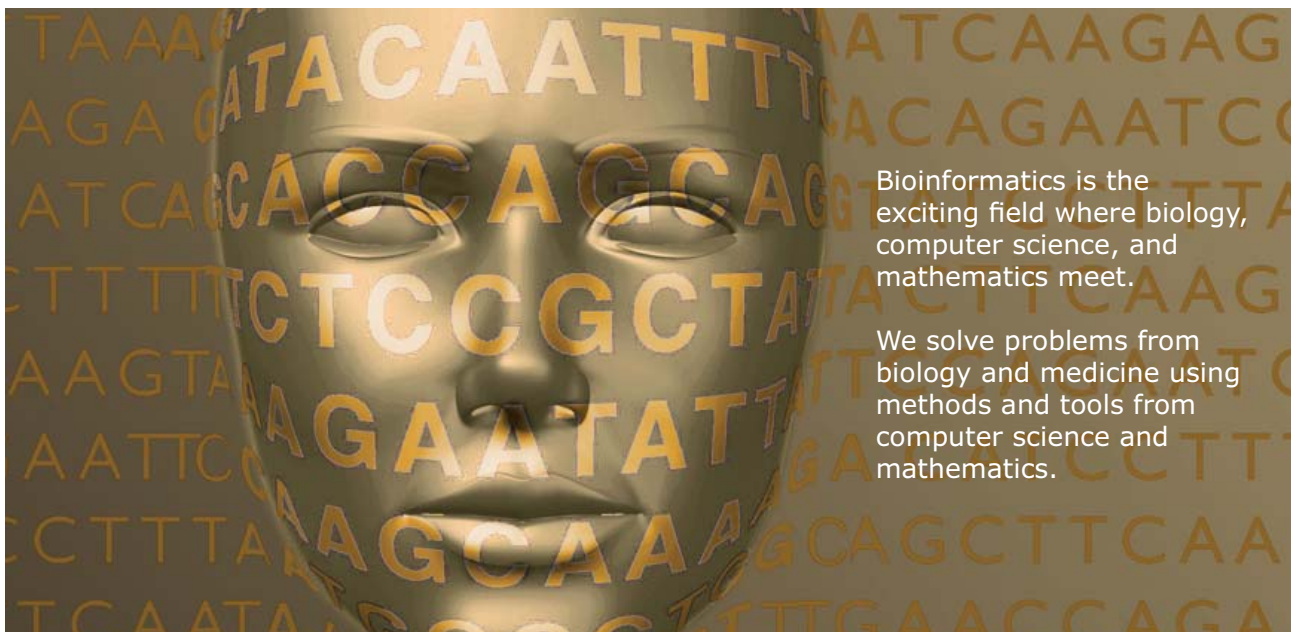
So, how do you represent *being* a great manager? In order to represent something we first need to be able to articulate it. To be truly effective in the job role we need to identify what critical outputs someone performing the job produces. In essence, what are the golden eggs? This then gives insight into what the producing asset (the goose) needs to *be* like.

8.1 Part 1: Getting to the core of the job

Review Table 5 below. Consider the questions in relation to your current, or most recent job, and then contrast this with the role that you are applying for. Note, by comparing your current role to that of your desired role you will identify potential developmental gaps as well as transferable assets. You will also spot the areas that need to be strengthened in your CV, cover letter, interview and networking performance.



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Getting to the core	Your notes
<p>From the perspective of the organization what needs does this role address?</p> <p>What are the key, or specific, problems that this job solves?</p> <p>What are the measures of success that prove these problems are resolved?</p> <p><i>(Remember solutions may need to be: highly visible; quick vs. long term; sustainable; high impact; address the financial bottom line; replicable; flexible to respond to further change, etc.)</i></p> <p>What will change as a result of this success? (E.g. New options, revenue streams, customers, profit, capabilities, etc.)</p>	<p>If you can't answer the questions on the left then consider what sources of data/information you need to find the answers. Where does this data reside?</p> <p>The most up to date information will be held by people, so drawing up a list of target people/positions will help you to network effectively to find out your answers.</p> <p>Set your priorities and begin your intelligent market research.</p>
<p>From the perspective of the customers/stakeholders/suppliers...</p> <p>What other problems will the job address and who will benefit?</p>	
<p>How long have these problems existed?</p> <p>What factors have allowed these problems to remain unresolved up until now?</p>	

Table 5: Getting to the core of the job

Competencies are elements of knowledge, skills, abilities or other characteristics that are intrinsic to high performance of the job. (See Chapter 9 on Achievements if you are not fully familiar with competencies.) A common fault when writing CVs is in losing sight of the linkage between these competencies and the required outcomes of the job role. It is very easy to break this linkage and just write your CV on the basis of the competency headings. This results in a generic sounding CV and cover letter, which is close but not close enough to meet the specific needs of the line manager.

8.2 Part 2: How much poison is in the chalice?

Take your list of answers from Table 5 and reduce the list of problems or goals that the job is there to address to three to five key goals. Think widely and don't rely exclusively upon the job description. Now list against each goal all the concerns or risk factors that you would encounter if you took it on. By being clear of the scale of challenge or complexity that you are likely to encounter it will highlight the degree of value add that you would bring to performing the role. Don't forget to estimate the benefits the organization would receive for solving the problem. This will help you to appreciate what you are offering to the organization.

8.3 Part 3: What kind of hero is expected?

Define; from the perspectives of the recruitment panel (HR, line & senior manager) what a good candidate would look like to meet the critical needs identified. Table 6 below offers a structure to consider your thoughts. Initially list the capabilities in the first column that you believe the recruitment panel would be seeking.

Then list the range of behaviours that would provide evidence that you have the necessary sophistication to deliver the capability. For example, if you select leadership as a core competency then you could display it in a dictatorial or collaborative style. What range of styles would the recruitment panel seek?

Finally, consider the type of outcomes that again would impress the recruitment panel.

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Capabilities	Range of behaviour required	Quantified & qualified outcomes
Business development	Pull approaches stimulating buyer interest highlighting the implicit customer needs. Selling concept, services and tangible products of varying levels of complexity as solutions.	Sustained year on year business growth 10% above target. Successful sales across cultures and maturity of markets.
Management & leadership	Has managerial courage to say what needs to be said and to take constructive action. Able to measure work, set objectives & responsibilities to realise strategic priorities. Empowers and engages others to excel.	Seen as a role model suitable for the role under review or higher. Peers trust, support and follow their lead. Demonstrates energy, personal commitment, learning and resilience. Leaves sustainable high performing teams, systems and a culture behind.
Decision making quality	Timely decision making despite imperfect data and pressure. Uses a mix of analysis, wisdom, experience and business acumen.	Solutions and judgements are quantified successes. Accuracy of decision identified through increased information and over time.
Conflict resolution	Faces conflict seeing it as an opportunity to listen, build agreement and settle disputes equitably with a minimum of disturbance. Cool under pressure without becoming defensive or irritated. Considered as mature and sought out to restore calm in a crises.	Exposure to a range of forms of conflict typical to the role level being sought. Timely and firm reviews of underperformance. Dealing with trouble makers and ability to make tough decisions when all other efforts fail.
Relationship management	Relates well to all people building appropriate rapport leading to effective relationships. Diplomacy, tact and ability to diffuse high tensions. Is widely trusted & perceived as a truthful individual whilst able to keep confidence and able to admit mistakes.	Relationships are maintained even when the person has moved on. Powerful personal & business networks aiding performance. Strong reputation.

Table 6: Defining success

(NB a webinar demonstration of this model being applied for those seeking a top four management consultancy position is available [here](#).)

8.4 Part 4: What does a *super* hero look like?

Now consider what outstanding performance would look like. After all, why have a hero when you really want a super hero to stand up and show themselves? To help think this through increase the quantifiable outcomes in Table 6 by 100% and then ask yourself how this could be achieved via the behaviours and competencies. You may also like to consider role models who demonstrate particular capabilities. Identify what it is that they *do* and how they are *being* when they deliver outstanding performance. This now gives you a target to compare and contrast your own performance against.

