Expanding Awareness of Employees' Competences: The Holistic Perspective as a Management Tool

Abstract

The phenomenon of employees' competences has received more and more scholarly attention during the last several years. However, scholars have not fully analyzed individual and organizational implications when analyzing the competences from a holistic perspective. In our study, which is based on qualitative research, we aim to get a deeper understanding of 1) what competences employees experience in the case organization and 2) what individual and organizational implications exist as employees perceive their competences from a holistic perspective. Our data was gathered through storytelling and focus group interviews and was analyzed using a content analysis method. This study's findings contribute to the theoretical discussion of employees' competences, and based on our findings, we argue that a comprehensive competence base enabled the evaluation of the employees' own strengths and weaknesses in their jobs and the evaluation of new development possibilities in the workplace. Furthermore, by applying the holistic competence model, employees were able to obtain a more equal workplace.

Keywords:

competence, holistic competence view, reflection

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1. Introduction

The research on employees' competences has received scholarly attention during the last three decades (e.g., Lai, 2011; Sandberg, 2000; Rychen & Salkaniz, 2003; Cheetham & Chivers, 1998). The need for this research has emerged both from the science and from the practitioners and managers who aim to find new tools and strategies to capture employees' competences in practice. It should also be noted that successfully implementing these competences can operate as a source of competitive advantage for organizations. In addition, the competence gaps easily form a barrier against growth, development, and competitiveness (Barret & Mayson, 2007; Isidor et al., 2011). Thus, the need for this kind of research is evident.

Employees' competences represent the dynamic and multifaceted potential for organizational performance, but this potential can be adequately mobilized through relevant opportunities, tasks, and challenges (e.g., Lai, 2011). "Hidden" competences, the skills an employee unknowingly possesses, can and should be investigated, as they can represent a valuable asset to the individual and the firm (Le Deist & Winterton, 2005; Cheetham & Chivers, 1998); when viewed from the holistic perspective, hidden competences are more deeply rooted in competence than when seen from the traditional view. (Spencer & Spencer, 1993).

Thus, in this study, which is based on qualitative research, we aim to get a deeper understanding of 1) what competences employees experience in the case organization (RQ1) and 2) what individual and organizational implications exist as employees perceive their competences from a holistic perspective (RQ2).

The following sections present, firstly, the theoretical discussion related to this study phenomenon and its occurrence in daily working life and in the organization's activities. Secondly, the empirical part of the study presents a research set-up and a reference framework for methods. Thirdly, the results will be presented and in the final part, discussion and conclusions end the paper.

2. Theoretical framework – levels and views of competence

Various studies (e.g., Sandberg, 2000; Rychen & Salkaniz, 2003) have shown the concept of competence (see e.g, Le Deist & Winterton, 2005) as very multi-dimensional, and the definitions of competence vary greatly from one another depending on the school and the perspective. More specifically, the US focus is clearly on the "inputs," or the abilities, aptitudes, and talents that a person brings to a job, which enable them to perform satisfactorily or exceptionally. The USA school of competence emphasizes much more potential rather than demonstrated proficiency compared to UK approaches. This has been described as "the difference between drivers of performance and standards of work" (Roberts, 1997, p. 70). In this study, we take the UK approach and the term *competence*. Table 1 clarifies some common definitions of competences.

Table 1. Common definitions of competence found in the literature (adapted from Woodall & Winstanley, 1998 and Horton, 2000 in Garavan & McGuire, 2001, p. 150).

Worker-oriented definitions
1) The behavioral characteristics of an individual that are causally related to effective and/or superior performance in a job. This means that evidence indicates that possession of the characteristic precedes and leads to effective and/or superior performance on the job (Boyatzis, 1982). 2) An underlying characteristic of an individual that is causally related to criterion referenced as effective and/or superior performance in a job or situation (Spencer & Spencer, 1993). 3) A High performance or H-competency is a relatively stable set of behaviors that produce superior workgroup performance in more complex organizational environments (Schroder, 1989).

Work-oriented definitions
4) Occupational competence (is) … the ability to perform the activities within an occupation or function to the level of performance expected in employment (Management Charter Initiative, 1990). 5) The ability to perform the activities within an occupation (Nordhaug & Grønhaug, 1994). 6) An action, behavior, or outcome that the person should be able to demonstrate (Training Standards Agency, 2000).

