

Unit 2: Competences

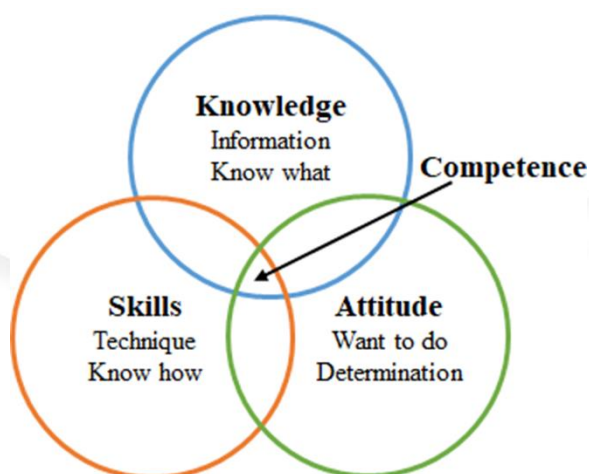
Subunit 2.1: Knowledge, Attitude, Skills

Learning goals

- To understand what is competence and all its components.
- Learning how to enhance a competence.
- Identifying some methodologies that help building a competence.
- Recognizing non-formal education benefits in learning.

Definition

A **competence** is a combination of knowledge, skills, and behaviours that an individual, or even an organization, possesses and can effectively apply to perform tasks, solve problems, achieve goals, or excel in a specific position or area of expertise. Despite when referring to a competence in general education, it is possible to be talking to more than just a single discipline, the concept is often used to describe a person's or a team's capability to perform a particular function or task successfully.



To better understand what a competence is, its components have to be identified and understood.

The **knowledge** is that foundational understanding of relevant concepts, theories, facts, and practices, which are key for achieving a competence. It involves having the necessary information and awareness about a particular subject or field.

The **skills** are techniques and practical actions that enable someone to apply their knowledge effectively. Skills are often developed through practice and experience and can encompass a wide range of abilities, such as communication, problem-solving, time management, and more.

The **behaviour** is about the interaction in different situation, when you can apply what you know or can do. A set of personal attitudes determines a behaviour, which when associated with competence can include professionalism, teamwork, leadership, ethical conduct, and straightforward communication.

As a competence is not just information put into practice, perfectionate through the experience, other relevant components are playing an important role, such as abilities, motivation and values.

The **abilities** are innate or acquired traits and qualities that influence one's capacity to perform specific tasks. These can include cognitive abilities like critical thinking, creativity, adaptability, and emotional intelligence, as well as physical abilities if relevant to the competency. As for **motivation**, that is usually goal-driven, and it is quite important to start developing a competence; for example, when you decide to start a business in circular economy, there is something that is moving you to do so, such as creating 0 impacts solutions in waste management, or contribute to the application of green governmental policies, and so on. In fact, this competence component is strictly related to **values** and beliefs: the first is about to be willing of doing well, and the second refers to personal convictions (for example, believing that climate change is real).

A competence is demonstrated through the practical application of knowledge, skills, abilities, and behaviours in real-world situations. It's not just theoretical knowledge; it's the ability to perform tasks or solve problems effectively in a given context or field. What makes someone competent in one role or situation may not necessarily make them competent in another. It depends on the specific requirements and expectations of the task, job, or domain.

Competence is not static: it can be developed, refined, and improved over time. Continuous learning, training, feedback, and experience play crucial roles in enhancing one's competence. Being consistent in this development is crucial, especially if you are willing to grow a competence from a beginner to a proficient level. This is to say that to evaluate a competence, it is essential to have measurable criteria or standards. Organizations often use competency frameworks to trace a common base for their employees' competences assessment since those does not refers to a single curriculum or a national educational system, but that is applicable to any subject, with no age limit.

Among the main factors that push someone to be willing to build a competence are the achievement of certain objectives, and that is why a competence should align with the goals and objectives of an individual, team, or organization (motivation for the person, mission for the company). Aligning to certain goals should contribute to achieving desired outcomes and performances.

Also, the flexibility of competences to be applied to emerging trends, and new challenges is a building-competence-driven factor. In a rapidly changing world, competence also requires the ability to adapt to new technologies, and necessities to be fulfilled in society (think of climate change, erroneous waste management, etc). Being open to learning and staying updated, or even renovate a contextually-appropriate competency is essential: changes and challenges always allow to have new competences applications, and future-oriented actions.

In summary, a competence is a multifaceted concept that encompasses knowledge, skills, behaviours, and their practical application in a specific context. It's dynamic and subject to continuous development and evaluation, making it a crucial aspect of personal and professional growth.

Competence building step-by-step

Building a competence in a specific area requires a structured approach and consistent effort. As follows, 10 recommendable steps to help developing a competence.