If you identify yourself as good at something there is a strong temptation to stop at this point. When you go for a job at the next level they want to see that you are actively engaged in moving your performance to the next level. You will need to demonstrate that you have already made the next grade before they gift to you the new job title. The more senior you go the less time there is to develop into the role and the greater the risks attached to failing to get it right first time.

When you go back to your CV now and read it against this Good & Outstanding criteria as well as the *doing* and *being* elements you will understand clearly what was missing. Being able to fill in the gap isn't an activity that will be achieved in the next 10 minutes but you should now understand why your CV is coming across as a bit lopsided or a bit boring.

Good is not good enough when employers actively want to hire outstanding talent. The more you speak with people doing the role you are interested in the more you will understand from them what the difference between good & outstanding performance looks like. This is the information that you can then make use of in your cover letter, CV, interview & onboarding (first 100 days) into the role.

In summary, exercise 1 builds your self-awareness and insight into what is required for accurate performance in the role that interests you. It also allows you to articulate the super hero qualities that the recruitment panel are looking for and how you measure up. This stimulates the employer's interest. Your competitors will be perceived as a bit boring in comparison as they match what they have to offer against the basic job description. No one expects you to be a full super hero, people would like to hear that you have thought about what it would take and are committed to becoming one.

- Being good doesn't get you noticed
- Being good doesn't move your career forward
- Being good is quickly out-dated when others are striving to be great!

9 Achievements: The components

What assignments have stretched you? What, in you, was stretched?

A consultant's reputation is built upon the projects that they have been engaged in and the value that they have delivered for the client. This is a helpful way to look at the components of your own workplace activity. In preparing yourself for a more senior position consider:

- What stretch assignments have given you the greatest learning opportunities?
- Where have you been out of your depth and are proud of your achievements?
- What impact or legacy have you left behind in previous job roles?

Building this list of overall and niche achievements can be thought of as equivalent to all the clothes in your wardrobe. Today what you are wearing is a selection from your wardrobe, which you have chosen to serve a particular purpose – comfort, looking good in formal/informal situations, etc. You will select individual achievements from this wardrobe to make an appropriate impact for each job that you apply for in the future. A well-stocked wardrobe allows you to meet all weather conditions.



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9.1 What are competencies? And, how do you make use of them?

In building your wardrobe of achievements it is helpful to construct achievements around areas of competence. As a brief reminder competencies are a cluster of skills, knowledge, abilities or other personal qualities (such as humour) that are intrinsic to the delivery of key goals associated with the job. For example,

- **Presentation skills:** you may demonstrate good IT powerpoint **skills**, comprehensive **knowledge** of your topic, good rapport building **ability** with your audience and displaying humour and confident body language **personal qualities** that makes for an effective presentation.

The purpose of competencies is to offer a common framework and language to raise performance from poor to good in the organisation. They remain a bedrock terminology used by HR in recruitment and selection processes.

The common thinking error is to merely seek to match competency buzzwords from the requirements of the job description and forget the purpose behind these words, which is to drive an increase in performance. This dilution of clarity around how competencies generate specific value for the organisation results in weak achievements being represented within a CV.

For example:

- Strategized and executed the marketing strategy for high-potential markets
- Served as the official negotiator for the company in cross-marketing associations and strategic affiliations

Both these examples show a statement-based approach to writing an achievement. Neither shows the value created and whilst key words are repeated little understanding of what was done or how appropriate behaviours were demonstrated emerges. Alternative expressions are:

“Developed and implemented the strategy for accessing high-potential markets collectively worth \$90m. Resulting in 20% enhanced brand recognition within 18 months, increased sales by 48%, additional profit of \$4m and ongoing client recognition for a coherent product range.”

“Formally represented the company and developed six strategic alliances by working with three companies to cross-market products. Resulting in extended global product coverage; enhanced brand visibility via association to local brands and increased sales by 35%.”

By retaining clarity over how these competencies dramatically enhance performance (rather than incrementally added value) you will distinguish yourself from your competitors.

9.2 Too long?

You may be thinking that the above examples are overly long. And, for a one page CV focused upon competence rather than capability this may be true. Two lines may have more impact and where bottom line results are highly favoured you can do this. However, remember where your advantage lies. If someone else has better outcomes and more experience within the relevant sector(s) will this mean the employer favours them? Also, if it takes one extra line to create an impressive impact and thereby saves you from repeating the competency elsewhere on the CV it may be economical to do so. Finally, a two page CV may allow you more scope.

Which person would you choose?

Person A:

“Scoped a new market potentially worth \$90m. Designed a marketing strategy creating a 20% rise in brand recognition within 18 months, 48% sales increase and \$4m profit p.a.”

Person B:

“Proactively scoped a potential \$90m market. Transformed demoralised sales staff with a fresh marketing strategy. 48% sales increase, 20% brand recognition & \$4m profit p.a. in 18 months.”

Consider which person you prefer and why. Choosing Person A may reflect your economic focus on the bottom line. Choosing Person B may result from the extra capabilities, e.g. initiative, creativity and the renewal of disaffected staff. Both achievements are written with 28 words but which hooks your interest?

Your audience may share your perspective or they may be weighting other information more heavily. You need to make an educated guess and position the impact of your achievements appropriately. If you have a limited number of high impact outcomes or are switching sectors/functions then emphasise how you overcame complexity in your achievements.

9.3 Are competencies enough of a match to create a winning CV?

Building on the *Mindset* chapter you won't be surprised that matching your CV and cover letter to the job competencies are not sufficient to create a winning CV in a highly competitive market.

Researchers, HR and line managers became frustrated that many individuals have a good track record of demonstrating the required competencies but were unable to apply them in novel situations. Equally, some people demonstrate their potential faster than others who on the surface appeared to be overflowing with potential. This sparked deeper research into the difference between strong performers and those with the ability to progress further quickly.

In the 1980s a lot of this research focused upon what identified successful leaders who were rapidly promoted and able to adjust to the varied challenges of a dynamic and uncertain global business environment. A key differentiator discovered was the notion of learning agility where certain individuals could extract meaning from their previous experience and extrapolate it successfully to their current/future situation (McCall, Lombardo, & Morrison, 1988). The speed and flexibility of achieving this are key characteristics that are looked for by international employers during the recruitment process.

You can give some indication of this in the way you write your achievements. For example, if the competency you are seeking to promote within an achievement is strategy, then demonstrate the range of contexts within which you have added value in this way. Make reference to complexity, scale, scope and varied contexts and this can reassure the reader that you have a track record of flexibly applying strategic insight to novel situations.

It is also worth noting that clichés develop. The term ‘strategy’ is subject to fashion. Being out of fashion can be a turn off for employers. Currently ‘operational tactics’ is a favoured alternative to using ‘strategy’ when speaking to people. The controversy revolves around the fact that many mid level managers don’t engage in pure strategic decision-making. Their impact is more commonly exerted through smart operational tactics. Regardless of whether you agree with this or not it is important that you understand the variety of views held. This will help you to astutely apply your executive impact as you phrasing your achievements.

You would still be best advised to use the word strategy in a CV for a high volume recruitment position as scanning software will be using key words to conduct a first screening of submitted CVs. Though you may use alternative phrasing in your cover letter, should you feel this to be warranted. The multiple levels of assessment that apply to the CV can cause frustration initially and you have to submit your CV at some point, even if it isn’t something you are perfectly comfortable with. It is an evolving document which should continue to build your confidence and show case your brand as you configure your achievements to achieve maximum impact.

10 Competent and capable?

“The winner’s edge is not in a gifted birth, a high IQ, or in talent.
The winner’s edge is all in the (mental) attitude, not aptitude.
Attitude is the criterion for success.”
Denis Waitley

10.1 What are capabilities?

Following on from the research into learning agility and the frustration with competencies the term capabilities was coined. If competencies are the functional elements required to perform a task then capability describes the flexible judgement to wisely use these competencies to leverage the best outcome in unfamiliar situations.

Technically the term capability refers to “...a holistic attribute and concerns the capacity to use one’s competence in novel situations rather than just the familiar, a justified level of efficacy for dealing with novel problems, having appropriate values, being able to work in teams and knowing how to learn.” (Stephenson, 1994 and Hase, 2002.)

