

**Jon Sample**  
**Accounting competency assessment**  
**180° feedback report**

**Saturday, January 26, 2002**

# Introduction

The following information is provided to help you to navigate the extensive information that is included in this Accounting competency assessment output report.

## 1. Overall summary chart

The summary results chart provides a quick visual representation of your scores in seven categories that make up the Accounting competency assessment profile. Scores upon which to most concentrate are above 3.5, which are considered to be strong and scores below 2.75, which may be in need of further development. Please note that these category scores are averages. Individual question scores can be viewed by clicking on the category label hyperlink.

## 2. Category description pages

This report contains three output pages for each of the seven categories. The first of these three pages explains the category, list average scores and then provides high and low score interpretation notes. The second page provides a graphical representation of individual question scores. The third page in the set provides broadly based improvement actions for those individuals wanting to develop their competencies in the overall category.

## 3. 10/10 Report

The 10/10 Report page provides the raw scores for the top 10 highest scoring questions and the bottom 10 lowest scoring questions out of the 36. It also identifies the categories to which these questions belong.

## 4. Course and Reading suggestions

This output report includes development suggestions for the two lowest scoring categories out of the 6. These suggestions include training courses that may prove helpful, as well as specific books that may provide some useful additional information.

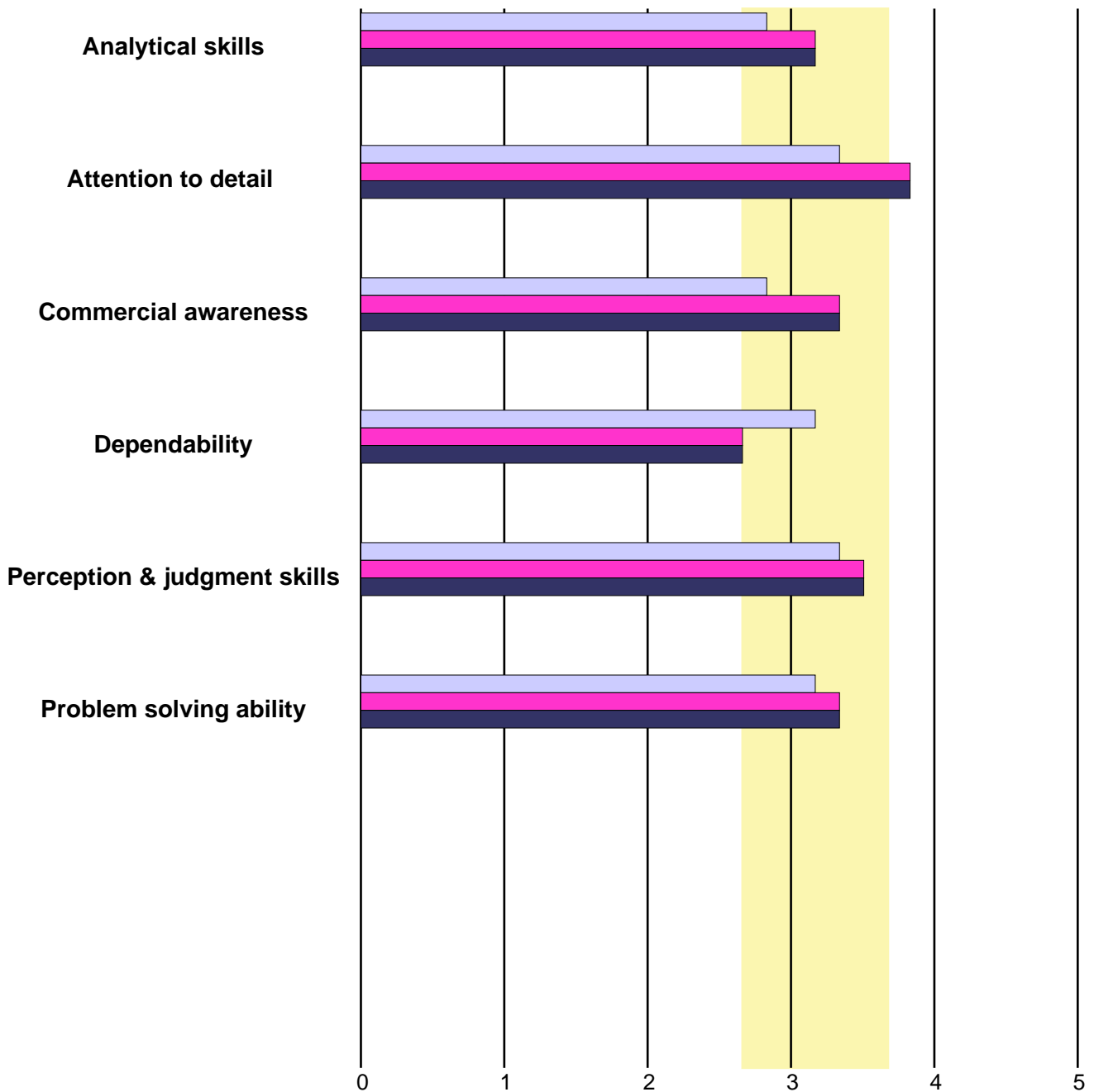
## 5. Development Plan

The development plan takes the five lowest scoring questions on aggregate and puts them into a single page template for individuals to record the specific actions that they plan to take as a result of their feedback during the forthcoming twelve month period. Individuals may draw upon any of the general guidance offered in their feedback report, or perhaps more usefully, draw upon the coaching tips ideas that are also included (see next section)

## 6. Coaching tips

The overall output report includes detailed coaching tips for the five lowest scoring questions on aggregate (consistent with the one page development plan). These coaching tips provide not only elaborative information about the particular questions but provide some specific advice on what individuals might do to improve their skills or learn new behaviors in the future.

## OVERALL SUMMARY



Self Supervisor Norm

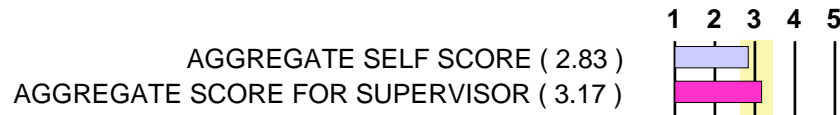
The above chart is sorted in descending order of gaps. The gap is the difference between your summary score and the average of those that rated you.

Norm bars shown on this chart are the progressive average aggregate scores of all team leaders rating individuals on this questionnaire.

## ANALYTICAL SKILLS

Analytical skills looks at your ability to evaluate large or complex situations in a logical and systematic way and to identify the most critical issues and factors that need to be dealt with. This category asks the question "To what extent do rapidly identify significant information through the use of a careful and structured analysis approach?"

1 = almost never, 5 = almost always.



