

An NS Competency Playbook on

How NSmen Add Value to the Workforce



Introduction

Greetings Employers,

Our world has changed drastically over the past few years. However, one thing remains the same – that National Service (NS) has added value to Singapore's workforce through useful skills and attributes inculcated in our NSmen during their service.

Although technical knowledge from formal education is vital, one needs more than that to succeed and have a meaningful workplace experience. Employers are looking for employees with both technical and behavioural competencies – the ability to communicate, mediate and navigate through obstacles.

This compact playbook helps both Employers and Operationally Ready National Servicemen (NSmen) learn about and assess the various competencies inculcated through NS. The playbook highlights several competencies that are important to both employers and NSmen to have a fruitful and successful work experience.

With these aims in mind, we, therefore, hope that this playbook will help employers to effectively facilitate and evaluate the decision to choose the right NSman for a team, hence bringing value back to you.

Here's to a better and safer Singapore.

ACCORD (Employer & Business) Council



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What are competencies?

Competencies are the knowledge and behaviours that lead one to be successful in a job.

Technical competencies are technical and quantifiable skills shown through qualifications and professional experiences, while behavioural competencies are non-technical skills less rooted in specific vocations.

Given technical competencies are demonstrated through the attainment of qualifications and not typically associated with NS training and experiences, this guide will focus on the attainment of non-technical competencies (i.e Organisational and Behavioural competencies) through NS training, which are less rooted in qualifications.

Competencies are developed in the following ways:

- ▶ On-the-job learning and training
- ▶ Participation in networking and discussion groups
- ▶ Reflection on learning objectives



Survey results of behavioural competencies

We surveyed over 100 individuals consisting of employers and NSmen to find out their views on how NS delivers value to the workplace.



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It is not easy to find individuals who don't give up and value hard work. Such individuals are cultivated in NS with exposure to the various walks of life, which enables them to appreciate and celebrate our multicultural vibrancy and diversity.

Edwin Fong
Former Executive Director
Restaurant Association of Singapore (RAS)

NS serves as a great training ground where important values are instilled, helping individuals adapt to the workforce easily. NSmen are resilient which is an important quality for ever-changing environments like the workplace.

Stephanie Gan
Resourcing Lead
DFI Retail Group

”

Competencies most employers look for

According to our survey, the following five competencies are the most highly valued and in demand by employers and NSmen alike. NSmen who develop these competencies during their national service well are more likely to deliver the best service and results for their employers and organisations.



Critical thinking

This is the ability to objectively assess issues and break them down into smaller and more manageable components to come up with effective solutions.

NSmen who are critical thinkers are focused and are able to sidestep distractions to develop and deliver solutions for the organisation. NSman employees with this competency will be able to guide and develop the workforce to achieve the best business outcomes.



Time management

This is the ability to use time productively and efficiently, contributing to an optimal and stress-free work environment.

NSmen with excellent time-management skills will be efficient and productive leaders. They can confidently lead their team and motivate them to give their best to achieve positive outcomes for the organisation.



Interpersonal skills

The ability to formulate tactics and methods on the spot that enables one to interact effectively with people in a variety of situations.

NSmen with highly developed inter-personal skills are valuable to companies as they can defuse seemingly difficult corporate situations and will be able to come up with win-win solutions.



Ability to lead

The confidence to take charge and guide individuals and/or teams to successfully attain corporate outcomes.

NSmen who are good leaders will be trusted by their subordinates. They will also win the confidence of corporate management as they can motivate a diverse team of members to rally together to deliver the best corporate outcomes.

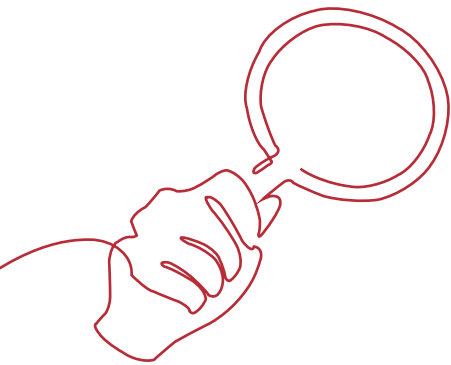


Teamwork

The ability to collaborate and cooperate with peers and colleagues to develop successful outcomes for the organisation.

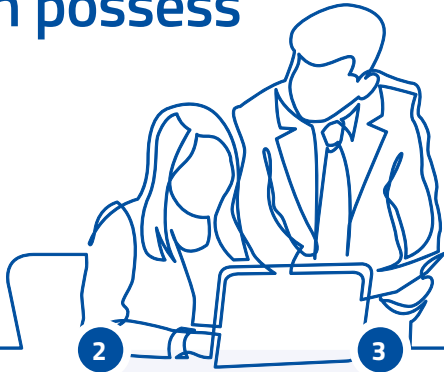
NSmen who are successful team players are excellent collaborators who are humble and give credit where it is deserved. They are invaluable assets to the organisation who put aside their egos and pride to focus on successful attainment of business outcomes.