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Education: Chemical Engineer

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Be careful, many employers and CV advisers will often use the terms competencies and capabilities interchangeably without recognising the distinction presented here. The differentiation of your approach relies upon how you choose to apply the distinction in these terms.

10.2 Capabilities & sector/function change cover letters

Some employers engaged in sensitive and highly dynamic contexts will be more interested in your capability or adaptable mindset rather than the number of times you have repeatedly used a competency. Make sure you consider what weighting has greatest relevance to the employer. For example, is a ratio of 40% competence and 60% capability relevant?

Now, re-read your existing cover letter and list of achievements on your old CV. Check the balance. In considering your credibility have you demonstrated the critical competencies and capabilities appropriately? Or are you trying to match a weak competency track record when you actually have a very strong capability story to present?

Highlighting your capability is particularly important when you are changing sector and function. Here your solid competency track record has been delivered in a context that has less relevance to your new potential employer. Reassure the employer with your capability to make wise decisions and implement change in an appropriately paced way, meeting the needs of the business.

10.3 How to discover & express capabilities

Showing your adaptability to meet the critical demands of the new role requires a quick revisit to Exercise 1 and continued networking to discover desired capabilities. Here are five example areas that might lead to the generation of outstanding performance. You will need to consider their relevance to the job that you are applying for. The following chapters highlight ways you can bring them into effect within the cover letter and CV achievements.

1. **Open mind-set:** The degree of accepting the unknown and remaining open-minded or able to consider alternative perspectives when making decisions under pressure
2. **Innovation:** Continuous exploration of new approaches, configurations and the ability to quickly exploit the results adding value to the business. As an example the speed with which currently bundled resources can be de-bundled and re-bundled to meet changing customer demands.
3. **Complexity:** Where different standpoints can be absorbed and information/knowledge appropriated, disseminated, implemented and transferred with positive impact.

4. **An engaging attitude:** alignment between your values and those required by the company that fosters the preferred way in which relationships are created, nurtured and developed leading to increased levels of satisfaction. The ability to foster this attitude through others may be required of leaders.
5. **Emotional capability:** uniting disparate groups with conflicting expectations; navigating a treacherous political arena to form a successful coalition resulting in a new culture of collaboration; motivating demoralised staff/customers to believe in a new brand/service/concept/product.

Ideally you want to leave behind a memory that you have the end-to-end capability to meet the employer's needs. By 'end-to-end' I mean highlighting the competence required in the role, the extra elements as described by Exercise 1 and the capability definition above. Oh, and if this wasn't enough consistently addressing the financial bottom line (growing turnover and profitability) will also be seen as vital in your demonstration of executive impact.



11 Achievements: Interlocking components

*"It is not the ship so much as the skilful sailing that assures the prosperous voyage."
George William Curtis*

Good stories are memorable. When key pieces of information lock into place they add up to more than the sum of the parts. The way people link some pieces of information and not others requires good story tellers to carefully adapt their material based upon their audience each time they tell it. The same applies to you.

For the CV, your objective is to assemble key facts within a series of very short stories that will positively connect with your audience. This establishes your credibility and makes you stand out as an interesting person that they would like to speak more with. Being boring is not your goal. Repeatedly telling the same story or using the same facts will also not achieve your objective.

11.1 Questions to consider when reviewing past achievements

In terms of recruitment you will need to have achievements with measureable outcomes that meet the different competency expectations identified from Exercise 1. Here are some suggested questions that may aid your quantification of past achievements:

- What was the deficiency that you were seeking to address? What ranges of measures demonstrate you were successful? This could be: a new model of working; higher levels of engagement; sustainable success; financial improvements; reduction in risk or time; enhanced recognition; capacity to scale up work to undertake bigger projects; greater scope for future change; new relationships established leading to future work, best practice, etc.
- How long had this problem existed? How long did it take you to address it?
- What was the most critical element in the process? Where could it have all gone wrong if something vital hadn't been in place or occurred? What damage would this have caused to the organization?

These questions can help you to recognize the scale and impact of your solutions, vital when providing qualitative and quantitative measures of your success.

11.2 The RHO model: Role, How & Outcome

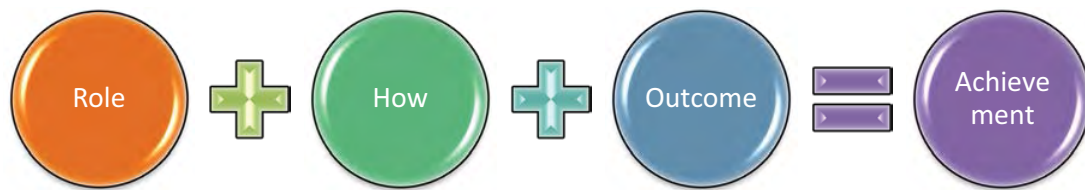


Figure 4

Here is a structure that produces a robust achievement or short story. There are three components:

1. **Role:** *What was your role in the project or activity that you are about to describe?*
E.g. a key word such as: Led, developed, co-presented, championed, headhunted to...
2. **How:** *How did you demonstrate the competency plus the capability aspects?*
This is both the competency you have prioritised from Exercise 1 and a demonstration of complexity, which can leverage your impact. E.g. 12 senior managers, international, leading edge, best practice, etc.
3. **Outcome:** *How do you measure your success in qualitative and quantitative terms?*
Quantify your success at the widest level of impact. Impact can be measured at different levels, i.e. impact on an individual, on a team or department, on the organization, and on society or a profession. Seek to identify the highest level of impact that you can. Consider the business benefits of your intervention and how success was measured and quantified, for example the amount of revenue generated or the percentage of efficiencies achieved. It can also be useful to refer to timescales, for example, to specify whether something was achieved within twelve days or twelve years.

A typical example might be:

Led four consultants in conducting negotiations with six European finance directors over 18 months. Resulting in the first joint approach to managing suppliers & saving €12m p.a.

11.3 Familiar models: STAR & CAR

You may be more familiar with the popular quoted STAR & CAR models used for generating interview answers. These can be useful to remind yourself of the elements within previous projects or activities. However, the formulae process can often drive you away from considering the capability elements that may be key in differentiating yourself.

STAR (Situation, Task, Achievement, Result) and CAR (Context, Action, Result). The Situation and task describe the Context element of CAR

An example of this could be:

S = Project manager of billing contracts

T = Developed daily billing system to replace outdated monthly version

A = Oversaw outsourcing to offshore development companies

R = Project completed on time within budget.

E.g. “Project manager of billing contracts. Developed a daily billing system to replace outdated monthly version. Oversaw outsourcing to offshore development companies. Project completed on time within budget.”

The problem with this description is that it fails to demonstrate the transferable capabilities that you are seeking to convey for the new role and it has no quantitative scale of impact. Alternative ways to express this following the RHO model are:

“Led the project management of 12 national billing contracts worth £1.5m. Oversaw outsourcing to offshore development companies and developed a daily billing system enhancing cash flow by replacing an outdated monthly version.”



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“Improved senior management strategic decision making by developing a daily vs. monthly billing system. Resulting in a 23% reduction in debtor days worth £1.2m over three years.”

“Oversaw outsourcing to offshore development companies. Led the project management of 12 national billing contracts worth £1.5m. Unified disparate parties on time and within budget.”

11.4 Variations to RHO

You can lead with the outcome to grab attention, i.e. ORH (Outcome, Role, How).

“Generated a £1.2m cost saving solution within four months. Led the project management of 12 national billing contracts, unified disparate parties to outsource services to offshore companies.”

This approach can be helpful where you have a strong headline-grabbing outcome. What often happens is that people write this and forget about the importance of the capability resulting in achievements that define the outcome and then emphasise the context of their activity, e.g.:

“Generated a £1.2m cost saving solution within four months. Developed daily billing to enhance cash flow by replacing an outdated monthly version.”