Multidimensional definitions
7) The ability to apply knowledge, understanding, and practical and thinking skills to achieve effective performance to the standards required in employment. This includes solving problems and being sufficiently flexible to meet changing demands (NCVQ, 1997). 8) The skills, knowledge and understanding qualities and attributes, sets of values, and beliefs and attitudes which lead to effective managerial performance in a given context, situation, or role (Woodall & Winstanley, 1998.)

Competences have been investigated from the traditional and holistic competence perspectives. In more detail, the traditional view of competence (e.g., Spencer & Spencer, 1993) has viewed it as a construct based on an individual's knowledge, skills, and experience. However, the so-called "holistic perspective of competence" (e.g., Le Deist & Winterton, 2005) views the construct of competence as more dynamic and multidimensional, which also includes employees' personal behavior and ethical values. Overall, the concept of holism is "a view that an account of all the parts of a whole and of their interrelations is inadequate as an account the whole" (Mauntner, 1997; Kelly & Horder, 2001; Fernandez et al., 2012). In addition, the holistic perspective entails various levels: knowledge/cognitive competence (e.g., technical/theoretical specialist and tacit-practical knowledge) and functional competence (e.g., occupation-specific), which form an individual's professional competence (Cheetham & Chivers, 1998).

Furthermore, the holistic model also includes meta-competencies such as communication, creativity, and problem solving (Cheetham & Chivers, 1998) as well as individual experiences, opinions, and principles (Rampersad, 2004). Finally, professional competence (in the holistic model) is also shaped by the context of work, work environment, and an employee's personality and motivation (Cheetham & Chivers, 1998; Fernandez et al., 2012).

Regardless of the research on the holistic competence model, the majority of competence research has offered a relatively rational and positivist perspective, which sees that competences are based solely on individuals' characteristics (Arnold & Davey, 1992; Sandberg, 2000; Garavan & McGuire, 2001). It should be noted that this "rational and positivist perspective" (Sandberg, 2000; Garavan & McGuire, 2001) has ignored the contextual aspects of competences and sees them more as mechanistic and bureaucratic (compared to the dynamic and holistic perspectives).

For example, in his research on the interaction competences, Spitzberg (2013) presents the concept of the paradox of competence; because individuals are constantly interacting, they also assume they know how to do it. It is a challenge to identify what the individuals could do differently, how to develop, and how to identify their own competences extensively. However, experiences and making by doing do not always develop the competences unless they can be connected to wider dimensions. Competences can also lead to work for oneself and for others in unsafe—

dysfunctional, and to play these ways through their working lives. It may also be that the individual is not brave enough "to do," but there is a need for support and guidance.

The Cheetham and Chivers (1998) model (Table 2) takes into account values and ethical competences as well, and demonstrates that those competences will increasingly become key factors (i.e., values that include respecting others, having an appreciation of others, a sensitivity to the environment, and precise customer orientation). In addition, Cheetham and Chivers (1998) paid attention to the ability to reflect which can be seen as a super meta-competence. As Ruohotie (2002) argues, the reflection is an individual's mental action to modify and structure the knowledge he or she has experienced in various situations: what happened, what the experience meant, and how to react to issues. The goal is to find the meanings and create new activities through the decisions and conclusions. From the learning perspective, reflection is the mental process and an awareness of the perceived review, which requires the use of critical thinking and evaluation (Seibert, 1996). The experience, therefore, is not assessed only at the activity level, but the criticality of operations is also essential. Thus, reflection adapts a process that accounts for the changing operating environment and is linked to future visions.

Table 2. The holistic competence view (Cheetham & Chivers, 1998).

