



EXECUTIVE BULLETED RESEARCH BRIEF (EBRB) COMPETENCIES & CAPABILITIES

JULY 2023

Jules Regan, Research Assessment Associate

Hannah Keepers, Research Assessment Associate

Manny Straehle, PhD, GISF, President and Founder

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DEFINITIONS AND FUNCTIONS

COMPETENCIES

- Competencies generally **refers to the knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs) that an individual possesses.**
- An example could include an individual's level of knowledge regarding coding in python.
- Largely, competencies are used to assess an individual's fit for a specific job or task. This is illustrated by the wide use of competency models in modern recruitment.
- However, this is a "fuzzy definition." There is a lack of consensus over what exactly competency refers to. Factors for this include cultural differences, work environment differences, and the reasons behind defining competencies among others.

"An individual's knowledge, skills, attitudes, and/or other characteristics (KSAOs) that are required to meet a specific standard/proficiency for success in a specified job or job role based on objective outcome measures."

(Straehle, 2023)

CAPABILITIES

- Capabilities explores **how an individual applies skills** in familiar and unfamiliar situations. It looks at overall potential to perform.
- An example includes the results an individual has or their abilities to react in unknown scenarios (e.g., a nurse in an emergency room).
- They are used to describe how an individual might grow over time in their abilities along with their potential at excelling in a role.

“An individual’s potential to demonstrate a competency (e.g., task, knowledge, skill) defined by an expected successful performance based on situation(s), predictable factors (e.g., experiences, training, assessments, set of other related competencies), and outcome(s).”

(Straehle, 2023)

SKILLS

- Skills are defined as the **expertise or talent an individual has that allows them to perform tasks.**
- They are utilized in both competencies and capabilities.
- An example could include technical skills (e.g., coding or graphic design) or soft skills (e.g., time management or communication).
- They are often used as a baseline to create job descriptions. Another way they are applied is in assigning and completing tasks.

COMPARISON SUMMARY

SIMILARITIES

- Competencies and capabilities seek to summarize an individual's readiness for completing tasks.
- Both are used in a variety of environments to assess candidates for a role or manage current employees.
- By narrowing in on KSAs, they also both discuss the application of an individual's KSAs. This could include implementing knowledge regarding a specific topic, skills such as coding in SPSS, or abilities such as empathy.

DIFFERENCES

- The difference between competencies and capabilities lies in their relation.
- Competencies focus on direct KSAs that a person can put on their resume. Capabilities, in contrast, go beyond that. They aim to view how an individual may apply their competencies to unknown scenarios.
- In this way, competencies are simply the KSAs one has while capabilities add a nuance of aptitude.
- An example of this difference includes nursing. When hiring a new nurse, a hospital will examine their aptness for the role.
 - Under competencies: the hospital could look at the direct KSAs a potential nurse has such as their educational background, language fluency, or even experience working with people.
 - Under capabilities: the hospital could look at the potential nurse's propensity to utilize their KSAs in unknown scenarios.

Competency

- **What You Do and Know** at a certain performance level (e.g., beginner, intermediate, expert) based on
 - Tasks
 - Knowledges
 - Skills
 - Attributes
 - Outcomes
 - Other Factors

Capability

- **Expected Successful Performance (WOULD BE ABLE TO)** of a competency based on
- Predictable Factors
 - Experiences
 - Training
 - Assessments
 - Set of Other Related Competencies
- Situation(s)
- Outcomes

EXECUTIVE BULLETED RESEARCH BRIEF

[Competencies or capabilities in the Australian higher education landscape and its implications for the development and delivery of sustainability education](#)

- Competencies are a subset of competency which refers to “the **development of contributing elements referred to as a skill.**”
- Capabilities are “an integrated and **large-scale characteristic.**”
- The difference between them lies in “the degree of skill acquisition.”
 - A competent person puts “into practice numerous competencies that correspond” to their field.
 - A capable person **applies** “associated competencies/skills” to specific scenarios.
- With this said, competency may be an inadequate measure for education. These approaches focus on skills in known environments which do not “facilitate change for the betterment of both their professions and society.”