The problem with this style of achievement is that it misses the scale of complexity and capability elements that would be transferable to the new job that you are looking to gain. This style of achievement may have more relevance if you were seeking an incremental promotion within your familiar sector and functional background. In this situation your credibility comes from demonstrating this competence. Be careful though as you would need to consider if the expression of this competence is in keeping with the senior position you seek.

So, for example if you come from a successful sales background and want to be the regional sales manager it would be inappropriate to think that repeatedly emphasising your success as a competent sales person will get you the job. Demonstrating how you manage others through planning workloads and coaching staff to be better sales performers would be more important competencies.

Delivering these benefits through an alignment of values to the company and fostering exceptional team spirit can also show you have the capabilities that would be sought after. Your challenge is now to reflect this through a number of achievements. Here are a few examples that emphasise the capabilities that might be looked for.

“Proactively invoked a vision, collaborative leadership and change agent skills to unite 12 disparate regional sales teams forming an agile global sales entity managing £10M+ budget.”

“Facilitated a new market vertical leading to £18M+ in new business. Convinced an adamant & disinterested department head via strong relationship skills quickly identifying corporate and personal opportunities.”

“Acted as a role model to generate a shift in culture from product focus to customer service over four months. Resulting in improved morale, collective sense of purpose and flagship promotional material for the company, 10% sales improvement over six months and retention of key staff.”

“Led a company wide rightsizing process holding intense conversations with key staff members regarding the necessity to take action for the betterment of the organization. Resulted in improving the financial stability and focus of the company securing £16M additional investment.”

“I studied English for 16 years but...
...I finally learned to speak it in just six lessons”
Jane, Chinese architect

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12 Profile: The short story

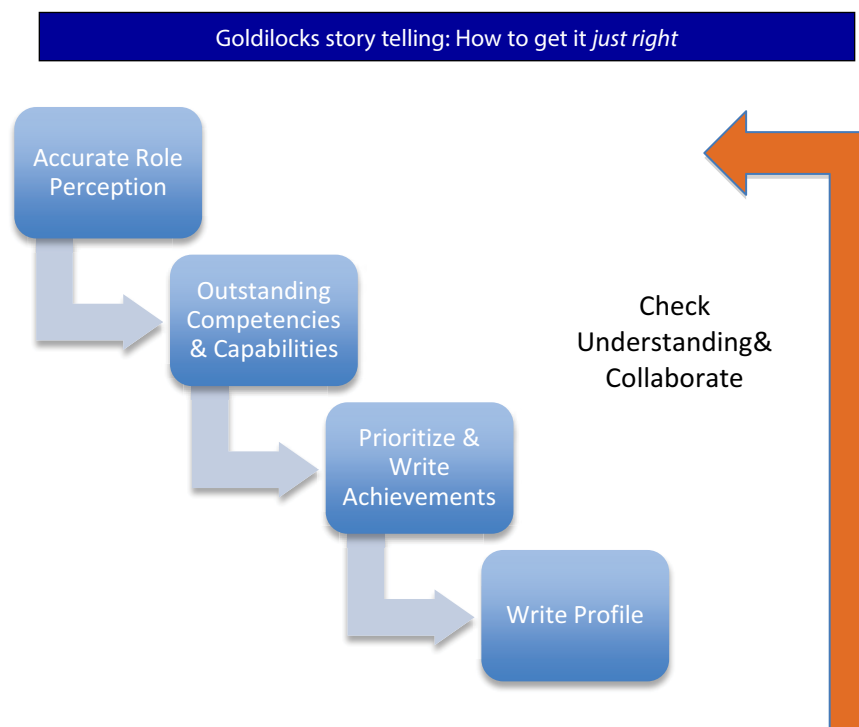


Figure 5: Stages in writing a CV

So, you now have a view on what an outstanding performer in the job role might be like. And you have explored your key achievements to articulate credible examples where you have shown both the competence as well as the capability to meet the employer's requirements.

What is missing is a short summary or profile that encapsulates your credibility to deliver and how you would shape the role. This profile is a snapshot of your brand. It will be read and compared with the stereotype that the employer seeks for the role.

People often mistake the profile as a summary of what they have done up to now. Your challenge is to represent yourself as an outstanding candidate with relevant credibility in the sector and or function within which the job is situated. If you are switching industries and or function then you need to show that you know what lies at the heart of success for this role and to lay claim to it.

For example, if you want to be a management consultant, we could argue that the difference between a good and an outstanding consultant is trust. Therefore, when or for how many years have you successfully established trust with senior managers? This could then be your opening line establishing your credibility in your profile.

“Six years of building trust with international CEOs leading to successful strategic change.”

You now have approximately 3–5 more lines within which you need to communicate three themes of contribution. These themes are core to your brand, are a result from completing Exercise 1 and will shape your impact upon the job role. By way of example these themes could be: project management, innovative client based collaboration and corporate sensitivity.

“Six years of building trust with international CEOs leading to successful strategic change. Complex project management experience gained in Europe, Asia & EMIR handling budgets of \$50K–4.5M. Reputation for collaborative innovation and corporate sensitivity by uniting disparate political stakeholders to achieve outstanding results.”

If you have strong credibility within the sector and function you may be able to position yourself in just two lines, e.g.

“10 years management consultancy experience in Europe, Asia & EMIR transforming supply chains by uniting disparate political stakeholders to achieve consistent and outstanding results.”

12.1 What if my new profile feels odd?

Whilst it is quite likely that you have demonstrated the three themes within your profile in other job roles it is unlikely that you have consciously put them together in this configuration before. This shift in emphasis from your usual story can create anxiety as well as excitement. A way to develop acceptance with the new story is to explore how authentic or true each element of the profile is for you. Avoid making a comparison between what is familiar and unfamiliar, as this will lead you back into repeating the comfortable identity story of your past.

The best way to build confidence in the new version of you is to repeatedly share it with other people. The act of expressing it out loud will aid the refinement process allowing you to position your brand with that all important self-belief. You might also share a couple of achievements that back up your story to see whether your audience believes you. (Note, family members or others who have built a strong view of you based upon your past may struggle initially to let go of how they know you and embrace a new message. Try out your profile with those who are open to your “Who am I?” experimentation or who know you less well).

In summary, an impactful profile will demonstrate: differentiation, insight and clear benefits that relate to specific needs. The order of your themes should build a coherent story that remains memorable to the reader even when they have put down your CV.

13 Switching careers

**The ultimate question & answer:
'To what extent does your CV match the needs of the employer?'
0–100%?**



Figure 6: The Additional Offer

How much does your focused offer meet the needs of the employer? In brand terms you need to meet the employers expected needs and also excite them with your additional offer. The expected offer tends to be well captured by the competencies within the job description. It is very familiar to the employer and therefore lacking in excitement. Meet this level and you are competing heavily with your peers – all struggling to be at the top of the pile of ‘average’ candidates.

Expressing your additional offer is where employers start taking an interest. The employer knows some of this information but there are also elements that are hard to state explicitly. Which gives you flexibility when you are completing Exercise 1 to lay claim to explicit areas that you would define as outstanding and that they are likely to go along with.

If you are switching careers and changing sector, function, background, country, level of responsibility, etc. then it is important that you are able to accentuate the transferable competencies and capabilities you possess to meet the expected and additional offer sought after by the employer.

13.1 Meeting the expected offer

You can do this through looking at the ‘bigger picture’ process of what you did and consider how your impact upon people and processes was achieved. Through describing what you did in a strategic manner, without technical jargon, you will be able to transfer the common skills across business contexts and functions. Remember that interpersonal skills are the ultimate transferable commodity. People, change, complexity, ambiguity, quality, volume, profit, brand reputation, customer service, analysis, results, integrity, values, trust, choice, etc. are consistent features of any business.