META-COMPETENCES/HIGH-LEVEL COMPETENCES			
e.g. communication, creativity, problem solving, learning, self-development, mental agility, analysis, adoption of changes, forecasting, learning			
KNOWLEDGE/ COGNITIVE COMPETENCES	FUNCTIONAL COMPETENCES	PERSONAL/ BEHA-VIORAL COMPETENCES	VALUES/ETHICAL COMPETENCES
Technical/theoretical/ specialist - formal knowledge base of profession Tacit-practical knowledge - difficult to articulate or pass on, often linked to the performance of particular functions Procedural knowledge - basic routines: how, what, who, when, etc. Contextual knowledge - organization, sector, geography, client base, etc. Knowledge application - including synthesis, transfer, and conceptualization skills	Occupation-specific - range of profession-specific functions/tasks Process/organizational/ management - e.g. planning, monitoring, implementing, delegating, evaluating, self/time management Mental - e.g. literacy, numeracy, diagnosis, IT skills Physical - e.g. hand-eye coordination, manual dexterity, keyboard skills SUPER META-COMPETENCE = REFLECTION	Social/vocational - e.g. self-confidence, persistence, thinking on feet, control of emotions and stress, listening skills, task-centeredness, interpersonal skills, empathy Intraprofessional - e.g. collegiality, conformity to norms of professional behavior	Personal - e.g. adherence to law, adherence to moral or religious codes, sensibility to needs and values of others Professional - e.g. adopting appropriate attitudes, adherence to professional codes of conduct, self-regulation, environmental sensitivity, client-centeredness, ethical judgment, acknowledging. boundaries of own competence, duty to keep up-to-date, duty to help develop newcomers to profession, judgements to profession, judgements re "whistle blowing" on colleagues

Several scholars have also recognized that identifying the real competences broadly have several positive outcomes for individuals and organizations (e.g., Arnold & Davey, 1992; Lai, 2011; Morrison et al., 2005; Parker, 2003). For example, by analyzing employees' competencies, firms are able to create, develop, and maintain "learning organizations" that constantly support firms to adopt new knowledge and insights through individuals and teams (see Sundberg, 2001). According to Arnold and Davey (1992), people's perceptions of their work-related competences have great importance in occupational settings. Most importantly, employee work competences are likely to affect work performance and perception of training needs (e.g., Arnold & Davey, 1992), career planning and development (e.g., London & Stumpf, 1982), and communication between the person and other people in the workplace (Carroll & Schneier, 1982).

Lai (2011) has also investigated the role of perceived competence mobilization (the degree to which employees perceive that they have adequate opportunities to utilize their competences in their current jobs) and its attitudinal outcomes within organizations. More specifically, Lai (2011) argues that employees' perceived competence mobilization is associated with a number of favorable employee attitudes, including intrinsic motivation, organizational commitment, and intention to stay with the organization. Notably, her study included only perceived competence mobilization but not "the deep and invisible competences" of the individual.

According to Morrison et al. (2005), earlier studies have shown that perceived still utilization has been one of the strongest predictors of job-related affective well-being. Similarly, Parker (2003) has also found that a high level of perceived skill utilization is linked to positive outcomes such as higher job-related affective well-being, higher job satisfaction, lower job-related depression, higher organizational commitment, higher job-related per-

ceived competence, and higher job-related feelings of worth. Perceived underemployment, in contrast, reflects a situation in which employees do not feel that they fully utilize their competence based on education and experience (Lai, 2011). Perceived underemployment is related to negative outcomes such as lower psychological well-being, increased job dissatisfaction, lower effective commitment to the organization, and higher turnover intention (Erdogan & Bauer, 2009; Feldman, 1996; Feldman & Bolino, 2000; Feldman et al., 2002; Maynard et al., 2006).

It should be noted that employees' perceptions of their own work-related competences have a great importance in occupational settings as they have implications for career planning and development, analysis of training needs, and communication with other people in the workplace, and self-ratings of competences are likely to influence a person's work performance (Arnold & Davey, 1992).

3. Context, data, and methods

In qualitative studies, it is vital to justify not only the researcher's selection of a specific context and case but also his or her context from a sampling perspective (see Pratt, 2009). Furthermore, the qualitative research strategy is particularly suited to elicit a deeper and more holistic understanding of complex, sensitive, and multi-layered issues (Yin, 2014).

This study explores a contemporary phenomenon in a bounded system (a case) (Creswell, 2013).To explore the barriers for value-based pricing that individual actors perceive in interorganizational exchanges, we used a qualitative, single-case study research design, which enables us to delve deeply into the social reality in an organizational setting and examine how individuals experience and make sense of everyday pricing issues (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Yin, 2009).

"The selection of the actual case and the unit of analysis is a critical aspect of case study

research as it binds the research phenomenon to its real-life setting" (Creswell, 2013, p. 97). Therefore, we selected a relevant and empirically rich case (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007). We looked for a firm that 1) employs value-based pricing with its customers, 2) has practiced value-based pricing, and 3) has a deep understanding of the potential challenges associated with customers.