1. Set clear doable objectives: Define specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and time-bound (SMART) goals related to the competence you want to build. Having clear objectives will help you stay focused and motivated on the creation of your desired outcomes. For that you should set indicators for your performance, define the scope of your activity, and adjust it all to the resources at your disposal.
2. Assess your starting point: Evaluate your current level of competence in the chosen area. Identify your strengths and weaknesses to determine where you need improvement. Through consistent practice, and analysis of that, you will be able to progress and measure the alignment of your performance to the set goals.
3. Research and create a learning plan: Gather information and resources relevant to the competence you are developing. This may include books, courses, online tutorials, collaborative hubs and platform where you can find a mentor. Especially online, there are always more open and available information you can access and compare to learn more and become a field expert. It might be useful to break down the learning process into manageable tasks and milestones.
4. Practice regularly: The application of a building competence through the allocation of dedicated time to practice what you have learned is a must. Repetition and consistency are key to improvement: becoming familiar with certain information and technical actions helps growing the competence proficiency.
5. Search expert/external feedback and reflect: Whether from experts or learning peers, asking for feedback can provide constructive criticism and guidance. Feedback helps you identify areas for improvement and make necessary corrections in progress. From someone else opinion should derivate a moment of reflection, and strategical planning to address the needed adjustments.

6. Stay updated: Depending on the field, knowledge may evolve rapidly. Staying informed about the latest developments and trends in your chosen area of competence could be key to being able to address a challenge, and become an expert on its solving, and so turning yourself into a competitive party.
7. Join communities: Engage with communities or networks related to your competence. This can provide opportunities for networking, learning from others, and sharing experiences. Become a collaborator in sectorial hubs and platform, to make yourself known in the community and get inspired from other professionals.
8. Track your progress and be persistent: Keep a record of your achievements: this can help you stay motivated and provide evidence of your competence. Whenever the progress is not as big as you wished, do not quit and be patient. Building competences takes time and effort, and it implies facing issues or setbacks, which are the moments when you learn the most.
9. Celebrate milestones and keep yourself humble: Celebrate your achievements along the way, no matter how small. Recognizing your progress can boost your morale. Nevertheless, never settle or let complacency hinder your learning path. Maintaining a growth mindset opens you to new ideas, developments and approaches to your work.
10. Review your objectives: As your competence performance level develops, update your goals and consider setting higher standards to your final outcomes. This way you will have the chance to adjust your actions to the up-to-date selected field context, and always be competitive in the area of expertise among the crowd.

Many other intermedial steps could be inserted in-between the mentioned ones, mostly frequently asking for feedback and reviewing objectives for further improvements, in a cyclical work of assessment-correction that requires consistency and practice. Leaving space for improvement and committing to a learning path is what allow someone to grow in the chosen area of competence.

Methodologies and tools

Building competences can vary greatly depending on the specific skills or knowledge you need to acquire to become an expert in a certain field or sector. However, the learning style can be a turning point in picking effective methodologies and tools that can be adapted to various competence-building personal and professional objectives. As follows, 7 of the most effective methodologies and tools.

1. Self-Directed Learning: this methodology is based on OER (Open Educational Resources), available online, allowing the learner to study the own pace. The tools to use for this method

takes advantage of platforms that offer courses and downloadable literature on a wide range of subjects and can provide structured learning experiences, with a substantial time-management skill increasement. Among those, some even contemplates automatic evaluation of the competence learnt, and certification of such knowledge, skills and abilities.

Self-Directed Learning tools are Moodle, Coursera (which includes Google courses), edX, as the major e-learning platforms; TEDx and YouTube, with conferences and video tutorials, are also considered valid tools to enhance field competences.

2. **Project-Based Learning:** is a collaborative methodology that helps acquiring managerial and communication skills, and team working ability. It is very close to Peer-Learning, especially if the decision taken are based on group discussions and peer-to-peer teaching/learning process.

Project-Based Learning tools are collaborative hubs and platforms, Slack, Asana, Microsoft and Google's collaborative instruments, from the emailing to video-calling, to documents storage.

3. **Mentorship, Coaching and Job Shadowing:** based on a link between the trainee or apprentice, and a mentor or trainer, these methodologies aim at getting some field experience, while sided by a professional. It is a very useful method to get to develop specific competences through guidance or advising for a specific workplace or labour field.

Mentorship, Coaching and Job Shadowing tools for competence building are networks, coaching sessions, and training programmes, such as the European Union initiative "Erasmus for Young Entrepreneurship" cross-border exchange programme that allows young adults to be working side by side with SMEs, and foster entrepreneurial mindset and related business competences to build an own company afterward.

4. **Competence-Building Workshops:** this methodology focuses on specific competences. Workshops are usually events where the learner is provided with hands-on training and networking opportunities. For the specificity of the competence to the enhanced, these workshops always count with the intervention of top experts and field professionals.

Competence-Building Workshops main tools can be online and offline, such as the workshop events, masterclasses, seminars, webinars.

