

In the English language, the term 'competence' differs only slightly in spelling from 'competency', but a distinction can be made between them. This is useful in distinguishing slightly different concepts, and distinct approaches to measuring them.

'A competency' is often taken to mean an identifiable skill or practice. 'Competence' is then often taken to consist of a large number of discrete competencies which could be tested independently, perhaps by so-called objective means.

Competence, on the other hand, is more than that: it involves being able to select from and then orchestrate a set of competencies to achieve a particular end within a particular context. The competent person makes multi-criterion judgments that are consistently appropriate and situationally sensitive. What is more, the range of situations faced by many professional practitioners is potentially infinite.<sup>7</sup>

Decomposing competence into manageable (or even atomised) components in order to facilitate judgments may have some interim value in certain contexts, but the act of decomposition can obscure how a practitioner would work the various bits in together to form a coherent whole. The logic of this phenomenon is obvious: if you break something into pieces, whatever originally held it together has to be either retrieved or satisfactorily substituted if the sense of the whole is to be restored.

This view implies that judgments of competence can properly take place only within complex situations, not in the **Abstract**, and not componentially. Furthermore, sound judgments of competence require qualitative appraisals of how well a person 'gets it all together' in a given situation. Judgments need to be integrative and holistic, and arriving at consistent judgments requires that the judges be calibrated.