The case organization in this study is a development company (Ltd.) operating in the social sector in Finland, which thus forms the context of this study. The operation of regional competence centers are based on municipality co-operation. The central focus of the operation is creating co-operation with different actors (municipalities, service producers) relating to social work, research, and education. Competence centers in social work are open networks with a light organizational model. The operation is based on areal co-operative needs, ensuring flexibility and innovativeness.

The selected organization represents a critical case and is an information-oriented selection rather than a random selection (see Flyvbjerg, 2006). In more detail, "a critical case can be defined as having strategic importance in relation to general problem" (p. 229) so that "if this is (not) valid for this case, then it applies to all (no) cases" (Flyvbjerg, 2006, p. 229).

As the purpose of this study is to generate new knowledge on this topic, theoretical sampling (see Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007) was appropriate. Theoretical sampling refers to when "cases are selected because they are particularly suitable for illuminating and extending relationships and logic among constructs" (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007, p. 27).

The research group included 16 participants (all employees of the case firm), and their backgrounds are illustrated in Table 3.

Fourteen out of sixteen interviewees were female, whereas only two were men (see Table 3). Interviewees were between the ages of 27 and 60 (most of them were in their forties), and nine of out sixteen worked as development planners. As most of the interviewees' work-related tasks were focused on development planning, it was up to them to identify their real and latent competence bases.

The data collection was a two-phase process: 1) writing an individual story on paper and 2) conducting focus group interviews (two focus groups, eight participants in each group). In the interviews, each participant wrote an answer to the statement "Describe what competences you have," and then we used group interviews and presented the holistic competence map (see Table 2; Cheetham & Chivers, 1998). The research questions in the focus group interviews were based on an idea of how the participants reflect their competences when they see the competence map, which gives hints related to possible competences.

One form of meaning construction frequently identified in qualitative interview data is story inquiry (Mishler, 1995). The underlying premise of story inquiry is the belief that individuals make sense of their world most effectively by telling stories (Ricoeur, 1981; Connelly & Clandinin, 1994; Riessman, 1990, 1991, 1993; Clandinin & Connelly, 1990; Wiltshire, 1995). It is important to note that for the interpretive researcher, the historical truth of an individual's account (story) of an event is not the primary issue (Riessman, 1993, p. 6).

A focus group is a group of individuals selected and assembled by researchers to discuss and utilize their personal experiences to comment on a research topic. As a research technique, the focus group employs guided interactional discussion as a means of generating "the rich details of complex experiences and the reasoning behind an individual's actions, beliefs, perceptions, and attitudes" (Carey, 1995). This information can be used to identify potential areas of inquiry or to clarify subject matter that, by its nature, eludes other

Table 3. Participants' backgrounds

Participant no.	Age	Male/female	Task
1	40	Male	Development planner
2	33	Male	Development planner
3	51	Female	Development planner
4	34	Female	Development planner
5	40	Female	Network coordinator
6	52	Female	Development planner
7	49	Female	Development manager
8	60	Female	Assistant
9	27	Female	Patient advisor
10	34	Female	Development planner
11	42	Female	Development planner
12	46	Female	Project coordinator
13	45	Female	Development planner
14	46	Female	Financial secretary
15	52	Female	CEO
16	46	Female	Development planner

research instruments. The "focus" underpinning the discussions is anything that engages the focus group in a collective activity "such as viewing a film, examining a single health education message or simply debating a particular set of questions" (Kitzinger, 1994). According to Powell and Single (1996), a focus group is especially useful when 1) existing knowledge of a subject is inadequate and elaboration of pertinent issues or the generation of new hypotheses is necessary before a relevant and valid questionnaire can be constructed or an existing one enhanced, 2) the subject under investigation is complex, and concurrent use of additional data collection methods is required to ensure validity, or 3) the subject under investigation is complex and comprises a number of variables. A focus group enables the researcher to concentrate time and resources on the study's most pertinent variables.