### Interpretation

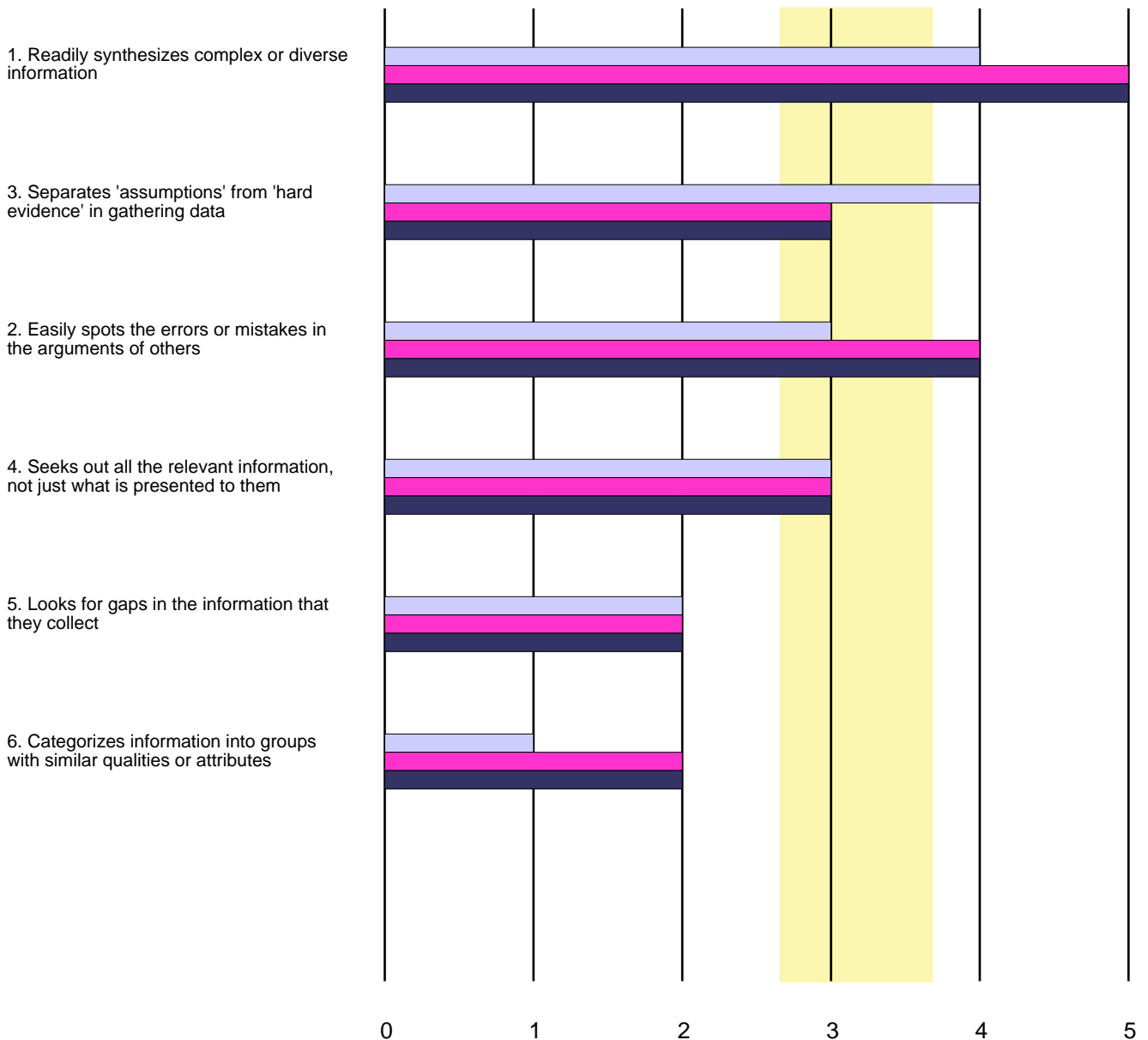
#### LOW (less than 2.75)

Scales predominantly in the ones and twos ('occasionally' and 'almost never') are likely to mean that this individual gives too little scrutiny to the facts, figures or opinions that are presented to them. They may therefore often fail to spot gaps in any available data and consequently make too many decisions based on guesswork. A low score person will be likely to take a lot of information or opinions that they encounter at face value and spend too little time in 'digging a little deeper' (through asking questions and carefully evaluating what they see and hear).

#### HIGH (greater than 3.5)

Scales predominantly in the fours and fives ('almost always' and 'very frequently') are likely to mean that this individual will look to apply systematic analysis to any situation or issues which they feel are likely to be in need of greater scrutiny in order to reveal deeper or better answers. This includes analyzing the base validity of any data or assumptions carefully before making any firm decisions. A high score person will be likely to look at the information that is presented to them and make sure that they fully understand the relevance and importance of each key component (including any patterns or relationships between facts or opinions that may exist). If used well, this close scrutiny can be used to improve the quality of overall decision making.

## ANALYTICAL SKILLS



■ Self     
 ■ Supervisor     
 ■ Norm

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### Improvement actions

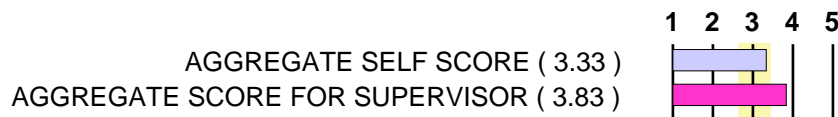
Low scorers need to take more time to assess important or complex information that is presented to them and make sure that they have carefully evaluated it in a logical and systematic way (including taking notes or making calculations where this will help to reveal a better understanding and lead to high quality decisions).

<p><b>Analytical skills</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Spend more time gathering background data and extra information where it will enhance your understanding of the subject matter. Look to sort or categorize any information you collect for ease of analysis.</li> <li>- Mentally look for errors and mistakes in the arguments or points that are put forward by others (and do not take any important information at 'face value')</li> <li>- Take a little more time to research data that has been presented to you - ask more probing questions and think about the underlying issues and potential consequences that it may have.</li> <li>- Evaluate each piece of information that you encounter. Assess its validity and importance by looking at where it came from, the assumptions that were made and any adjustments that may have occurred.</li> <li>- Make a habit of taking notes when you encounter important or complex information so that you can reflect upon it accurately.</li> </ul>
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## ATTENTION TO DETAIL

Attention to detail looks at your ability to manage the work of yourself and others to ensure that it is fit for purpose and free from error. This category asks the question "To what extent do you try to create high levels of accuracy in your work and make sure that smaller or apparently less significant (but important) requirements are not forgotten?"

1 = almost never, 5 = almost always.



### Interpretation

#### LOW (less than 2.75)

Scales predominantly in the ones and twos ('occasionally' and 'almost never') are likely to mean that this individual often produces work without looking at the original objective or goal. This may lead to data gaps, conflicting information and omissions and can leave them open to challenge from others. They may also adopt a "near enough is good enough" approach when it is not appropriate to do so.