***Main Takeaways:** Competencies have been argued as focusing on **face-value skills** compared to capabilities which show the **application** of those skills.*

[From competencies to capabilities in the assessment and accreditation of coaches](#)

- In modern times, competency is often described as “**the ability to apply** knowledge, understanding, practical and thinking skills to achieve effective performance to the standards required in employment.”
- Capabilities “**allow the person to choose action** and goals according to values and an evaluation of a wider external situation.”
- The difference between them focuses on how:
 - Competencies are “predetermined lists” of skills.
 - Capabilities are “guided by the exercise of individual freedom to choose an action.”
- Due to this difference, it can be argued that a capability-based system allows one to see “coaching engagement as a complex adaptive system.”

***Takeaways:** The main difference between competencies and capabilities lies in how **competencies are skills** and **capabilities show the implementation** of those skills.*

[Beyond competencies: using a capability framework in developing practice standards for advanced practice nursing](#)

- Standards of competency are “**measurable**,” and allow “student behaviour [sic] to be observed and assessed while specific workplace tasks and roles are performed.”
- With that said, competencies have weaknesses.
 - They are “designed for practice in stable environments with familiar problems.”
 - They are ambiguous due to being “defined in different ways by different people.”
- On the other hand, capabilities are “some **potential** ability,” that allows a person to cope with unknown situations, adapt, and apply competencies.
- When it comes to nursing, using capabilities as a model may better show one’s **ability to perform their job** compared to simply having a certain set of skills on paper.
- Competencies and capabilities have been used interchangeably by the Australian public sector workforce “without recognizing or clarifying fundamental distinctions.”

***Takeaways:** Competencies and capabilities have muddled definitions but there is a distinction of **capabilities applying competencies**.*

[Capabilities and Skills](#)

- There are two types of capabilities:
 - Internal capabilities describe “**skills embodied** in agents.”
 - External capabilities describe “the social and political institutions that inhibit or promote the **expression of skills**.”
- Skills allow one to have “the power to act in **multiple capacities**.”
- Children have “endowments of innate skills,” that need to be scaffolded early through their parents and schools.
- One question regards if “society should try to shape or manipulate individual preferences” of skills for children and adolescents.

***Takeaways:** Capabilities and skills work in tandem with capabilities focusing on one’s **skills and expression of those skills**.*

[A Survey on Data-Driven Evaluation of Competencies and Capabilities Across Multimedia Environments](#)

- In modern times, competency can be described as the “quality or state of being **functionally adequate or having sufficient** knowledge, strength and skill.”
- Capabilities, on the other hand, involves the integration of “knowledge skills and personal qualities used effectively and appropriately in response to varied, familiar and unfamiliar circumstances.”
- Competencies and capabilities are related in that “**capabilities are made up of competencies** that go beyond existing knowledge and experience.”
- All multimedia environments included in a meta-analysis survey were shown to be highly “correlated with the measurement and/or development of various capabilities.” This suggests that online environments could facilitate capability development.

***Takeaways:** There is a **direct relation between competencies and capabilities** along with evidence that capabilities are seen in a variety of digital environments.*

[Competence-based approaches in organizational and individual context](#)

- There are **multiple definitions of competencies that depend on context**. Two popular views are individual and collective.
 - Individual, mostly used by the US, looks at one’s behaviors.
 - Collective, mostly used by the UK, looks at organizational behavior.
- However, there is a “(mis)match between employers’ requirements and workers’ acquisition of needed competences.”
- In a growing digital world, companies need to invest in their employees to stay afloat.

***Takeaways:** Different contexts and how they interact are vital for understanding competencies to stay afloat in today’s growing digital atmosphere.*

[What Is Competence?](#)

- Competence has been defined in both individual and collective contexts.
- **Culture plays a large role in the definition of competencies**. Across the globe, there are three main approaches in western culture.

- Behavioral (US): “**underlying characteristics of people**,” that are “causally related to effective or superior performance in a job.”
- Functional (UK): “**the ability to apply knowledge**, understanding and skills in performing to the standards required in employment.” This is also known as vocational competence.
- Multi-dimensional and holistic Approach (FR, GER, AUST): A combination of approaches.
- Due to the individual definition not including a collective basis and the functional one not looking at the individual, a holistic definition that includes "knowledge, skills and social competences that are necessary for particular occupations" must be utilized.

Takeaways: Both the collective and individual approaches to competencies are necessary for a complete understanding of competencies.