In analyzing the storytelling papers and focus group interviews, we used content analysis, which is both the analysis method and the thematic method. We studied storytelling papers, and for the most part we transcribed interviews inductively (Pratt, 2009) without guiding theory structure or a structure of pre-selected rating (Silverman, 1989) and identity. Ritchie, Spencer, and O'Connor (2003) have described the iterative process throughout analysis. The first level (data management) generates themes and concepts, and the purpose is to label or tag data. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), what counts as a theme is not (usually) dependent on quantifiable measures, but instead it depends on whether the potential theme captures something relevant to the investigated research question (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Researchers classified and sorted the data at the second level (descriptive accounts) in order to ascertain their meaning. The third level (explanatory accounts) addresses how and why questions and establishes the typologies.

The current study followed the above-

mentioned iterative process. First, we coded and identified themes and concepts before classifying and sorting themes and issues and establishing head typologies. Finally, we addressed the research questions on the basis of the research data gathered.

4. Findings

The findings from the first part of the study (16 employee stories) revealed that each participant experienced their competences individually and differently. In general, the participants perceived their competences as much narrower than Cheetham and Chivers (1998) have done in Table 2. For example, one interviewee stated the following: *"It helps to perform all tasks when you understand the diversity of your competences. And the workplace as well" (Participant 4).*

When comparing the answers with the category of competences by Cheetham and Chivers (1998), we identified some participants who felt that their competences have only two aspects: cognitive and personal competence (see Spencer & Spencer, 1998). For example, one interviewee suggested that *"I have good ADP skills and then I'm a good listener and I have good interpersonal skills, too" (Participant 13).* However, only a few used the whole scale of competence model when evaluating their competences.

Remarkably, no one mentioned professional behavior, obeying the law, or work-related ethics when evaluating their competences. For example, no one mentioned the concealment of confidential information in their story—even though it is closely related to the field of operation in the study. However, several participants described only substance competence ("hard competence") or competences relating to their own behavior or values ("soft competences") (see Woodall & Winstanley, 1998). The following quotes describe this well: *"I have a good substance competence" (Participant 6); "I get along with all kinds of people and I can encourage people" (Participant 11).*

Several participants described their competences only as meta-competences, like communication skills and social interaction, creativity, innovativeness, problem-solving skills, and the ability to perceive big entities. For example, one participant described the following: *"I'm good at creating the networks—I'm very flexible and I can tolerate the stress" (Participant 6).*

Some of the participants described their cognitive and functional competences in the way that meta-competence was intertwined with the evaluation of their competences. For example, describing competences could indicate that they manage their everyday life routines well and can apply problem-solving skills and flexibility.

Furthermore, their presumption was that their so-called "substance competence" is an automatic, built-in operation that they cannot even think about in an everyday life operation (see also Sandberg, 2000). Employees experienced a manifestation of their comprehensive competence base in that their subconscious directs their operation and uses different ways to operate in different situations without the employee even realizing it (Lai, 2011). In addition, employees constructed different meanings of competences; they were considered "real" as they matched the individual's perceptions of the operation related to the context (Wierdsma, 2007).

So-called "super meta-competence," which manifests as the "ability to reflect" manifested in several stories: employees critically and analytically identified their own deficiencies but also their talents and gifts, and they could evaluate their own operation from the perspective of others.

Interviewees also suggested that change and the tolerance of change demanded skills such as the ability to change their thinking and operation methods, their flexibility, and an open mind. All of the employees experienced positive change, which operates as a precondition and a "driver" of operation

and development. In addition, change made it possible for them to use their creativity because they were able to recognize aspects that require changes, alternative operation methods, and models in their work. A high tolerance to change also strengthened the tolerance of insecurity and complexity (see Lai, 2011). In addition, a high tolerance to change helped them adjust to their presence.

Change also allowed them to develop their work and move it in different directions (within the strategy of their company). Through change, participants could acquire new tasks and when the opportunity arises, they could move away from their "comfort zone" voluntarily. Change enabled watching new situations and created a feeling that things proceed and that development is happening, and then they could ignore their "old and safe ways/habits" (Lai, 2011).