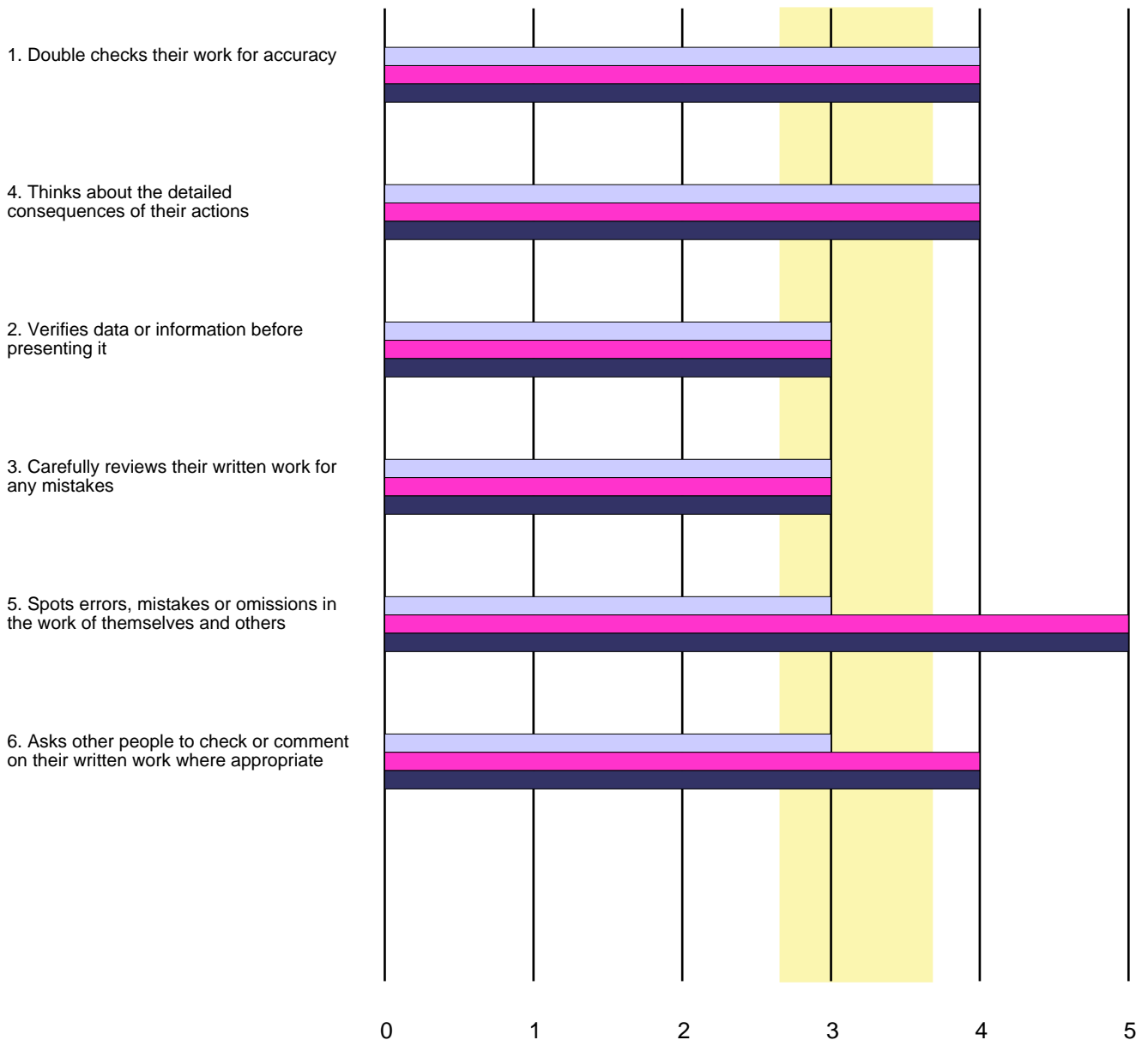
A low score person will be likely to often skip the opportunity to check work (of themselves and others) for mistakes or errors and present information without thinking about the possible reaction that other people may have.

#### HIGH (greater than 3.5)

Scales predominantly in the fours and fives ('almost always' and 'very frequently') are likely to mean that this individual is highly conscious of the need for accuracy and completeness in the work of themselves and others. As a result they will look to carefully verify any information that they present and make doubly sure that they check for errors (or ask others to do this for them).

A high score person will be likely to spend reasonable amounts of time in checking their work for any obvious confusions or omissions, as well as proofing written documents for mistakes and making sure that the task or project for which they are responsible is completed efficiently and effectively.

## ATTENTION TO DETAIL



■ Self     
 ■ Supervisor     
 ■ Norm

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### Improvement actions

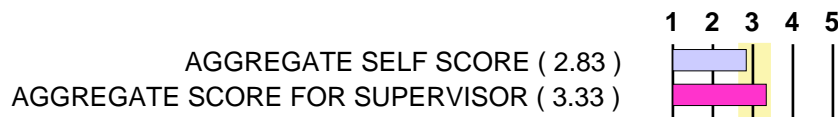
Low scorers need to take more time to check any gaps or errors in any of the work for which they are responsible (individually or collectively). If this is not a natural capability they should either slow down further or ask others to help them check work so as to eliminate mistakes and tie up as many loose ends as possible.

<b>Attention to detail</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Aim to be a role model for others by being serious about accuracy in all of your work.</li><li>- Wherever time is squeezed, make a habit of asking others to check any work for accuracy and completeness (and offer to do the same for them).</li><li>- Always look to verify any information or data for which you or the team is responsible. Check the underlying assumptions that have been made and any implications that it may have in the future.</li><li>- Think about any detailed tasks or actions that need to be done and take the time to follow through and complete them.</li><li>- Build time into your schedule to check all of the work that you produce to ensure that it is accurate and free from error.</li></ul>
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## COMMERCIAL AWARENESS

Commercial awareness looks at the extent to which this individual looks to build long-term value by tackling their business responsibilities in a highly focused, customer driven, and well-controlled way. This category asks the question "How effectively and efficiently does this person ensure that commercial value is created and maintained for both the customer and for the organization?"

1 = almost never, 5 = almost always.



### Interpretation

#### LOW (less than 2.75)

Scales predominantly in the ones and twos ('occasionally' and 'almost never') are likely mean that you spend insufficient time on looking at whether the actions of yourself or your colleagues around you are truly adding value to the organization in a real, tangible and measurable way. This means that you may tolerate ordinary poor 'mediocre' performance more than you should and even opt for short-term benefits at the expense of longer term gains.

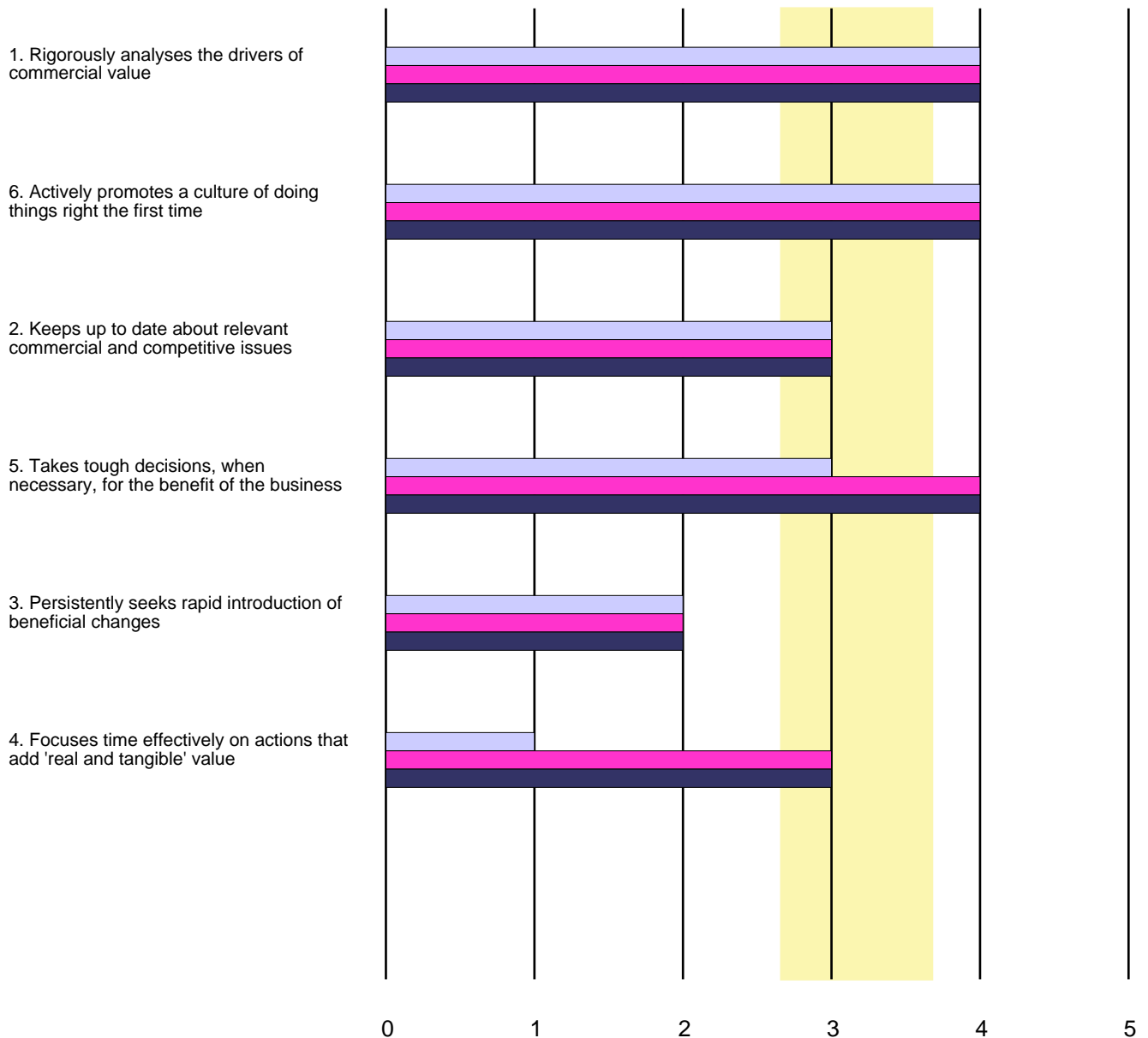
A low score person will be likely to tackle their day to day tasks and actions 'as they come' without evaluation, including spending too much time and resources on what may later prove to be wasted effort, or low commercial benefit. Little or no analysis or prioritization of those opportunities that can create substantial long-term value is therefore carried out.