5. **Practical Exercises and Simulation:** it is a type of methodology particularly useful for technical competences. In a controlled environment, the learner can simulate a real-life situation, and train practical skills and apply theoretical knowledge, receiving feedback on the performance.

Practical Exercises and Simulation tools are virtual labs, AR simulation software, role playing dynamics.

6. Gamification: this methodology is aimed at acquiring competences through game elements that makes more engaging the learning path. This methodology is not restricted to the youngest apprentices, but it registers particularly effective competences enhancement in adults too.

Gamification more effective tools are AR games, VR games, quizzes, gamified platforms and courses, like Kahoot or Gametize, and certain competences-related board games, and serious games.

7. Books and Literature: maybe the most formal among all the above-listed educational methodology, it is based on reading authoritative sources on a subject to provide in-depth knowledge and insights. It is merely theoretical, but combined with simulation or traineeship, it could help building lifelong competences.

Literatures tools are books, research papers, academic journals, in digital and physical formats.

As briefly advanced with the last methodology, the most effective approach to building competences often involves a combination of these methodologies and tools, tailored to a specific learning style, goals, and the nature of the competence to be developed. It is key to experiment with different approaches to find what works best for a learner, considering motivation as crucial to pick the most suited methodology and tools, together with open-mindedness and constant updating.

The learning process can be a very different experience depending of the degree of formality of the educational style or competence-building methodology chosen: some people thrive in formal classroom environments, while others prefer self-directed learning or informal learning opportunities. The context in which learning takes place matters, and, for the purpose of this training, non-formal education methodology is taken into account. Non-formal learning style, in fact, make competences development closely tied to real-world applications and practical experiences. In relevant contexts, such as job shadowing or workshops, can have a strong impact on the enhancement of practical skills.

Practical activity: What are your competences?

Objective: to self-assess the set of competences one's have, and drafting a plan to develop more.

Materials: Flipcharts, paper sheets, markers, tape, pens.

Time: 1 hour and 30 minutes.

Methodology:

1. Use a flipchart or a paper sheet, and create 3 columns: knowledge, skills, and attitudes. Then, take 15 minutes to insert the different entrepreneurship competences features in the table below, dividing these into the right column, for example: finances in knowledge, communication in skills, and teamworking in attitudes. Try to set at least 15 of the listed competence components into a column.

Problem-solving	Customer focus	Passion	Financial management
Communication	Strategic planning	Risk management	Negotiation
Leadership	Resilience	Customer behaviour	Marketing
Adaptability	Persistence	Initiative	Sales
Time management	Creativity	Open-mindedness	Law and rules knower
Networking	Confidence	Ethical mindset	Technology proficiency
Product knowledge	Strategic planning	Financial literacy	Market research

2. After, take 5 minutes to underline those elements you are sure you possess and can demonstrate having. Mark those competences' components you think you should acquire and/or enhance to become an entrepreneur. Here's a table of skills, knowledge and attitude by level of expertise, to be acquired step-by-step. Take 10 minutes to read it carefully.

Level of expertise	Skills	Knowledge	Attitudes
Beginner	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Basic communication skills - Time management - Basic financial literacy - Problem-solving - Basic understanding of marketing and sales 	Basic understanding of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the industry - legal and regulatory knowledge - market research skills - customer behaviour - technology proficiency 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Willingness to learn - Open-mindedness - Initiative - Ethical mindset - Passion
Intermediate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Improved communication skills - Leadership - Negotiation - Intermediate problem-solving skills - Intermediate financial management skills 	Deeper knowledge of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the industry - product knowledge - more complex legal and regulatory issues - market research and analysis - customer behaviour 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Resilience - Persistence - Creativity - Confidence - Responsible risk-taking
Advanced	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Advanced leadership skills - Expert negotiation skills - Advanced problem-solving abilities 	Comprehensive mastery expertise in: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the industry - products and services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Strategic thinking - Innovative mindset

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Advanced financial management skills - Mastery of communication skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - legal and regulatory knowledge - advanced market research techniques - financial analysis and forecasting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Decisiveness - Adaptability - Customer-centric focus
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3. In order to achieve the proficiency of the competences who think you do not have, set a competence-building plan following the 10-steps structure above-mentioned in the theoretical part, in 60 minutes.
4. When you think you have finished your steps plan, compare your opinion with your peers, whenever possible and discuss your choices. If some of their steps' description inspires you, review your plan.

Food for thoughts:

How do you usually learn? Have you ever thought of using at least 2 methodologies above mentioned to get to know something new or develop a new skill?

Take about 10 minutes to think about your learning process.

Learning materials suggestions

Asana: <https://asana.com/>

Coursera: <https://www.coursera.org/>

edX: <https://www.edx.org/>

Gametize: <https://gametize.com/index>

Kahoot: <https://kahoot.com/>

Moodle: <https://moodle.org/?lang=en>

Slack: <https://slack.com/>

TEDx: <https://courses.ted.com/>

Non-formal education in a nutshell: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xm7PioKwkGo>