Competencies in-demand



10 behavioural competencies NSmen possess

In this section, you will learn more about the various competencies NSmen develop during their National Service.



1

Problem-solving

Finding solutions to problems or breaking bigger problems down to smaller parts for easier solutions.

NSmen who can solve problems or improve situations for the organisation's benefit, will be assets to employers.

People who help to find solutions to problems instead of complaining about them are good team players and are highly trusted by their superiors, increasing overall efficiency of a team.

2

Collaborative ability

Working effectively with others to solve problems and achieve desired results.

The saying goes like this: "If you want to go fast, go alone. But if you want to go far, go together."

Someone with a strong collaborative ability will care for his colleagues and the organisation. He will put his colleagues' and the organisation's needs above his own. Team players are valuable as employers know that they will work ethically and with integrity for the organisation.

3

Resilience

The ability to bounce back emotionally and physically to the duties at hand after every setback.

A wise quote goes: "Fall eight times, get back up nine. Fall nine times, get back up 10."

Setbacks and disappointments are inevitable in life and work. But how we respond to each setback determines our character. Being resilient results in colleagues and bosses placing trust in one another to persevere at the task at hand. Resilient individuals raise the morale of a team and encourage perseverance.

4

Organisational ability

Taking steps to give structure to a disorderly situation to solve problems and future-proof the organisation.

An organised individual knows how to maintain order despite external circumstances. Being organised allows an efficient flow of information and increases productivity within any organisation.

5

Leadership qualities

Taking charge of planning to resolve disputes or critical issues and heading groups of people to perform certain tasks or duties.

A leader is one who knows the way, goes the way and shows the way. Leaders give calm and objective guidance during chaos and inspire teams and an organisation during crises or discouraging moments. Good leaders guide people through demanding situations effectively by boosting their morale and being level-headed throughout difficulties.

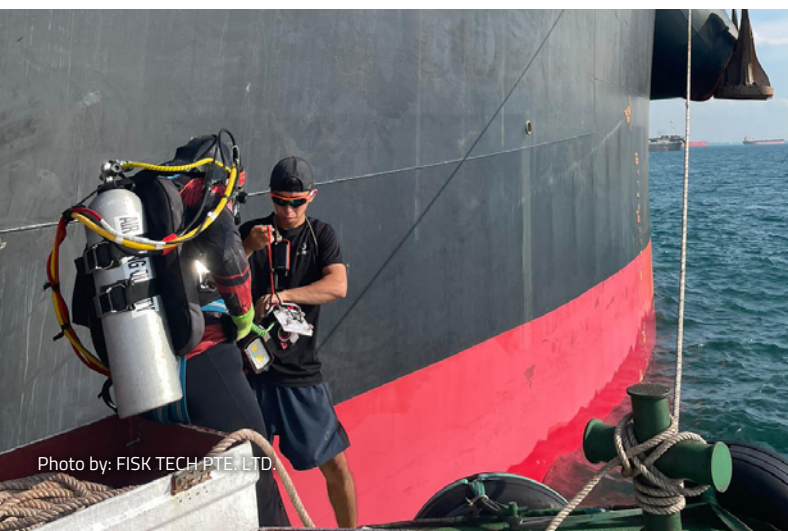


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Photo by: ST LOGISTICS PTE. LTD.

10 behavioural competencies NSmen possess

(continued)



6

Initiative

Taking active action to improve a situation or change it for the better.

Individuals who take initiative are independent workers who can work with little supervision. By taking initiative, one can quickly understand how the organisation works, what the challenges are, and what action must be taken to resolve the issues.

7

Effective communication

Convey information clearly, concisely and succinctly so that all the concerned parties can easily understand it.

Effective communication is crucial to the success of any project. With effective communication, misunderstandings can be avoided, producing a healthier and more efficient work environment.

8

Critical thinking

Going beyond conventional wisdom, looking at the “bigger picture” behind problems, and using the insights for creative and effective solutions.

Critical thinkers are good team players who are not afraid to ask tough questions or make tough decisions. NSmen who think critically can produce effective long-term solutions for the benefit of employers and the people around them.

9

Confidence

The ability to accurately assess your abilities and shortcomings, as well as be calm, humble, composed throughout any situation.

Confident employees are calm in crises, give essential guidance and boost employee morale through tough situations. Confident individuals can convey useful and accurate assessments and will be dependable colleagues who can be trusted by their superiors to help build a successful organisation.