#### HIGH (greater than 3.5)

Scales predominantly in the fours and fives ('almost always' and 'very frequently') are likely to mean that you spend a considerable amount of time and energy in looking to add value in almost everything you do on a day to day basis. This means you fully appreciate the processes, behavior and actions that can enhance long term organizational value and try to take the 'right' decisions that will deliver the best results as often as possible.

A high score person will be likely to think analytically about the strengths and opportunities that could drive increased future commercial value, as well as actively guard against those potential weaknesses and threats that could have a negative impact if not anticipated and managed carefully.

## COMMERCIAL AWARENESS



■ Self    
 ■ Supervisor    
 ■ Norm

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## COMMERCIAL AWARENESS

Commercial awareness looks at the extent to which this individual looks to build long-term value by tackling their business responsibilities in a highly focused, customer driven, and well-controlled way. This category asks the question "How effectively and efficiently does this person ensure that commercial value is created and maintained for both the customer and for the organization?"

### Improvement actions

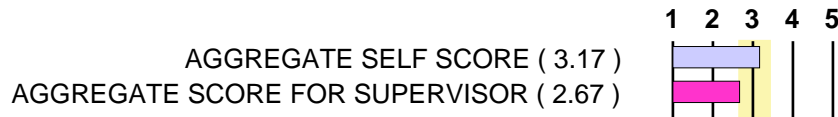
Low scorers need to invest more time in carefully reviewing their efforts and determining what is making a low, medium and high contribution to the organization in terms of long term value. This analysis can be used to take some hard decisions about the structure and content of the work that should be performed. This should ideally include the actions that might be taken to leverage better performance from existing assets or to create new commercial value altogether as a result of fresh initiatives that are aligned with the overall strategic direction of the business.

<p><b>Commercial awareness</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Identify one key process in your work area that could be improved by technology and develop a plan to describe how this might be brought about.</li> <li>-Evaluate where the greatest potential wasted effort and re-work occurs in your work area and what impact this may have on the organization and on customers.</li> <li>-Develop a range of standard questions that can be asked to test the sensitivity of reduced revenues or higher expenses than forecast and look to see what fallback positions or contingencies are in place if projects do not go entirely to plan.</li> <li>-Take time to read about or learn one or more risk evaluation methods in order to apply a rigorous risk evaluation approach more regularly to major decisions.</li> <li>-Analyze your job or role and list those areas that make the most profit contribution in rank order and how the might be optimized in the future.</li> </ul>
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## DEPENDABILITY

Dependability looks at your ability to be seen as reliable, steady, responsible and committed in relation to everything you do for yourself and others. This category asks the question "To what extent do people see you as someone upon whom they can rely and trust to meet their commitments and follow through?"

1 = almost never, 5 = almost always.



### Interpretation

#### LOW (less than 2.75)

Scales predominantly in the ones and twos ('occasionally' and 'almost never') are likely to mean that this individual has little or no personal commitment to being consistent in their words or their actions, and even avoids taking any responsibility if others are quicker to volunteer to take it on first.

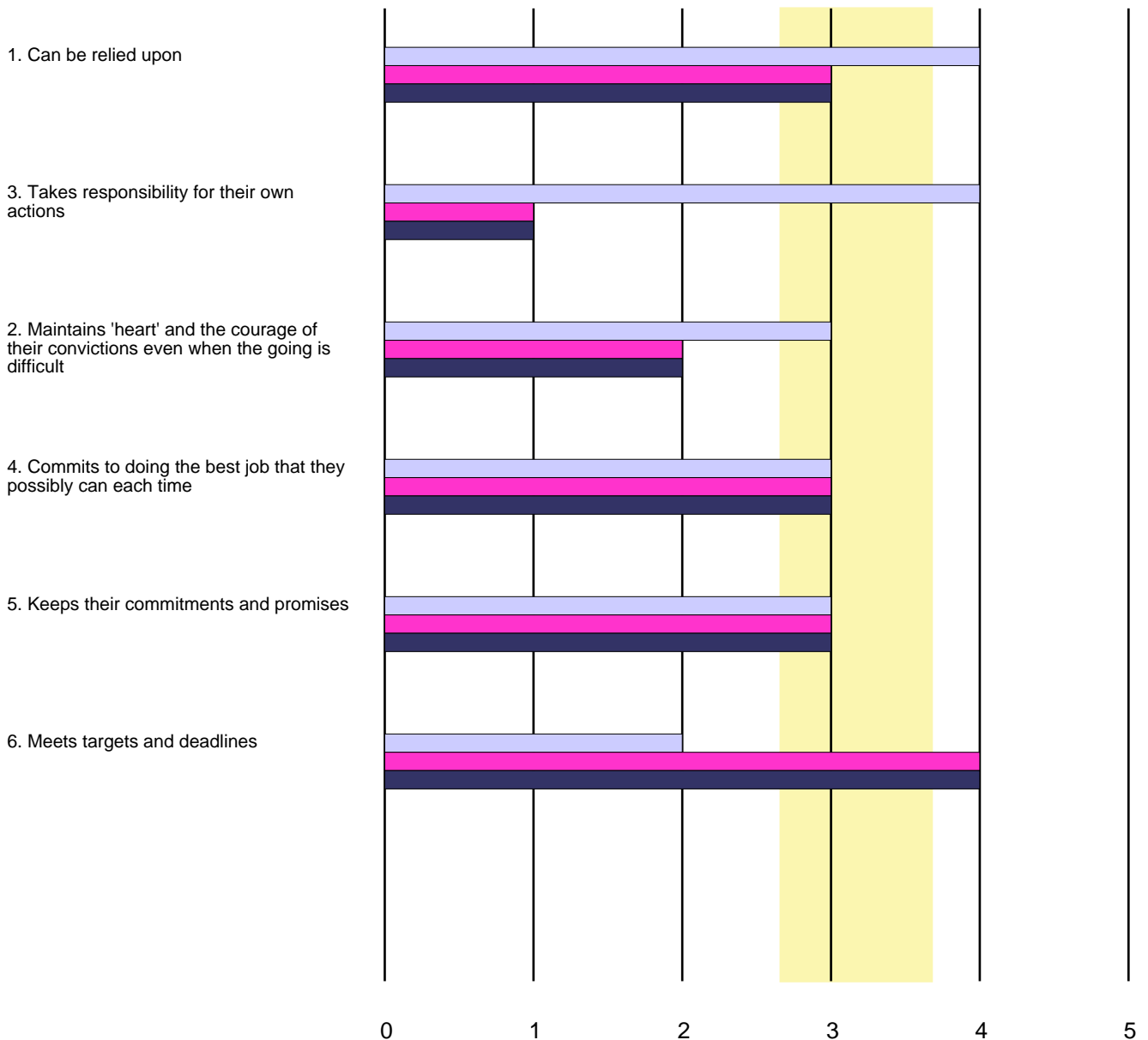
A low score person will be likely to be relatively self-interested and even fickle in their general behavior, seeing no major problem with changing their mind or failing to keep commitments from time to time (particularly when they can find situations or circumstances that can justify their actions).