As an example, you could turn this highly technical explanation into a more transferable achievement:

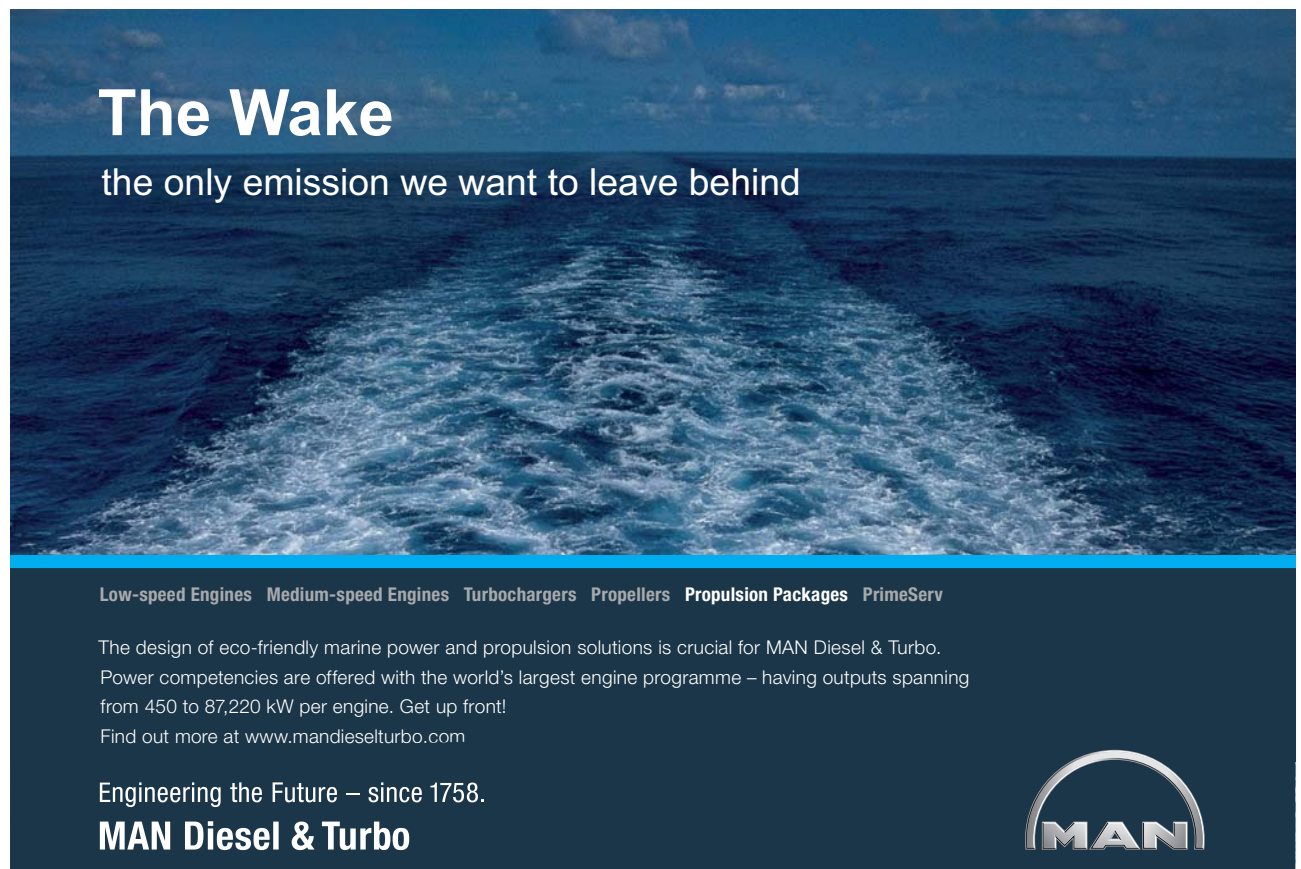
Technical example: “Improved data mapping process by automating manual tasks. Designed a programme to read COBOL copy book, creating a Doner File Data Directory resulting in a 20% reduction of work for 8 people.”

Alternative 1: “Championed smarter IT working practices through regular senior management ‘show & tell’ sessions. Proactively established and promoted an intuitive knowledge management system routinely used by 15,000 staff each quarter.”

Alternative 2: “Proactively translated customer needs into a sympathetic IT process. Demonstrated successful innovation and embedded the Group’s strategic objectives through expanding service delivery by 10% and winning new lucrative contracts potentially worth 5% of turnover.”

13.2 Meeting the additional offer

In Exercise 1 you can explore what the additional offer might look like from the perspective of the employer. If you are making a career switch it is beneficial to consider what stretch projects or assignments that you have taken on in your previous role that most closely resemble the tasks or activities asked of you in the new role. If you don’t know much about the challenges of the new role then you will need to conduct some research interviews with those that are performing well in role currently.



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Career switching is entirely feasible though success is dependent upon your quality of research and relationship skills. On paper your argument will be weaker than an internal candidate so you have to demonstrate greater insight and positioning skills (see Hunting Chapter 5 and Chapter 14 as to when not to use your CV).

A strong cover letter highlighting how your story makes sense for the role that you are applying to is essential for career switchers. You will have to persuade people that you should be treated as an equally valued candidate. So, you need to project a memorable brand based upon repositioning all that you have done before-hand to be a solid basis for what you want to go on to do.

Brands are concepts; they are more inspiring than a list of skills. A brand offers a promise to the buyer, which stimulates interest and sometimes allows for forgiveness. Apple has created a hugely loyal customer base that; whilst still critical of Apple, remain very forgiving because they believe in the brand concept or vision. When you seek out a new role, the quality of how you articulate your personal brand to bring about change in the role needs to be as infectious a vision as possible. In that way you answer the following question:

‘Why should a prospective employer buy me
rather than another MBA or internal competitor?’

13.3 Change, choice and principles

One approach to considering your brand is in relation to what Stephen Covey describes as the three constants in life. Change, choice and principles. Consider how you have made personal and business defining decisions against each of these areas. This could give you a fresh look at your past in order to discover a valuable format to help differentiate yourself. Answering this question will also help equip you with something interesting to share whilst networking.

14 When not to use a CV

**"Are you a vitamin pill or a painkiller?"
No one has, as yet, successfully marketed a pain killing vitamin pill.**

14.1 The painkiller introduction

When you look at what you have to offer do you have a range of potential long-term benefits to improve the well being of the employer? Are you in essence a vitamin pill? Or, do you have specific focus, credibility and will be trusted to resolve an urgent need? Are you the painkiller? Once you have worked out what you have to offer you can then position yourself appropriately to match the needs of the employer. Most people don't think about what they are offering and how it will add explicit value to the employer – ensure you aren't offering yourself as a vitamin painkiller. Test out your offering to see how compelling it is and remember most employers want to take a painkiller to ease their headaches rather than a vitamin pill.

14.2 When not to use your CV

Pushing your CV forward too early doesn't make sense, particularly if:

- You don't know what the employer is really looking for
- The employer has not advertised a job and therefore is unclear on what they need
- You have large amounts of experience and are making a significant career change
- You have an unconventional background or offering
- The employer is risk adverse and your background would normally sound alarm bells

In these situations you can write a letter to the chief exec or to the head of a relevant department. In this letter you may highlight the specific and painful needs that the organization (or its primary customers) is, or will soon, experience. Share how you could find insightful solutions to address these needs and cut the pain.

Ask to meet with the person who is likely to feel the pain of your identified issues for a short meeting to further discuss your ideas. Make sure your LinkedIn profile and any other social media platform is positioning your key messages clearly as they will research you before deciding if they want to spend time with you.

Only after you have met would you construct a tailored CV or a short biography and pass it through to them, at their request. Be ready to do this within 24 hours ideally. By this point, assuming you have had a quality interaction they have already decided to invest time with you. The pace of the next steps and your ability to sustain their continued attention are the final challenges to successfully closing the opportunity you have created.

14.3 Five common cover letter traps

1. Who Matters Most?

The most common error in writing cover letters is one of mindset. Holding yourself as the most important frame of reference is a classic trap. Here are some examples where people have got the wrong focus:

- “I am interested in this challenging assignment. I believe that I have the required experience and expertise to perform the role. This experience coupled with my exemplary academic background including my MBA from xxx, mean I am ideally suited to performing the role of xxxx.”
- “Your renowned development programme is of particular attraction to me.”

These statements offer no evidence to the employer of your track record or understanding of the key determinants for performance in the role. Avoid the “I believe...” statement. Whilst self-belief is often attractive if it is not anchored in addressing the employer’s contextual needs it is meaningless.