Employees also highlighted their network-related competences and how those competences allowed them to develop new innovations and service entities, and they were also able to take into account the customer's perspective. For example, one interviewee stated, *"I'm a director of many networks, and I feel that I'm conversational and give space to others. Such action requires that I have to be good for summarizing all discussions and conclusions" (Participant 7).*

Networking was seen as a precondition for one's own learning when the job description was unique and when they did not have colleagues with whom they could discuss work-related issues, problems, and development areas. In this way, networking offered a natural support and a route to development (see Morrison et al., 2005). In addition, operating in a network brought up their own competence and especially their ability to reflect their own operation. Networks were also seen as a possibility to learn how to create and manage networks, and they experienced networks as a good way of "making things clear" and managing their competences. The ability

to network was seen as a living condition and as something that maintains their job satisfaction. For example, many of the employees have started their jobs by building networks (Parker, 2003).

Several participants described their competences by discussing their families and hobbies, which also related to value and ethical competences and told much about the personal values of the employee. In more detail, these were the most valued factors that came before their work: *"Outside of work I'm an older sister, mother of three children (one of them is hearing-impaired), and I live in such a 'new family.' So I have my own family and in addition my husband's children and family" (Participant 12).*

For example, employees identified competences related to their hobbies (e.g., in sports) or their tasks in similar associations (e.g., as a trainer). Personal hobbies such as playing instruments, singing, gardening, outdoor activities, moving in nature, boating, diving, skiing, and taking care of their pets were mentioned in the employees' stories. Family life also closely related to their competences, especially with the women, who described it through their role as mothers—its requirements and demands, the results they were able to achieve through motherhood, and how they could implement their role as a mother into their work:

"I'm a wife. I have received a good present—the gift to love. I'm a mother to two children. I have had the possibility to learn to be a mother with my children" (Participant 4).

An employee's role as a mother and partner was strongly seen as the ability to be a nurse, the ability to control their emotions, the ability to understand different generations, taking care of daily routines, and in some cases, it was recognized for the challenges experienced by single mothers. In addition, employees also highlighted competences related to their marriage relationships and their interactions with relatives and friends (Kelly & Horder, 2001; Fernandez et al.,

2012). Three factors: age, life experience, and work life were seen as huge strengths that enabled them to receive demanding job-related tasks and to constantly develop their skills and competences.

In several employee stories, competence was seen as a synonym for "being good in something," needing improvement in some other aspect, or having succeeded in something.

In the second phase of the study, we presented the holistic competence model by Cheetham and Chivers (1998) (see Table 2), and each part of the model was discussed carefully with the participants. Based on this holistic competence model, the employees realized their competence base much more comprehensively than what they had previously thought of themselves: *"I think this is good in that somehow this domination of cognitive competence becomes more equal with other aspects of the competence" (Participant 1).*

This realization explained why the work atmosphere in the organization was perceived as positive and as something that supported everyone. In addition, learning was enabled through colleagues. Several employees also understood the meaning of their attitude in relation to their personal competence; even though the substance competence would be fine, it would disappear anyway if the attitude was not right. Perceiving employees' competences comprehensively was perceived as something that unites and encourages change and in the intraorganizational dynamics (see Erdogan & Bauer, 2009; Feldman, 1996; Maynard, 2006).

"It eases at least the coping when you understand the complexity of competences, and in a way it kind of helps to understand the work place, I mean, like the way employees have focused their competences differently." (Participant 2)

"…then the attitude, if you take an attitude like I can."

"I think this is like a richness that everyone sees it differently and we don't label employees as

better or worse." (Participant 14)

"If you identify the different competence levels, then if we organize teams then we can put right the assembly." (Participant 15)

Overall, the participants had not identified and recognized their own competences at first according to the holistic competence model by Cheetham and Chivers (1998): *"These are things which I have taken for granted, these are something which are always present…I had insights [seeing] these things written down" (Participant 9).*

In addition, several participants felt that it was "easier to work," as they had identified their whole comprehensive base, because they realized that if they failed, they would still have several other competence aspects where they were strong. A comprehensive competence base enabled the evaluation of their own strengths and weaknesses and enabled them to evaluate new development possibilities. In addition, participants felt a richness in recognizing that every employee in the company looks at things differently, depending on their level of competence (development level). By recognizing this, the focus group expressed that by using the holistic competence model, they are able to achieve more a equal workplace. This finding also pushes the previous knowledge of the outcomes of using the holistic competence model in the workplace to the edges of new scientific knowledge. That is, to our knowledge, this finding has not been highlighted in the previous studies of the holistic competence model (see Cheetham & Chivers, 1998).