#### HIGH (greater than 3.5)

Scales predominantly in the fours and fives ('almost always' and 'very frequently') are likely to mean that this individual has a high personal commitment to being consistent and reliable in everything that they do. This typically involves not only being positively true to themselves but also means ensuring that their reputation for dependability is communicated widely to others.

A high score person will be likely to carefully make sure that their deeds match their words as much as possible. In addition, they are likely to regularly go above and beyond what is expected of them in order to meet a personal promise or commitment.

## DEPENDABILITY



■ Self     
 ■ Supervisor     
 ■ Norm

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### Improvement actions

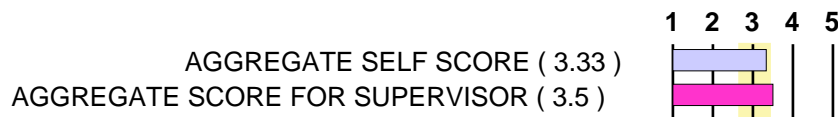
Low scorers need to recognize that other people expect high levels of consistency between words and actions in order to see someone as reliable or dependable. In addition, they need to think more deeply about the consequences of their commitments and promises and make sure that they do not lose conviction or 'heart' along the way because the circumstances have shifted or changed a little.

<b>Dependability</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>-Keep all your commitments to targets and deadlines constantly in your mind and let people know openly if you are going to fall short despite your best efforts.</li><li>-Aim to do your best in all circumstances when you are asked to do something by another person and always avoid cutting corners or missing out parts of the job.</li><li>-Only make promises and commitments to others when you know that you can follow through and deliver without distraction.</li><li>-Think about any personal commitments to do something carefully first and then plan to work as hard as necessary to meet the goal or the target as necessary.</li></ul>
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## PERCEPTION & JUDGMENT SKILLS

Perception and judgment skills looks at the extent to which you effectively synthesize what you see, hear or sense in order to form a clear view of what may be viable and practical as a cause of action. This category asks the question "How well do you assimilate information and interpret what you experience to make good sense of it to make a decision?"

1 = almost never, 5 = almost always.



### Interpretation

#### LOW (less than 2.75)

Scales predominantly in the ones and twos ('occasionally' and 'almost never') are likely mean that this individual may consider issues at a relatively 'shallow' level and ignore clear fallacies, bias or flaws in arguments and suggestions, when they occur. They are also likely to be overly 'closed minded' on some issues and spend too little time in looking for true meaning or significance.

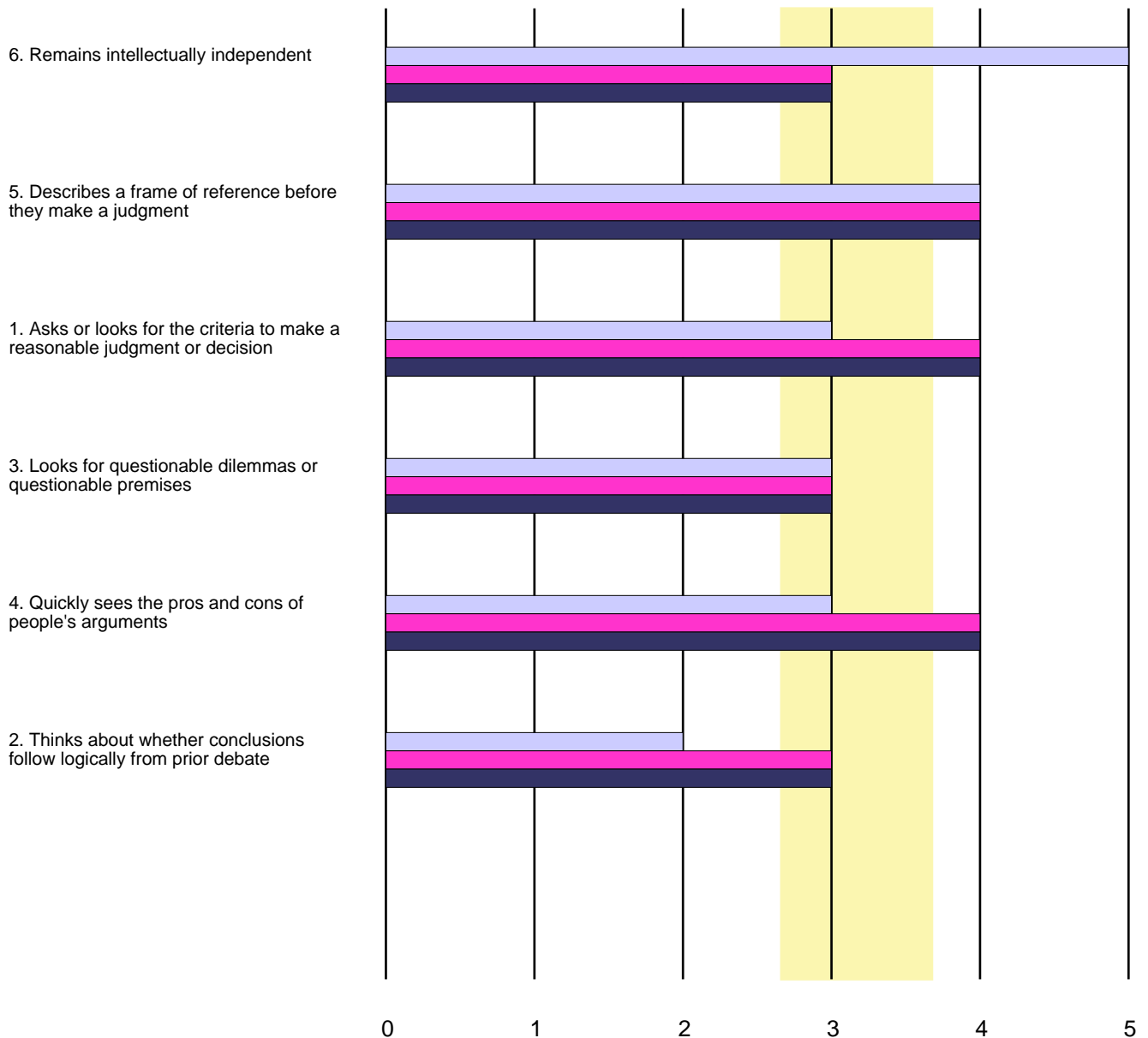
A low score person will be likely to find it difficult to 'sift' or interpret what they sense or experience, to separate the relevant from the irrelevant and fact from fiction. As a result, low scorers may too readily accept 'questionable' information or fail to discard some of what they see or hear on the grounds that it is likely to be logically false or exaggerated.

#### HIGH (greater than 3.5)

Scales predominantly in the fours and fives ('almost always' and 'very frequently') are likely to mean that this individual carefully appraises what they experience with all of their senses and creates meaning and significance for themselves after considered reflection. They are also likely to assimilate information quickly and to link ideas or spot flaws or fallacies quickly.