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Employers know that people are often poor at adapting to change and take far longer to reach optimal performance than they think at the outset. Employers want to see evidence of how you have been exposed to their issues already. Avoid exaggerated claims as they reveal a lack of self-awareness and potentially a dangerous level of naivety. For example:

- “I am an exceptional strategic thinker capable of bringing clarity to any complex & multi-dimensional business problem, as demonstrated by my MBA.”

A better example could be:

- “Your multi-dimensional business requires agile operational collaboration. With five years cross functional experience delivering complex change programmes I understand the challenges of engaging diverse stakeholders.”

2. The crystal ball

Many MBAs are understandably unclear on what they are offering an employer. Their passion to get involved and allow the process of action and reaction to guide their thinking can cloud wise judgment. Don't expect the employer to do the hard work and see your potential. They don't have a crystal ball with which to spot potential.

Employers are hesitant, even if they see a good thing they don't always jump at the opportunity straight away. For example, if you owned an F1 racing car would you let a garage apprentice get stuck in to demonstrate how good a mechanic they might be? Employers are unlikely to be excited by this prospect. Here is a real example paragraph:

“I am currently doing a Global MBA program with xxx. I am searching for a challenging job/career in different sectors of the economy. I have a wide range of interests in many subject areas including Physics, Engineering, Mathematics, Theology and Law. For further information please look at my CV and my LinkedIn Profile.”

3. Failure to bridge

Employers expect you to have researched them. You need to go beyond collecting data and demonstrate useful interpretation or insight. However, every year MBAs will waste their time writing a CV and a cover letter without showing the basics to companies that have prestigious brands.

Prestigious companies have the most applicants who aspire to be associated with the status and glamour of the brand. Having invested heavily in their brand these companies also have the highest expectation levels of applicants. They dismiss brand wannabees who fail to show diligent company and social research skills. Examples of MBA superficial applications include failing to:

- Name the contact person within the cover letter or the senior manager to whom the role would report
- Explain why you want to work for them beyond gaining the trappings of the job
- Clearly state what you have to offer (competencies & capabilities) and why this is a relevant and powerful configuration
- Demonstrate the demands of the business, the challenges of their competitor's business models, their position in the market place in respect to their products/service brands and not forgetting their guiding principles, vision and values.

Ignorance over the role you are seeking is no excuse.

The good news is that by simply typing into Google the job title, such as “What does a brand manager do?” you will find 210,000,000 results. You can narrow this down by company or sector to get useful case study insights immediately at your fingertips.

As an example of how to demonstrate your interest in a company:

“Being a regular customer of Starbucks in the UK, I have watched with interest its continued strength in the market against Costa, Caffè Nero and small chain coffee shops. In the USA, where I will be based from September, its advantage of a comfortable customer environment has helped it to rise above competition from Panera Bread, McDonald's and Caribou. The more innovative menu items, particularly the ice cream combinations, such as espresso shooters, have, in my opinion, contributed to the strength and distinction of the Starbucks brand in the battle for high street trade...”

4. Echo language

You need to align your language and key words to your chosen role to meet their expectations. So, if you're seeking a marketing position they will expect you to use words such as marketing, brand, customers, research, segmentation, channels, positioning, market share, etc. within your CV & cover letter. To not use expected phrases that relate to the operation of the role or to mention key stakeholder groups will show that you do not think like a 'marketing person'.

This is a common flaw for career changers who may see the role through the eyes, and language, of a former role. Unfortunately HR software programmes looking at your application will screen out your application, or not even read it if it is in a PDF format.

5. Inauthentic matching

If you don't showcase the drive, passion and pace that the employer is seeking you will also fail to receive positive feedback. Review your cover letter – how do you come across? In the example of a brand manager are you seen as a passionate brand literate trailblazer or a plodding administrator seeking a pay rise?

We often seek approval and to look good, consequently we try and be all things to all people. Deep down you know that this is impossible. Recognising what you prefer, how you generate success and what environments you will be exceptionally successful in is important. It helps you to choose not to go into something that will, at best, produce mediocre results.

By focusing upon the elements (even if you don't know anything more than this) of what will allow you to be successful it can resonate with your line manager. Articulate this in a way that the employer can understand and you will successfully persuade people that you will be successful.

This does take courage, as it will mean you will be excluded from those jobs that don't match your success criteria. No one seeks to be rejected; ironically we don't even want people to say 'no' to us doing jobs that we would hate. If you are unclear on what you are looking for and what you have to offer for that job it is highly likely you will be upset when someone does apply criteria to judge your application. (See Exercise One for assistance.)

Inventors take the view of experimentation: seeing unsuccessful attempts as opportunities to learn rather than moments of crises. The confidence to move forward in search of a more authentic match increases as you have a strong story to tell about yourself. Reconfiguring your story allows you to evolve beyond what you have done in the past.

“Learning and innovation go hand in hand.

The arrogance of success is to think that what you did yesterday will be sufficient for tomorrow.”

William Pollard

15 Cover letter structure

"In business you get what you want by giving other people what they want."
Alice MacDougal

Why do key customers buy a product or service from the job that you are applying for?

Going back to basics helps answer what the employer's needs and expectations are for the job role. Spotting the gap where competitors or the employer are missing an opportunity sets up a compelling reason for your cover letter to be treated seriously. Without this attention-grabbing hook your cover letter is likely to be read as nice, but dull.

15.1 Compelling?

For an employer the two expectations of a cover letter are that you will reveal:

- Why should they trust that you could help them with difficult challenges and be the person they place their faith in when the going gets tough?
- How aligned to the role, team and operating context are you?

I joined MITAS because
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Month 16
I was a construction
supervisor in
the North Sea
advising and
helping foremen
solve problems

Real work
International opportunities
Three work placements



 **MAERSK**



Employers hope that you have a clear and compelling story to tell which will inspire them. This level of expectation can be quite scary, particularly when you have never done the job and are unclear if it is for you. Remember you do have value to add. You have been successful given the level of resources, time and support provided (or not as the case is more likely to be) to you. Recalling specific examples of how you have added significant value will help you to breath more easily. It is helpful to separate your personal confidence from the story-telling challenge of relating your track record to the employer's needs. This latter activity takes practice like any new skill. If low self-confidence is present then work in partnership(s) with others – it makes the process a lot more bearable.

15.2 Examples

A cover letter, also known as a letter of motivation, is short at just one side of A4 paper. Examples of cover letters are listed in the appendix and additional download options are accessible [here](#).

15.3 Content of a cover letter

The core structure of your cover letter includes three steps:

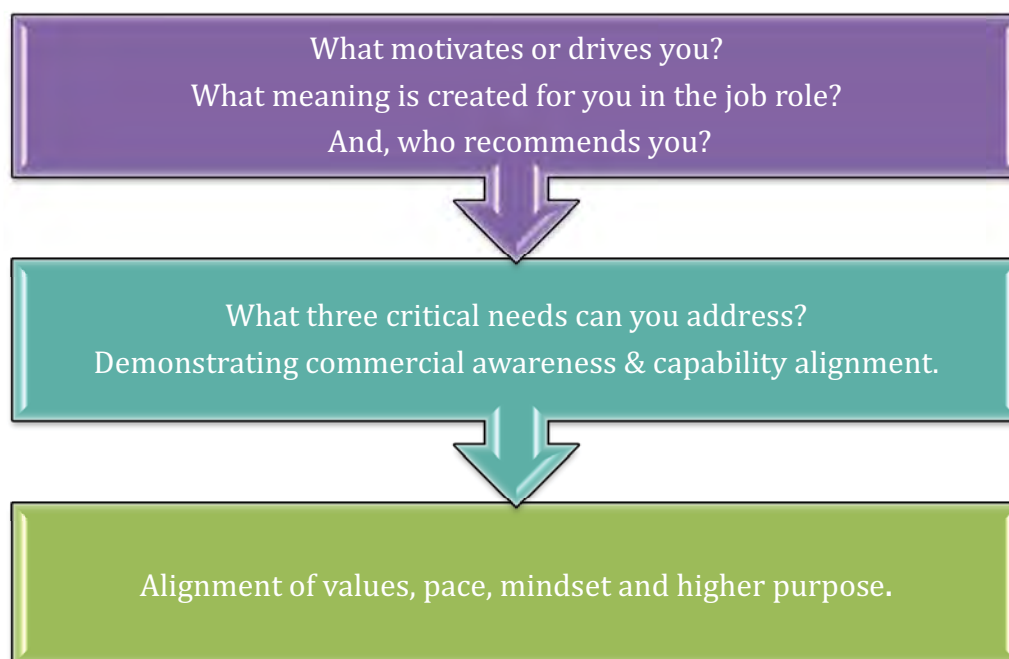


Figure 7: Cover Letter Structure

15.4 Motivation & network

Step 1: Open your cover letter with a paragraph to highlight why out of all the jobs in the world this would offer a great partnership between you. Be careful you don't focus on the exclusive benefits that will make your life better, such as your development programme is perfect for my ambition to be a CEO, etc.