10

Adaptability

Being able to effectively change working styles and attitudes according to evolving workplace situations.

Amid changing economic landscapes, working from home, and the COVID-19 pandemic, the future of the workplace community is constantly changing. Adaptable employees can move quickly and benefit from rapidly evolving work and employment landscapes, bringing value to employers by helping them cope with internal and external changes.



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Asking the right interview questions

The interview process is crucial for employers to assess if their interviewees are the right fit for the positions to be filled. Asking the right questions enables employers to uncover qualities that go beyond academic achievement. The following questions can help employers assess both a candidate's aptitude and attitude to succeed and thrive in the workplace.

10 questions to bring out the best in your interviewees



Problem-solving

Question #1 ▼

How would you help your superiors with constructing solutions to problems?



Collaborative ability

Question #2 ▼

When you see your colleagues or teammates in need, do you step up to help or wait for them to ask you directly?



Resilience

Question #3 ▼

During and after projects, do you look at each setback or failure as a crisis or learning opportunity? Why so?



Effective communication

Question #7 ▼

Do you repeat and reframe instructions from superiors, making sure that the information shared with your colleagues is accurate and understood well?



Organisational ability

Question #4 ▼

Do you challenge yourself by learning new methods or software to better organise workflow or logistical matters?



Critical thinking

Question #8 ▼

Do you analyse training lessons and SOPs, and inform your superiors and teammates about ways to improve them?



Leadership qualities

Question #5 ▼

How do you help bring up the concerns of your teammates to your superiors?



Confidence

Question #9 ▼

During demanding situations, do you do your best to discharge your duties despite your fear?



Initiative

Question #6 ▼

How often do you discuss with your colleagues and teammates about ways to improve things or situations?



Adaptability

Question #10 ▼

Do you regularly discuss with your superiors and teammates about how to cope with disruptive influences and events?



Employers' perspectives

The employers featured on this page value the competencies and experiences acquired in NS and allow their NSman employees to put them to good use in their civilian jobs. They have created a positive work environment where employees can fully utilise a variety of competencies to realise their potential.

Sharing employer insights

1. What skills and competencies do you think NS training has equipped your NSman employees with or strengthened that are particularly useful and important at the workplace?
2. Do you believe that your NSman employees bring with them these skills and competencies from their NS training?

3. Please relate a situation where your NSman employee demonstrated these skills and competencies honed in NS and applied at the workplace.
4. What opportunities would you give your NSman employees to help them apply the skills and competencies that they honed in NS at the workplace?
5. What advice would you give to other employers on:
 - ▶ How to find out more from their NSman employees about the skills and competencies that they are equipped with from their NS training?
 - ▶ How to create opportunities for their NSman employees to demonstrate these skills and competencies at the workplace?



“ NSmen are inculcated with teamwork and esprit de corps during military training and operations...”

1. As a distinctive world-class destination, RWS offers a comprehensive range of guest experiences for various customer profiles. With a diverse workforce of different ages, genders, nationalities and cultural backgrounds, communication and people skills are one of the most important skills in the industry. Called the “Kampung Spirit”, we strive towards “1+1=3”, going above and beyond to bring memorable experiences to customers. We believe that cross-cultural communication and understanding a diverse customer base give us a competitive advantage.
 2. Definitely. NSmen are inculcated with teamwork and esprit de corps during military training and operations, aligning with our core value of the “Kampung Spirit” where the team looks out for one another. Being able to coordinate with multiple stakeholders and solve problems are also relevant NS competencies.
 3. During his interview, a team member shared his experience in planning and presenting an “Approval of Plan” and the importance of timely execution of the plan as a Scout Team Commander in NS. His concern for his team and his physical and mental resilience developed during NS resonate with our team members. As Assistant Director of Human Resources, his excellent social and organisational skills enable him to connect with team members of diverse backgrounds.
 4. At RWS, every role is an opportunity for NSman employees to apply their skills and competencies honed during NS. We have more than 900 different job roles across our integrated resort and I am confident that our NSman employees have the discipline and resilience to capably navigate their roles.
 5. Employers can provide platforms for NSman employees to share their NS experiences and keep records of their key roles and achievements. This is a critical component in our talent development assessment as we develop the NSmen’s skills and competencies to motivate them to improve and excel at their jobs.
- There are many opportunities for NSman employees to work on new projects across different business units, allowing them to demonstrate their skills and competencies and helping the supervisors identify areas where they can excel. Our management team is constantly seeking young talents with exceptional attitude and aptitude.

Mr Tan Hee Teck
Chief Executive Officer

Resorts World at Sentosa Pte. Ltd.



“ It is easy...to train an NSman on the job if his character and attitude reflect the values and ethos of the SAF.”