A high score person will be likely to make as independent assessment as possible about what they sense or experience, to determine whether the information is consistent, useful and credible. To do this they may often question what they see and hear and also check to make sure that their judgment is not 'clouded' by bias or possible error.

## PERCEPTION & JUDGMENT SKILLS



■ Self     
 ■ Supervisor     
 ■ Norm

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### Improvement actions

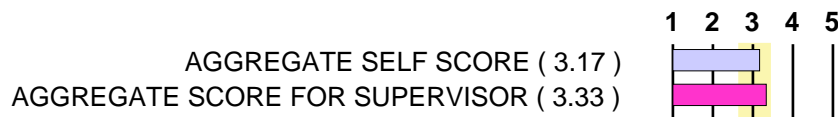
Low scorers need to deeply question what they experience or perceive more often, and look at different ways in which information could be offered and interpreted. They should look harder for poor assumptions and arguments that do not follow, and avoid sitting on the fence about an issue or a situation - they need to make their own judgment.

<b>Perception &amp; judgment skills</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>-Avoid making hasty assessments or arriving at the easiest or most convenient conclusions when the issue matters or is important.</li><li>-Evaluate the reasoning processes that have been used to reach particular conclusions and ask whether they have been sound, reasonable and comprehensive.</li><li>-Look to generate two or three different ways in which you could interpret what you experience.</li><li>-Think longer and harder about the alternatives presented to you</li></ul>
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## PROBLEM SOLVING ABILITY

Problem solving ability looks at your skills in finding appropriate methods and means to analyze people's concerns or situations and to suggest potential avenues to explore that may provide a solution. This category asks the question "How well do you provide people with a useful contextual framework to think about their problems and issues and guide them towards possible answers?"

1 = almost never, 5 = almost always.



### Interpretation

#### LOW (less than 2.75)

Scales predominantly in the ones and twos ('occasionally' and 'almost never') are likely mean that this individual rarely offers creative problem solving or problem analysis tools, techniques and methods when coaching individuals. They may also let individuals tolerate constraining rules or boundaries that inhibit their capacity to find a better solution or general way forward.

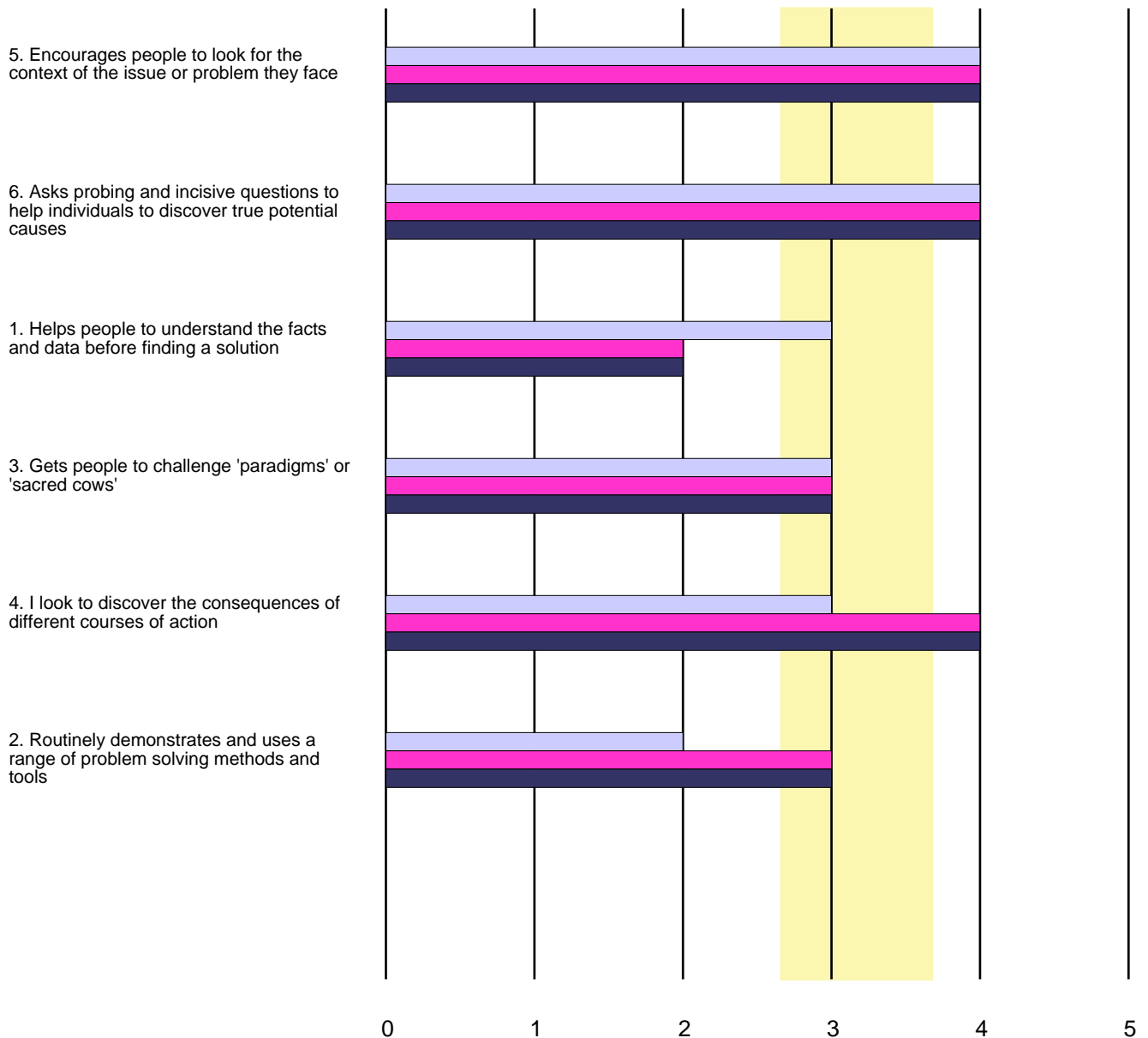
A low score person will be likely to have limited means to help people to look rigorously at the situations or circumstances that they face and (through careful sifting and analysis) to come up with possible future solutions. They may also be seen to lack knowledge or appropriate understanding to suggest the application of useful problem solving tools or approaches that may give new insights, or create a different contextual framework for a problem to be dealt with.

#### HIGH (greater than 3.5)

Scales predominantly in the fours and fives ('almost always' and 'very frequently') are likely to mean that this individual encourages individuals to use different ways of looking at problems or issues and a range of different tools of analysis that they may use. They also will encourage them to generate several possible solutions and to carefully evaluate the best one, based on the evidence, to provide the best possible course of future action.

A high score person will be likely to be seen as appropriately knowledgeable and understanding of a range of problem solving approaches and capable of suggesting the most appropriate of these when the circumstances are right to do so.

## PROBLEM SOLVING ABILITY



■ Self    
 ■ Supervisor    
 ■ Norm

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## PROBLEM SOLVING ABILITY

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### Improvement actions

Low scorers need to research a range of problem solving methods that can be usefully suggested when seeking to assist other people. They can also adopt a more incisive questioning approach and get people to look at their problems in new contexts or from different angles as often as possible.