Instead focus upon explaining how the following applies:

- How the core challenge (demonstrating insight via Exercise 1) the role presents is aligned to your motivations, values and talents
- How key elements of your past experience & education come together to offer unique value to the role
- Who recommends you that may be personally known or positively regarded by the reader?

It may be that you have discussed the role with someone senior within the company, one of its suppliers, a consultant to the company or even one of its competitors. If they can see you as a suitable fit and recommend you for the role then you can instantly increase your perceived value due to the credibility of person recommending you. NB You will need the person's permission to use their name. As an example, if you were going for a job within one of the Virgin Group companies and your opening sentence started with...

"Sir Richard Branson, Founder and Chairman of the Virgin Group highly recommended that I apply for this role..." Would you dare reject this application?

Due to the power of your network the reader is extremely likely to put you forward to the interview short list even if the rest of your CV is a bit average. Whilst it is unlikely that you will know the Chair, a trustee or executive member of the organization you may well know (or be able to create a relationship) with someone within the company. As an example PwC for many years has offered its employees a finders fee for sourcing good quality consultants. PwC knows their current employees are unlikely to recommend someone who wouldn't fit in, as the employee's own brand reputation within the firm will suffer if they support inappropriate people.

15.5 'How can you meet my needs?'

Step 2: This is the most important and longest section of the cover letter. Choose three themes of contribution that will address critical needs for the employer. Use one paragraph to summarise your credibility for each theme. (NB Exercise 1 will help you to identify the top needs.) Each paragraph needs to establish how you will add value. Being generally helpful or a vitamin pill is not good enough. Your value add should be compelling for each of these paragraphs as this forms the substance of your argument as to why you should be the successful candidate for the role.

15.6 Aligned: A match made in heaven?

Step 3: People buy people, not pieces of paper. This paragraph needs to convey the potential for a long-term partnership between you and the organisation. For meaningful roles the employer will be searching for someone offering more than a short-term transaction of skills for money. Employers take a risk when bringing someone new into the company, even for an interim position. They take time to train you, mould the role around your strengths and offer feedback to achieve a high state of productivity (this often takes six to 18 months depending upon the complexity of the role). It is very disappointing to the employer if you seek to move on inside of a year, as they will not feel that they have gained a return on their investment in you.

Consequently, show the employer how your values and outlook are aligned to their mission. It is not enough to say that you share the same values and outlook as your future life partner if you seek to convince them to live with you. They won't take it at face value, neither will your employer. Equally, it is not essential that you share all of the same values. Consider what commonality of guiding principles you share that will form robust glue in the partnership. Can you share how you have lived these values in other roles? This will give them the facts from which they can make their own judgement. Failure to address this alignment issues creates an impression in the reader that the applicant is cold and robotic.

Understandably some roles and companies require more or less of this explicit values alignment based upon the evolutionary maturity of their culture. If you were to join a company like [Johnson & Johnson](#) or [Patagonia](#) for example then they would be looking for strong societal values alignment. If you are to join a task focused bank or consultancy their health and environmental ethos may be weaker. Instead, their devotion to fast, quality customer solutions may require you to show how you have exceeded expectations to create an innovative commercial result.

15.7 Instant credibility loss

Errors in writing a cover letter can be very costly, if you mis-spell your network contact name, e.g. Sir Richard Branson or that of the hiring manager, promise more than your CV delivers or fail to spot the employer's most relevant needs then you have lost your opportunity. Just like 99% of flyers that come through your letterbox, if it doesn't positively grab your attention within a few seconds and meet your need you move on. It isn't personal and the fact you don't provide feedback to the author of the flyer is a reflection of the volume of them that you receive. This is the same situation for HR departments.

As you invest so much time in your applications it easy to become word-blind to errors. They will creep in unseen to you but will always stand out for the employer. What can you do to avoid this simple but dangerous risk?

16 Impact checklist

“Knowing a joke and learning to tell it well to a live audience are two different things.”

Comedians recognise that they have a very limited window of time to build rapport with their audience. They spend long hours crafting their material and have learnt from bitter experience to rigorously test it out on friends and other professionals that they can trust before going live with it. This doesn't guarantee a perfect routine but it greatly increases the odds in their favour. Who could you work with?

By way of support here are two checklists that you can apply to your application in order to identify areas for improvement.

16.1 Application considerations

1. Do I understand what I have to offer and what key needs they meet?
2. Have I given evidence of being a high achiever compared to other good MBA candidates?
3. Am I clear about the employers' expectations?
4. Do I fully understand how I fit in?

If your answer to any of these questions is “No”, you may be compromising your ability to attain the position and would benefit from collecting this data quickly.

Ambiguity over these areas can lead to either:

- Frustration, tension and unrealised expectations – leading to withdrawal, adaptation and aggression
- Flexibility, self review, accommodation and commitment to research new avenues thoroughly



Figure 8: How do you typically choose to respond?

16.2 CV impact checklist: What messages are you giving out?

Issue	Example
Career Profile / Summary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What message do you gain from reading the profile? E.g. is the person trapped in their past? • Can you easily identify their Unique Selling Proposition? • Is there a person here or just machine-gunned achievements?
Presentation	<p>On first glance is the CV: crisp; clear; clean; focused; easy to find information, key words are used in tune with the level of the role, etc.?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is there a consistent structure to the CV? • Are dates, the use of capitals, underlining, bold, fonts, headings used consistently? • Do headings match the content beneath them?
Language	<p>Is there evidence of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive, action & success orientated language, e.g. proactive, led, re-focused, overcame, aligned, transformed, creating, resulting in, progressing, demonstrating, etc. • Avoid words that have negative inferences, e.g. however, damaged, cut, slashed, merely, mistake, failed, etc. • Avoid the use of 'I' in the CV although it is ok in the cover letter • Do you get the point / message early on in a sentence or only work it out at the end? • Are there too many words being used, e.g. 20+ in a sentence? • Are outcomes, profit, and time scales clearly mentioned?
Spelling & Flow	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poor spelling, repetition or inaccurate language use in your own CV – your best sales document – does not demonstrate attention to detail or good communication
Powerful Impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Having read the CV: what level within the organization could you see this person working? Is this consistent with the aspired job? • Reviewing the last 3–5 years is there a clear accumulation of responsibility that relates well to the new role? • Are complex technical, people & business challenges addressed? Compared to peers is over achievement demonstrated? • Memorable? Without looking at the CV, after the first read how easy is it for you to say what the critical contributions are? • Can you picture this person in your mind? How would you describe them? What: management style; problem solving approach; interpersonal skills; personal qualities; communication ability; strategic thinking; technical aptitude; customer skills; strengths & weaknesses, etc. do you think they have? Does this fit the role?
Social Agility	<p>Recruiters are looking for a 'well rounded' person able to work at all levels creating meaningful relationships.</p>

17 More questions?

More questions?
"Google can bring you back 100,000 answers.
A librarian can bring you back the right one."
Neil Gaiman

Frequently asked questions

Understandably this e-book cannot answer every question that you may have however, feel free to post your questions and review answers [here](#). Lots of things are mysteries. However that doesn't mean there isn't an answer to them.