1. The SAF values such as Loyalty, Discipline, Leadership, Care for fellow mates and Fighting Spirit, are the foundation of any NSman’s character, and necessary for their post-NS success. It is easy for an employer to train an NSman on the job if his character and attitude reflect the values and ethos of the SAF. The competencies NSmen learn from their tasks in the SAF give them the confidence to face the commercial world. The competencies acquired during NS give employers confidence and trust to hire NSmen.
 2. Yes, absolutely. The NSmen we have employed display the best traits of the armed forces, and the confidence and character developed during NS helps them do very well in our company. When they go for their ICTs, these qualities help them refresh their confidence and discipline when they return to work.
 3. Many of our company’s NSmen are commercial divers. They practise safety, looking out for each other and leaving no man behind on a daily basis. They also showcase the fighting spirit and discipline developed in NS, helping them add value at work.
 4. We always provide opportunities for our NSmen to take on more responsibilities. As employers, we must respect and understand the ambitions of our men and help them to succeed. The desire to learn and succeed is important, and employers need to recognise these qualities in their NSmen and trust them.
 5. During job interviews, we ask about their NS experiences, the roles and responsibilities they took on during NS, and what they learnt. We also look at attitude and character; as most NSmen are new to the industry, the only reliable qualities we can assess are their core values, confidence and attitude towards learning.
- Employers must create open communication environments in the workplace to allow NSmen to voice their ambitions and aspirations. It is also important that employers trust and empower their NSmen, as well as give them constructive feedback and personal development plans to help them reach their goals.

Mr Varun Ramdas
Chief Executive Officer

Fisk Tech Pte. Ltd.

NSman employees' perspectives

The NSmen featured on this page have applied the competencies they learned during NS to their work. Through honing essential workplace competencies, they add value to their daily work and prove themselves capable of added responsibilities.



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I have also learnt adaptability in the face of adversity, flexibility, strategic planning, and problem-solving skills.

”

1SG (NS) Ng Wee Chun

Engineer

Heraeus Materials Singapore Pte Ltd



“

I now have better knowledge of time management, setting priorities and interpersonal skills to better communicate with my teammates at work.

”

LCP (NS) Mohammad Haikal Bin Sulaiman

Logistics Coordinator

St Logistics Pte Ltd

Interviewing the NSmen

We had an interview with two NSmen on their thoughts of NS training and how it has shaped their mindset.

What skills and competencies do you think your NS training has equipped you with or strengthened that are particularly useful and important at your workplace?

Wee Chun: The key takeaway from my NS training is being disciplined and leading by example, and with empathy too. I have also learnt adaptability in the face of adversity, flexibility, strategic planning, and problem-solving skills. These skills and competencies have helped me develop into an effective and efficient engineer.

M. Haikal: I have gained new skills and competencies during national service. I now have better knowledge of time management, setting priorities and interpersonal skills to better communicate with my teammates at work. Through NS, I have also learnt that knowing the commander's intentions is important to the success of the mission. This motivates me to clarify work-related matters with my superiors if I am unclear.

How does NS training allow you to demonstrate these skillsets and competencies to a higher level as compared to your other non-NS liable colleagues?

Wee Chun: Having done my NS in the Intelligence unit, I learnt how to plan counter-strategies through analysis of situations from the enemy's perspective. This enables me to view my work/project from multiple perspectives of cross-functional teams, in order to meet the company's objectives, and not just individual KPIs.

M. Haikal: I can demonstrate these skill sets in camp with my fellow soldiers first before applying them at my workplace. This enables me to clarify my thinking and ask the right questions at work.

How have you applied these competencies in the workplace?

Wee Chun: In battle, the Intelligence unit gathers information from multiple sources. I have applied this to my work by learning the importance of gathering as much data as possible, analysing it, and breaking down the necessary information so as to identify the root cause of the problem, propose solutions, and resolve the issue.

M. Haikal: I can communicate better with my colleagues. There were a few occasions where I had to demonstrate my communication skills by conveying instructions to my fellow colleagues. Giving clear instructions enabled my colleagues to acknowledge them properly and helped make work easier and more efficient.

How else would you like for your direct superior to be able to support you in demonstrating your NS skills and competencies at work?

Wee Chun: I would like my direct superior to wholeheartedly support me as I lead my projects and the technicians involved in them to excel at the highest possible levels.

M. Haikal: Currently, I am involved in a roving task (equipment maintenance) across different departments at my workplace. Communication to my partners and colleagues is key in this task. It entails proper planning and scheduling so that I can ensure timeliness in operational requirement.

I hope I can do a project on digitalising this process to improve efficiency and share it with the rest of my teammates.

If you have any queries, do feel free to drop us an email at:
NSOutreach_NSD@defence.gov.sg