<b>Problem solving ability</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>-Help individuals to broaden their horizons when looking to solve complex issues by getting them to think outside their most immediate or familiar experience.</li><li>-Encourage people to challenge any fixed thinking paradigms that they might hold or things that they see to be 'sacred cows" when this may not be the case.</li><li>-Guide people towards challenging their assumptions and even the supposed inevitability of some of the outcomes they foresee.</li><li>-Suggest tools and methods that might help their problem or issue analysis process.</li><li>-Find ways to help people to concentrate on facts that they might have missed</li></ul>
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# THE '10/10' REPORT

## Top 10 strengths according to supervisor

		Self	Sup	coll.
Analytical skills	1. Readily synthesizes complex or diverse information	4.0	5.0	N/A
Attention to detail	17. Spots errors, mistakes or omissions in the work of themselves and others	3.0	5.0	N/A
Analytical skills	2. Easily spots the errors or mistakes in the arguments of others	3.0	4.0	N/A
Problem solving ability	10. I look to discover the consequences of different courses of action	3.0	4.0	N/A
Problem solving ability	11. Encourages people to look for the context of the issue or problem they face	4.0	4.0	N/A
Attention to detail	13. Double checks their work for accuracy	4.0	4.0	N/A
Attention to detail	16. Thinks about the detailed consequences of their actions	4.0	4.0	N/A
Attention to detail	18. Asks other people to check or comment on their written work where appropriate	3.0	4.0	N/A
Dependability	24. Meets targets and deadlines	2.0	4.0	N/A
Perception & judgment skills	25. Asks or looks for the criteria to make a reasonable judgment or decision	3.0	4.0	N/A

## Top 10 development needs according to supervisor

		Self	Sup	coll.
Dependability	21. Takes responsibility for their own actions	4.0	1.0	N/A
Analytical skills	5. Looks for gaps in the information that they collect	2.0	2.0	N/A
Analytical skills	6. Categorizes information into groups with similar qualities or attributes	1.0	2.0	N/A
Problem solving ability	7. Helps people to understand the facts and data before finding a solution	3.0	2.0	N/A
Dependability	20. Maintains 'heart' and the courage of their convictions even when the going is difficult	3.0	2.0	N/A
Commercial awareness	33. Persistently seeks rapid introduction of beneficial changes	2.0	2.0	N/A
Analytical skills	3. Separates 'assumptions' from 'hard evidence' in gathering data	4.0	3.0	N/A
Analytical skills	4. Seeks out all the relevant information, not just what is presented to them	3.0	3.0	N/A
Problem solving ability	8. Routinely demonstrates and uses a range of problem solving methods and tools	2.0	3.0	N/A
Problem solving ability	9. Gets people to challenge 'paradigms' or 'sacred cows'	3.0	3.0	N/A

## Top 10 strengths according to self

		Self	Sup	coll.
Perception & judgment skills	30. Remains intellectually independent	5.0	3.0	N/A
Analytical skills	1. Readily synthesizes complex or diverse information	4.0	5.0	N/A
Analytical skills	3. Separates 'assumptions' from 'hard evidence' in gathering data	4.0	3.0	N/A
Problem solving ability	11. Encourages people to look for the context of the issue or problem they face	4.0	4.0	N/A
Attention to detail	13. Double checks their work for accuracy	4.0	4.0	N/A
Attention to detail	16. Thinks about the detailed consequences of their actions	4.0	4.0	N/A
Dependability	19. Can be relied upon	4.0	3.0	N/A
Dependability	21. Takes responsibility for their own actions	4.0	1.0	N/A
Perception & judgment skills	29. Describes a frame of reference before they make a judgment	4.0	4.0	N/A
Commercial awareness	31. Rigorously analyses the drivers of commercial value	4.0	4.0	N/A

## Top 10 development needs according to self

		Self	Sup	coll.
Analytical skills	6. Categorizes information into groups with similar qualities or attributes	1.0	2.0	N/A
Commercial awareness	34. Focuses time effectively on actions that add 'real and tangible' value	1.0	3.0	N/A
Analytical skills	5. Looks for gaps in the information that they collect	2.0	2.0	N/A
Problem solving ability	8. Routinely demonstrates and uses a range of problem solving methods and tools	2.0	3.0	N/A
Dependability	24. Meets targets and deadlines	2.0	4.0	N/A
Perception & judgment skills	26. Thinks about whether conclusions follow logically from prior debate	2.0	3.0	N/A
Commercial awareness	33. Persistently seeks rapid introduction of beneficial changes	2.0	2.0	N/A
Analytical skills	2. Easily spots the errors or mistakes in the arguments of others	3.0	4.0	N/A
Analytical skills	4. Seeks out all the relevant information, not just what is presented to them	3.0	3.0	N/A
Problem solving ability	7. Helps people to understand the facts and data before finding a solution	3.0	2.0	N/A

## **CATEGORIES IN GREATEST NEED OF IMPROVEMENT EFFORT**

This category has emerged as the lowest scoring in terms of the questionnaire responses that were entered. As such, it is one of the categories in greatest need of focus and attention. Please note however that your scores in these categories are relative. As a result, even though they are the lowest in overall terms, you may still have comparative strength in this area or your job role may not require these skills or behaviors to be further developed. However, if you choose to use this information to focus on some personal development activity or to assist in helping you to write your development plan, the following broad suggestions are offered to assist you (and to complement the specific coaching tips that are associated with individual questions):

### **Dependability**

**Dependability looks at your ability to be seen as reliable, steady, responsible and committed in relation to everything you do for yourself and others. This category asks the question "To what extent do people see you as someone upon whom they can rely and trust to meet their commitments and follow through?"**

### **Course Suggestions**

- Think about any personal commitments to do something carefully first and then plan to work as hard as necessary to meet the goal or the target as necessary.
- Only make promises and commitments to others when you know that you can follow through and deliver without distraction.
- Aim to do your best in all circumstances when you are asked to do something by another person and always avoid cutting corners or missing out parts of the job.
- Keep all your commitments to targets and deadlines constantly in your mind and let people know openly if you are going to fall short despite your best efforts.

## **CATEGORIES IN GREATEST NEED OF IMPROVEMENT EFFORT**

### **Analytical skills**

**Analytical skills looks at your ability to evaluate large or complex situations in a logical and systematic way and to identify the most critical issues and factors that need to be dealt with. This category asks the question "To what extent do rapidly identify significant information through the use of a careful and structured analysis approach?"**

### **Course Suggestions**

- Make a habit of taking notes when you encounter important or complex information so that you can reflect upon it accurately.
- Evaluate each piece of information that you encounter. Assess its validity and importance by looking at where it came from, the assumptions that were made and any adjustments that may have occurred.
- Take a little more time to research data that has been presented to you - ask more probing questions and think about the underlying issues and potential consequences that it may have.
- Mentally look for errors and mistakes in the arguments or points that are put forward by others (and do not take any important information at face value )
- Spend more time gathering background data and extra information where it will enhance your understanding of the subject matter. Look to sort or categorize any information you collect for ease of analysis.

## DEVELOPMENT PLAN

Use the space below to write out your personal development plan for the next 12 months based on your results. Draw upon the general improvement actions in relevant areas of the report and ideas that are suggested in the attached coaching tips.

<b>Development Area: Helps people to understand the facts and data before finding a solution</b>		3.0	2.0	N/A
Action to Take:	Target Date:			
<b>Development Area: Routinely demonstrates and uses a range of problem solving methods and tools</b>		2.0	3.0	N/A
Action to Take:	Target Date:			
<b>Development Area: Gets people to challenge 'paradigms' or 'sacred cows'</b>		3.0	3.0	N/A
Action to Take:	Target Date:			
<b>Development Area: I look to discover the consequences of different courses of action</b>		3.0	4.0	N/A
Action to Take:	Target Date:			
<b>Development Area: Encourages people to look for the context of the issue or problem they face</b>		4.0	4.0	N/A
Action to Take:	Target Date:			

## Analytical Skills

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### Readily synthesizes complex or diverse information

All the way through any formal or informal problem solving process, an individual ideally needs to adopt a process in which data, assumptions, opinions and other types of information can be filtered or assessed for relevance or pertinence to the issue at hand. This means that a problem solver has to evaluate everything that they hear and synthesize all of the various pieces of information into a coherent summary and come to the clearest conclusion possible (over time of course).

