

Competence

By Mogens Lilleør

Did you know that ...?

The word 'competence' is derived from the Latin 'competentia', which signifies both 'fit together' 'be fit' and 'ability', 'skill' and 'striving for'.

But what does the word mean today? Well, the term is often used in pedagogy and in the psychology of knowledge and skills denoting for example skills in problem solving, in reading, in mathematics, that is, denoting processes indicating that competence somehow is knowledge as use. In fact, I would argue that competence is nothing but 'knowledge as use'. Knowledge that cannot be used, is junk, it just fills up.

If competence is knowledge as use competence must be something you acquire. I think competence is developed through a process where certain knowledge becomes a power through concrete application. The term power implying specific types of processing, presentation, services or activities with users, analysis, meeting management, planning, project management and project participation, negotiation, coaching, coordination, organizing, counselling, management, conflict resolution, conversation, listening, etc.

There are several kinds of knowledge

1) Theoretical knowledge you get through education, training and courses, and theoretical, professional knowledge, that is, the theories of professions, among them concepts, specialised areas, methods and traditions, or it may be theoretical knowledge of the legal framework, that is, principles, values and goals, which one continuously acquires.

2) Experience and 'know how' as rendered by 'trial and error' when working on tasks. After a while you become good for oral or written presentation or good to make a group function well, good to lead, good to cooperate, good to transform theory into practice, good to support individuals, or you know how to 'cut a case production'.

You may also develop knowledge from your leisure and hobby interests, for example if you work as a volunteer in aid organizations and have participated in courses or training in that context. But perhaps it often is particular skills based on experience you reap from leisure? Have you been leading a choir for some time, have you taught dilettante, led a general meeting in an association, been a board member in a club or organized rallies and clubhouse maintenance weekends, then you probably have acquired know how concerning group dynamics and leadership or about coordination and organization.

3) For the sake of completeness, I'll also mention a third kind of knowledge, often described as 'tacit knowledge', meaning knowledge not immediately possible to describe either because there is no known covering words in the moment or there simply is no language to cover the phenomenon, so it cannot be articulated at all. Who knows, perhaps a large part of a person's skills or powers are 'tacit' in one way or the other? Perhaps it is only a small flap that is captured through language?

Identifying skills and powers?

If I myself should identify my competences, I would look for:

- Vocational education and training and other theory insight connected to my profession, that I have acquired.
- Functions, tasks and problem types connected to my profession, which I have taken care of and struggled with through time.
- Leisure and hobby courses, for instance an assistant coach education or a sailing certificate education.
- Leisure tasks and challenges, I have been involved in as NGO and association member.

The concept 'competence' is denoting something about the way one is meeting a problem or a task to resolve it. One is competent when one is able to choose the right way. These competences can be identified through narrative.