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Use Gap Analysis as a Career Management Tool

Are you planning a vacation? Need to attend a conference? Before you book your travel arrangements, you must know your destination. Likewise, to reach your career goals, you have to know where you're headed.

- Do you want to make a lateral move? (*Within the same company or with a different employer? Cross-functionally? Within the same industry?*)
- Are you looking to advance your career?
- Do you need to make a career change?
- Do you want to sharpen the skills needed to improve job performance or to stay up-to-date with the changing requirements of your current position?
- Are you planning to re-enter the workforce?

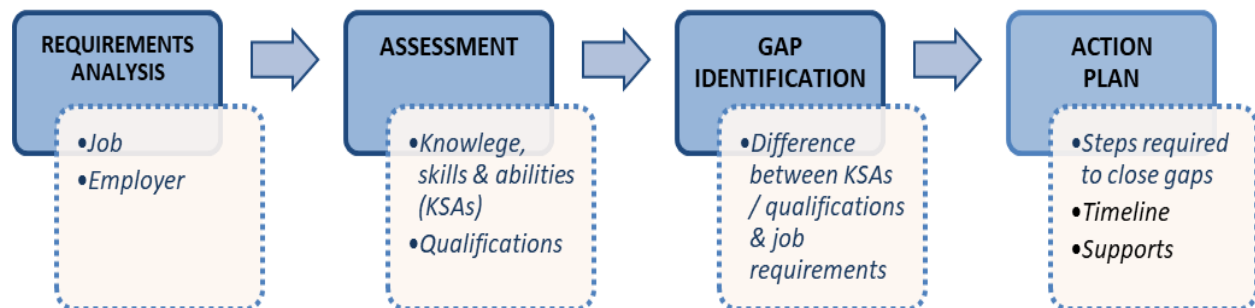
No matter your career direction, gap analysis is a powerful tool for career planning and decision-making.

Moving Forward

Career gap analysis enables you to identify the differences between your current skill levels and qualifications as compared to the requirements of the job you're considering. Based on findings from your analysis, develop your strategic action plan to bridge the gaps.

The diagram below shows the steps you should take to get from **where you are** to **where you want to be**.

Career Gap Analysis Process





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Here's a closer look at each step in the career gap analysis process:

Step 1: Requirements Analysis: *Where do I want (or need) to go?*

Have you decided to take a trip overseas? You'll need a passport to enter another country. Along similar lines, you can't reach your career goals without first understanding the requirements to "get in". With your career goals in mind, ask yourself the following questions related to the *job* you're considering and the *employer*.

- **Job:**
 - What are the roles and responsibilities of this position?
 - What tasks will I be required to perform?
 - What knowledge, skills, abilities, and qualifications are required (*including any unique technical skills, language skills, industry knowledge, etc.*)?
 - What are the education / training / certifications / experience requirements?

- **Employer:**
 - Where is this company heading?
 - What are the organization's business objectives? Values?
 - What skills do this company's employees need now and in the future?

If you're struggling to answer these questions, you'll need to do some research. Gather general information about the tasks, responsibilities, required skills, and training / education requirements for the occupation through the U.S. Department of Labor's [Occupational Outlook Handbook](#), [O*NET](#), [CareerOneStop](#), [My Next Move](#), and [Career Outlook](#).

Work tasks and requirements vary based on each employer's needs. So read job postings carefully to get more specific information about the job. And set up informational interviews with people working in the position or in the organization.

Step 2: Assessment: *What's in my suitcase?*

Before you leave for your trip, you need to pack. It's a good idea to complete a travel checklist to make sure you have everything you'll need. Similarly, based on your research regarding the job and the employer's requirements, career gap analysis requires that you assess your skills and qualifications in comparison to the job requirements to see where



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you stand. You may want to consult with mentors, people in your professional network, and your manager to get their perspectives on your **knowledge, skills, abilities (KSAs)**. You can also include other categories to make your analysis even more comprehensive (e.g., *interests, values, personality, personal situation, support systems, etc.*).

- **Example:** A human resources manager wants to expand her scope of responsibility. Currently she works for a small company with limited growth opportunities. So, she sets a goal to secure an HR position with a bigger company.

She has conducted several informational interviews with HR directors in large organizations. These directors say they strongly prefer candidates who hold a professional HR certification (which is a mark of expertise and credibility) along with strong decision-making, interpersonal, leadership, and organizational skills.

