

# Definition of competence(s)

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 (From: Acquiring the Key Competence)*

The historical development in views on learning indicate that individuals increasingly will have to be competent and what is more be competent in lifelong learning in order to refresh, maintain and upgrade their competences permanently.

Competences as defined by European bodies, as well as by educational experts throughout and beyond Europe, consist of three interrelated ingredients:

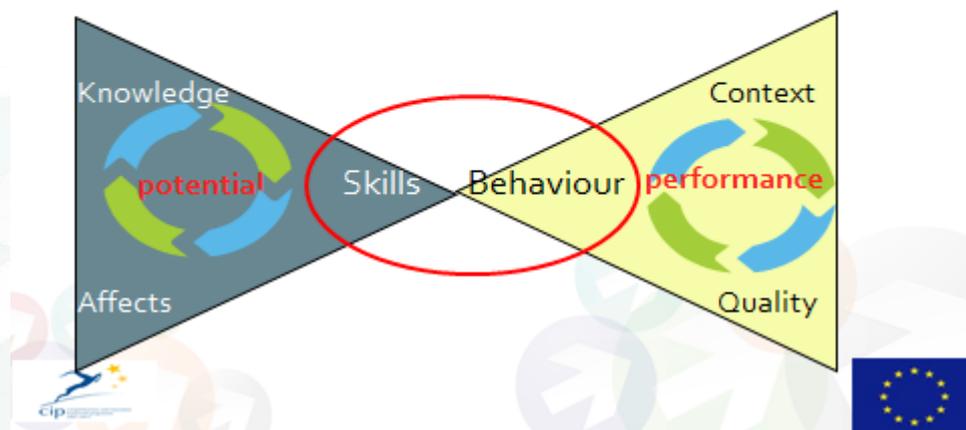
- a. a knowledge component (the understanding part),
- b. a behavioural components (the overt behavioural repertoire) and
- c. a value component (including values, beliefs and attitudes).

Competences consist of a combination of skills, knowledge, attitudes, and behaviours required for effective performance of a real-world task or activity. A competence is defined as the holistic synthesis of these components. At another level a competence again may be divided in three components or aspects. It is the ability of a person to show:

- 1. a particular behaviour in
- 2. a particular context and with
- 3. a particular quality.

This is a formal way of describing competences. In more down to earth language this implies that what matters is not only what we know about things, but more important is what we are able to do with this knowledge, and whether we are able to go on developing our abilities. Does education make learners knowledgeable, or does it make them competent, that is the question.

## Competence model visualised: Two triangles



*The components of competence*

The ellipse in the middle of the scheme includes the actual behaviour that shows the level of control over a particular competence. The components in the left triangle (composing someone's potential) allow a person to show the intended behaviour in the right triangle. There the learner demonstrates his/her acquired competence (performance). In the next section we will turn back to a sense of initiative entrepreneurship as the competence we focus on in the YEDAC project.

## Competence oriented learning

In this section we move from ideas on what competences are in general and entrepreneurship as a competence in particular to competence oriented education. Competence based learning and competence based education do not consist of traditional teaching situations. They are based on the idea that the learners learn by experience and discovery. This concept has an impact on how learners may be educated. The idea is that learners need to be actively involved in the learning situation. They learn best in meaningful contexts and in co-operation and interaction with others and with their environment. Thus they enable themselves to acquire knowledge, construe knowledge and check and cross check their newly constructed ideas with those of others. Of course this implies no denial of the importance of teaching; it emphasises the necessity of teaching in a highly responsive and learner centred way without neglecting the obligation of showing learners new horizons and perspectives and enthusiasm for things they may never yet have heard of.

### Key features of competence based education

Competence based learning requires an approach to education that differs from the traditional approaches to teaching. In competence based education one tends to stress the importance of powerful, or rich learning environments, that enable students to engage in meaningful learning processes. The most distinctive features of this approach may be summarized as follows:

- *Meaningful contexts*  
For learning to take place it is recommended to create or to look for meaningful contexts in which students will in a natural way experience the relevance and the meaning of the competences to be acquired.
- *Multidisciplinary approach*  
Competences are holistic and as a consequence the educative approach needs to be integrative and holistic as well.
- *Learning by developing*  
The philosophy of competence oriented education has pervaded our views on learning these days. Learning is conceived as a process of extending ones own knowledge in interaction with ones environment, rather than as a process of absorbing the knowledge others try to transfer to you. The consequence of this view is that educative processes may better be active and creative. By focusing on actually making models, products, guidelines, rules of thumb, reports, or other tangible outputs the learning easily and naturally will turn out to be productive. This as opposed to learning processes that focus on information processing after which the actual application of knowledge will have to be awaited.

- *Cooperative, interactive learning (with peers, teachers and heritage providers etc.)*

The basic idea behind competence based education is to help learners to develop and construct their own knowledge and seek ways to make optimal use of other people's competence in their learning itinerary. This is what social constructivism is about.
- Co-operation and interaction are both domains of learning as well as vehicles of learning in other domains. If learning is supposed to be self-initiated, self-regulated, and aimed at developing personal competences, the educative approach must allow for diversity in needs and related to that in goals and objectives. This requires an open approach in which education includes dialogues between learners and educators about expectation, needs, goals, choices etc.
- *Discovery learning*

Open learning processes require learning that may be characterized as active discovery as opposed to receptive learning. This does not imply that learning content should not be made available and accessible. It means that the way of acquiring this knowledge or these competences, could not be just a process of providing information, but should always be embedded in a discovery based approach.
- *Reflective learning*

Competence based learning requires apart from a focus on the key competences, also an emphasis on the learning processes as such. By reflecting on ones own needs, motivation, approach, progress, results etc. one develops learning competences/strategies that may be considered meta-competences. The competence meant here usually is referred to as the process of "learning to learn".
- *Personalised learning*

In the competence oriented theories learning is conceived as a process of constructing ones own personal knowledge and competences. Information, knowledge, strategies, only become meaningful for a person if they become an integral part of ones own personal body of knowledge and competences. In education this implies that learners need to be able to identify with the contexts, the persons, the situations and interests that are included in the learning domains involved.