18 Conclusion

"It's not so much that we're afraid of change,
or so in love with the old days, but it's that place in between
we fear...its like being in between trapezes."
Marilyn Ferguson

Job-hunting is a disruptive experience. It is the point between the familiar past and the novel future. Hanging between these two states for a protracted period of time, like being between trapeze bars, can be very uncomfortable. You will reach the other side, it is only a question of time.

This e-book has been written to emphasize how you can effectively position yourself with the employer by adopting uncommon thinking practices. It is not a book focusing upon how to differentiate yourself compared to your competitors by using buzzwords or fad layouts. There is enough mediocrity in the world. Your challenge is to draw the line between the needs of the business, its social purpose and your added value.

This is the brave new world of management. The old way of thinking that work is a binary arrangement of linking skills to needs to get the job done is too basic. By working with others and holding onto the advice presented here you will find interesting ways to craft your story. I wish you every success in the management of your career progression.

Feedback

Learning doesn't occur within a vacuum, I would love to have your feedback on what you have tried and your experiences of it. Also, you may have personal challenges not covered in this e-book. Please contact peter@careersynergy.com or post a question via www.careersynergy.com

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19 Appendix examples

"We learn by example and by direct experience because there are real limits to the adequacy of verbal instruction."
Malcolm Gladwell

Worked examples of cover letters and CVs are listed below and additional download options are accessible [here](#). You will need to adjust these templates to find your authentic voice and meet the employer's needs with your own configuration of information. The two key CV formats are:

- **Recruiters' preferred CV:** This is the most frequently used CV format as it presents information in a familiar manner to recruiters. The positioning of your education may vary based upon your work experience and the preferences of the employer.
- **Functional or skills CV:** This is a popular format for people who have gaps or are seeking to make a career switch. Success in this format is highly dependent upon spotting the relevant competency headings sought by the employer.

Additional online CV templates

To make life just a bit easier you can find word document templates for: management consultancy; finance; energy; manufacturing; IT, etc. etc. at www.careersynergy.com Go there now and download a document that most closely fits your needs or review the frequently asked questions section.

- Recruiters' Preferred CV Format -

Jane Smith (Spanish: EU National)

jsmith@gmail.com Mob. 07777 888 88 839 Windmill Hill, Battle, E.Sussex, AB4 1NS.

LinkedIn Profile: www.linkedin.com/profile

[NB Date of birth is unnecessary and illegal in the UK. Photos may be used rarely – see FAQs]

Profile

[3–5 lines in length]

Education & Professional Qualifications [*Languages can also go here or after Education depending upon relevance to the role.*]

2013–2015	MBA completion in Jan 2015. XXX Business School ranked XX FT, 2014
2000	CEng: Chartered Engineer British Engineering Council
1994–1997	2:1 [<i>or GPA</i>] BSc (Hons) Mathematics XXX University ranked XX University Guide Dissertation topic – <i>if directly relevant.</i>
1991–1993	3 A-levels [<i>or equivalent</i>] (A,B,C) <i>Use if relevant, good or you have little work experience.</i>

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Professional Experience *[Most recent first]***Job Title** **Company name:** Market share, ranking in niche, T/O **Country****2008–2013**

- Achievement 1 *[Prioritise the presenting order of your most relevant achievements.]*
- Achievement 2 *[You are likely to have more achievements in your most]*
- Achievement 3 *[recent job. Depending on whether you are creating]*
- Achievement 4 *[a 1 or 2 page CV these will vary in length from 2–4 lines.]*

Job Title **Company & ranking** **Country****Dates**

- Achievement
- Achievement
- Achievement

*[Less significant earlier jobs will have fewer achievements.]***Position** **Company & ranking** **Country****Dates**

- Achievement
- Achievement

Awards, Professional Memberships & Interests*[If you gained an award be explicit about what it was for, e.g. showing leadership potential.]*

If you raised money for charity how much did you raise? If you were a club secretary what achievement did you facilitate? Keep it short but have something to say here of interest. If you have a hobby share what makes you passionate about it – you can have 1–2 lines here for your interests but don't get carried away. Work experience is more important.]

- Functional Or Skills CV Format -**Jane Smith** (Spanish: EU National)

jsmith@gmail.com Mob. 07777 888 888 39 Wind Hill, Battle, E.Sussex, AB4 1NS.

LinkedIn Profile: www.linkedin.com/profile

Profile. *[Much more relevant to a functional CV. However, it must be very well written, summing up accurately and succinctly what your USP and other highly desirable qualities are. 5–6 lines]*

Functional Experience**Business Development**

- Achievement
- Achievement *[Depending on whether you are creating a 1 or 2 page]*
- Achievement *[CV these achievements will vary in length from 2–4 lines.]*

Operations Management

- Achievement
- Achievement
- Achievement

Leadership

- Achievement
- Achievement
- Achievement

Career History

Dates (years)	Company & Country		Job Title
2009–2013	xxxx	UK	xxx
2007–2009	xxxx	USA	xxx
2006–2007	xxx	China	xxx

[List key employment details very briefly. No job description necessary]

Relevant Qualifications & Languages *[This section could be placed after your profile especially if your work experience is light.]*

2013–2015	MBA completion in Jan 2015. XXX Business School ranked XX FT, 2014
2000	CEng: Chartered Engineer British Engineering Council
1994–1997	2:1 [or GPA] BSc (Hons) Mathematics XXX University ranked XX University Guide Dissertation topic – if directly relevant.
1991–1993	3 A-levels [or equivalent] (A,B,C) <i>[Use if relevant, good or you have little work experience.]</i>

Awards, Professional Memberships & Interests

[If you gained an award be explicit about what it was for, e.g. showing leadership potential. If you raised money for charity how much did you raise? If you were a club secretary what achievement did you facilitate? Keep it short but have something to say here of interest. If you have a hobby share what makes you passionate about it – you can have 1–2 lines here but don't get carried away. Work experience is more important.]



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- Example Recruiter Speculative Introduction Cover Letter -**23 June 2014**

Company Name	Your name
Mr / Mrs / Ms if unclear or Miss Name	Your address
Their address	xxx
xxxx	xxx
xxxx	xxx
	Email: xxxxx
	Mobile:xxx

Re: Career Opportunities

Dear Mr xxx,

John Smith, as I understand is a former colleague of yours from McKinsey & Company, now CEO of xxx and until Feb 2013 my CEO at xxx, kindly provided me with your details and recommended that I should get in touch with you to discuss my career aspirations.

My name is xxx, I am Indian, 42 years old and a Senior Level Executive with almost 20 years of experience in progressively more responsible roles. For the last four years, I have been working as Senior Vice President and Head of Region for Asia-Pacific. During that time I built the structures and developed the business resulting in significant growth. I hold a first degree in Mechanical Engineering from the University of xxx and an MBA from xxx (UK).

My current assignment in Asia-Pacific will expire in August 2014. I do like my current role and am still passionate in further driving the business for growth. However, I have decided to start exploring options both within my company and external during the course of the next 12–18 months. My career goal is that of a CEO of a global, mid-sized company. While I am flexible with regards to the location of the job, I would have a preference for either Asia or Europe. Based on my experience, I would like to pursue opportunities in Technology related businesses such as system integration, industrial solutions, or capital goods industries. Also, I am open to either take on a CEO role immediately or over the mid-term, for instance, in the case of a CEO succession plan.

Throughout the last 15 years I have built a strong track record in developing business in existing and new markets and achieving sustainable growth. For example, during my current assignment in Asia, I was able to triple the business on both top and bottom line in less than four years. Moreover, I have proven my leadership capabilities in different business situations, whether it was start-ups, turnarounds or rapidly growing businesses and in various countries. In order to be agile and have rapid success, I drove the formation of management teams and built quick engagement, coaching and mentoring for personal growth. Lastly, I have demonstrated my capabilities in strategic planning in different business situations and for various markets, such as for Asia, Europe or the US.

May I introduce myself in person and share more about my past and future plans during the next couple of weeks? We could either meet in Beijing or Shanghai. Please kindly let me know your availability and preference.

I look forward to meeting with you.

Yours sincerely,

Name

CV attached