Here's her self-assessment:

		Rating <i>(low / mid / high)</i>	
		Required Level	Current Level
KSA Requirements			
Skill	Description*		
<i>Communication</i>	Utilize strong speaking, writing, and listening skill to give presentations and direct staff.	High	High
<i>Decision-making</i>	Balance strengths and weaknesses of different options and decide best course of action.	High	High
<i>Interpersonal</i>	Collaborate on teams, and develop positive working relationships with individuals and groups.	High	High
<i>Leadership</i>	Direct staff and oversee operations of HR department; coordinate work activities; ensure workers complete duties and fulfill responsibilities.	High	High
<i>Organizational</i>	Prioritize tasks; manage several projects at once.	High	Mid



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		Rating <i>(low / mid / high)</i>	
		Required Level	Current Level
KSA Requirements			
<i>Technical Skills & Knowledge</i>	HR Information Systems Software; HR Programs & Policies; Compensation & Benefits Planning; Employee Relations; Change Management; State and Federal Employment Laws.	High	High for most <i>(mid-level = compensation planning)</i>
Employer Requirements		Meet Requirement?	
		Yes	No
<i>Education</i>	Bachelor's or Master's degree typically in Human Resource Management or Organizational Development	X	
<i>Experience</i>	5+ years as HR Manager	X	
<i>Certification</i>	Professional in Human Resources or Senior Professional in Human Resources certification strongly preferred		X

**Adapted from Occupational Outlook Handbook's [Human Resource Managers - Important Qualities](#)*

Step 3: Gap Identification: *What else do I need?*

As you pack for your trip using your checklist, you soon realize you don't have a travel adapter (which is needed to bridge the gap between voltage requirements in the U.S. versus overseas). Unless you get an adapter, you won't be able to charge your cell phone or plug in your hairdryer while abroad.

In the same way a travel checklist ensures you have everything you need for your trip, a career gap assessment analysis helps you identify the chasms between your current skill levels and the required levels for the position. Identify the gaps between *where you are now* and *where you need to be*. As you complete this step, you'll get a better sense of the actions you'll need to take to close the gaps.

- **Example:** Based on the assessment above, the human resources manager identifies the following gaps:
 - *Compensation Planning:* below targeted range
 - *No HR Certification*



Step 4: Action Planning / Implementation: *How will I get there?*

How will you get that travel adapter you need for your trip? It's easy. You can order one online in a matter of minutes. Once it arrives, you'll have everything you need. But the actions required to bridge career gaps aren't nearly as simple as pressing a button on your laptop. Depending on the nature of these gaps, it may take considerable energy, time, and effort to close them.

For example, a career change will most likely require multiple steps and perhaps several years to complete. On the other hand, if you need to learn a new software application for your job, you can close the gap quickly and easily by taking an online course or attending an in-house training session.

Develop an action plan to bridge the identified gaps. Think of your action plan as the map you'll follow to arrive at your destination.

Your action plan should include:

- **Steps:** *What actions will I take?*
- **Timeline:** *When will I start / complete each step?*
- **Supports:** *Who can guide / help me along the way?*

When designing your action plan, keep in mind that KSAs can be developed or enhanced through formal and informal methods, including:

- degrees, online courses, certifications;
- training programs, workshops, conferences, professional association meetings;
- mentoring programs;
- readings (e.g., books, professional journals, trade / industry publications; career-related blogs and LinkedIn postings);
- volunteerism.

(For more information: [CareerOneStop Certification Finder](#); [CareerOneStop Professional Association Finder](#).)

As you implement your plan, monitor your progress. Adjust actions as needed in order to achieve your goals.



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- **Example:** Based on the HR certification gap she identified, the human resources manager developed the following action plan:

<i>Gap</i>	<i>Action Required</i>	<i>Timeline</i>	<i>Supports / Resources</i>
HR Certification	1. Complete 12-week Professional Human Resource (PHR) Certificate Program	09/14/24 – 12/11/24	Family members will care for my son while I'm in evening classes
	2. Prepare for PHR Exam	01/04/25 – 02/12/25	Study Guide Study Group
	3. Take PHR exam	02/15/25	

Mind the Gaps

In summary, along with SWOT analysis, career gap analysis is a useful tool in career management. By assessing your skills and qualifications in comparison to requirements, you'll be better prepared to "mind the gaps" and move in the right direction to achieve your career goals.