Often, the best way to evaluate or synthesize information is to adopt a systematic or structured approach in which each component can be recorded and properly analyzed on a relational basis. This is simply done by keeping good summary notes and putting any points into some kind of sequential or logical order.

Information synthesis is a harder process to make systematic or structured because it will often be done in a way that is unique to each person. However, all information needs to be collated (usually in written form to assist later recall) and the important or key 'nuggets' need to be retained to create the basis for solid and logical conclusions.

Consider the following actions to improve your overall effectiveness:

1. Keep a written record of the whole problem solving and decision making process, noting key facts, assumptions, ideas, decisions and anything else that may be pertinent.
2. Use a logical structure to assess the information gathered, putting it under logical headings or clustering similar or related issues together (you may have to design this thinking process ahead of time).
3. Try to make connections between points and issues so that you can derive new information or options arising out of the data you gather.
4. Avoid data being randomly included in your arguments, conclusions or decisions or being introduced without feeling confident about how it fits – try to either connect one piece of information with another or link it to the wider context (or else discard it altogether).



## Analytical Skills

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### **Easily spots the errors and mistakes in the arguments of others**

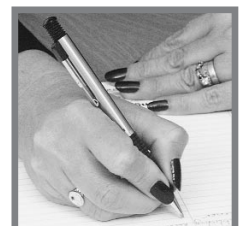
With the likelihood that many of the problems and decisions that you face will require considerable data collection and analysis, too much data is more often going to be more of a challenge rather than not enough data. As such the ability to be able to see through the clutter of information; to be able to identify the critical from the trivial; to be able to recognize the valuable and the less valuable in the information that others provide will be vital for your success as a problem solver.

Alongside this ability to sort the data that others bring forward into categories of useful and not so useful, it is the capacity to be able to analyze and evaluate the quality of the thinking that others bring to the problem solving process that is vital.

A capacity to spot errors and mistakes in the arguments of others is an additional key way of maintaining focus on the issue, of bringing real clarity and of avoiding time wasting discussion and thinking on ideas or suggestions and actions that are based on shaky or incorrect conclusions.

Consider the following actions to improve your overall effectiveness in this area:

1. Ensure that you listen to all points or arguments in a discussion carefully by concentrating at all times and focussing strongly on any complex data.
2. Make notes where appropriate to help keep track of the facts and opinions that are offered and to help identify questionable information that may need to be challenged.
3. Ask questions to clarify, define and elaborate points that appear to be wrong or fly in the face of other facts or evidence relevant to the issue.
4. Maintain a 'healthy' disrespect for information presented as proven fact. In other words, when in doubt about the accuracy of any point or statement, ask the individual to confirm "How do they know for sure?"



## Analytical Skills

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### **Separates 'assumptions' from 'hard evidence' in gathering data**

As the saying goes, “Assumptions are the mother of all stuff ups” and yet our thinking is riddled with them. All of us have probably experienced frustration in communication because someone had “assumed” information... “Assumed” that the arrangements would be the same as last week; “Assumed” that the time would be the same or “assumed” that everyone understood etc., etc. While this kind of confusion is irritating and frustrating it is usually not as costly as making a decision or solving a problem based on unchallenged assumptions

Since we will be rarely in possession of every piece of relevant information as we attempt to resolve issues, the temptation is to complete the gaps in our data by filling these ‘data holes’ with half complete or speculative information based on assumptions; sometimes quite reasonable assumptions but assumptions nevertheless.

The danger is that the pieces of data based on assumptions can often take on “hard evidence” status if they are not sorted and classified and clearly marked to remind us. If we resolve the issue relying on the assumed evidence then the level of risk has probably increased considerably. This may be something that we can or have to live with because of other factors but we should at least be fully aware of taking this course.

Some suggestions for enhancing performance in this area are as follows:

1. Use a visual method to display data as it is gathered and mark assumptions or loose and untested data versus hard or intangible evidence with different colored stickers or some other method graphically distinguishing these 2 categories of data.
2. Develop a checklist of criteria in order to verify if the data can be classified as “hard evidence”.
3. Work through the “assumptions” list to see if further investigation might enable information to be reclassified as factual evidence or information.
4. For all pieces of data based on assumption or calculated guesses mark these with an “R” to clearly convey that an element of risk surrounds actions based on this information.
5. When looking at solutions, check to see how dependent your decisions are on assumptions and generalizations as opposed to hard facts and evidence. If they are too dependent upon the former, you may want to gather more hard data.



## Analytical Skills

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### **Seeks out all the relevant information, not just what is presented to them**

Complex issues will often require the analysis of large amounts of information some or most of which may have been gathered by others. It may also be that without clear and specific guidance some of this information may not be reliable or at least be open to some doubt. It may be inaccurate, may be based on invalid assumptions or may be unrelated to the key aspects of the problem, etc. To rely solely on such information would clearly be unwise.

One of the real benefits of using a more structured and systematic data gathering process is that it can provide a standard checklist of questions to ask and areas to investigate. Using such an approach allows you to quickly identify gaps in the information that is presented to you so that you can seek out further data or verify existing data.

Everyone comes with their own biases and prejudices of various sorts and data collected by others needs to be considered in the light of a whole range of factors that could distort (intentionally or unintentionally) the way the problem is viewed and acted upon. Consequently being able to question rigorously the information presented by others in ways that expose gaps and assumptions is the mark of a skilled problem solver.

Some suggestions for enhancing your performance in this area:

1. Set your self to be a proactive data seeker not merely a passive receiver of data from others – this involves having a curious disposition, asking lots of questions and being prepared to challenge conventional wisdom.
2. Progressively develop your own checklist of areas for data collection and use this as the basis for determining when you have enough data – utilize simple probing questions at first like how, why, what, where, who and when.
3. Investigate some of the generic problem analysis processes and modify them to suit your own needs. Use this as your basis for data seeking.
4. Give specific data gathering briefs to those collecting data for you so that the criteria by which data should be sought and presented is consistent and well understood.
5. Develop a series of data testing questions to systematically assess the value of data gathered for you by others and make sure that it is as reliable as possible.



## Analytical Skills

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### Looks for gaps in information that they collect

In solving complex problems rarely will all the information be available so that we can solve the problem or make our choice with complete confidence. Add to this the time pressures that often demands issues be resolved immediately and very often it will mean that some response to your issue will need to be made with much less than 100% confidence.

In these situations, which are more likely to be the norm rather than the exception, it becomes critical to know where the data gaps are likely to be. Identifying the guesses and assumptions that could derail the resolution of your issue becomes a critical skill in the problem solving process. This does not mean that no progress is possible until these “gaps” in information have been filled with accurate data, but it does mean that you can move forward knowing more fully what and where the risks are. With these gaps and risks highlighted contingent actions can be put in place so that any risks identified can be effectively managed.

Some suggestions for developing your effectiveness in this area include:

1. Keep a record of past problem solving efforts when facing the same or similar issues or challenges and note where assumptions and gaps may have occurred in the previous problem solving efforts.
2. Don't trust your instincts only. A structured problem analysis or decision analysis process will provide an objective diagnostic list of areas to investigate and help to ensure that all bases are covered.
3. Work hard to become aware of your own biases and “blind spots” – these can often hide gaps in your thinking and may need others to point them out. This is often why group problem solving works so well – everyone can help each other out.
4. Invite someone with an entirely independent perspective to critique your thinking with a view to uncovering gaps or spotting flawed thinking.
5. Make searching for gaps an explicit step in your problem solving/decision making process. When you think you have all the information assembled add a “gap search” session to your meeting agenda.