In addition, the holistic competence model gives tools for self-management, which also reflected on the inner dynamics inside their organization:

"I somehow thought of the recruiting situation, that in that situation we could actually apply this model and on the other hand the development discussions, and then apply for self-management and for evaluating our own core competences." (Participant 15)

We also noted that the participants high-lighted competences related to their personality and their ethical operation: attitude toward the work, customers, colleagues, empathy, personal behavior, giving feedback to colleagues, and behaving ethically. The identification of the holistic competence model helped them tolerate more differences, be helpful, equal, create a "we-spirit," and understand the meaning of interpersonal skills (see Cheetham & Chivers, 1998; Sundberg, 2001).

5. Discussion and conclusions

The aim of this study was to get a deeper understanding of what competences employees experience in the case organization and what individual- and organizational-level implications exist as employees perceive their competences from a holistic perspective in the case organization. Various scientific studies (e.g., Le Deist & Winterton, 2005; Garavan & McGuire, 2001) have shown that scholars have had difficulty identifying competences. There is also a research gap concerning how the holistic perspective can and should be applied in order to harness employees' real but invisible competences into practice (Cheetham & Chivers, 1998). This can be because the organization traditionally evaluates employees from its own point of view instead of from the employee's self-reflection. Ruohotie (2002) and Seibert (1996) argue that the ability to reflect depends on experiences, mental processes, and context. If they do not meet the organization's targets, the reflection process can stay too facile. For example, Cheetham and Chivers (1998) have pointed out that especially a professional's reflection contributes markedly to their ability to adapt the knowledge into practice. Furthermore, there is a lack of empirical studies that focus on the implications of analyzing employees' competences from the holistic competence model.

Based on our study, we found that the employees in our case company first perceived and understood their competences mainly from the traditional competence view by focusing on cognitive and functional competences (e.g., Spencer & Spencer, 1993). However, after applying the holistic competence approach (e.g., Cheetham & Chivers, 1998), employees experienced a significant insight into understanding their very broad competences and an in-depth understanding of their own work. The findings of our study have several theoretical insights that push the current knowledge forward regarding how the holistic competence approach can be applied in order to harness employees' competences into practice.

In addition, we found that utilizing the holistic competence approach in order to map out employees' competences has several individual- and organizational-level implications. In more detail, we found that identifying these competences had several positive outcomes for both the individuals (employees) and the case organization, and can lead to effective and/or superior performance on the job (Boyatzis, 1982). At the individual level, understanding the holistic competence view made it easier to view one´s own competences and understand the behaviors and actions of other employees, the importance of empathy, and the capability to control one's own emotions. The Training Standard Agency (2000) mention that identifying individuals' own competences can lead to an action, behavior, or outcome that the person should be able to demonstrate.

In summary, the holistic perspective increased employees' well-being in the organization. As Woodall and Winstanley (1998) have argued, the multidimensional approach includes the skills, knowledge, and understanding qualities and attributes, sets of values, and beliefs and attitudes that lead to effective managerial performance in a given context, situation, or role. Secondly, employees experienced a new kind of job satisfaction when they found that they have a lot more competences and that part of these compe-

tences are "latent," as they had been hidden and unconscious. At the organizational level, identifying employees' competences was also important and had positive outcomes. Employees' competencies are often well understood and implemented in organizations that have adopted the principles of *learning organizations* that constantly support firms to adopt new knowledge and insights through individuals and teams (see Sundberg, 2001). Finally, we argue that the concept of the holistic competence view helped in self-assessment, reflection, and attitude editing at both the individual and the organizational levels.

The first contribution of this study is to emphasize the value of understanding the holistic competence approach. For example, it is useful in recruiting process and development discussion when identifying employees' features and hidden talents. The topic has not been widely studied, and its thematic has not experienced a significant amount of (or has not even fit) business-related decision-making. From a managerial aspect, benefit of this approach is the new way of understanding the tacit dimension in the workplace atmosphere and group dynamics. Secondly, the research enables the development of recruiting and development discussion processes, for example whether it is possible to create the question tools that help to evaluate intangible and abstract issues from the holistic competence perspective. Thirdly, the study underlines the importance of creating an assessment tool for the recruitment process, targeting the evalua-

tion of the holistic competence approach and intangible and abstract issues.

Limitations and future research

The main limitation of the current study is that it is a qualitative case study and only one case organization was examined. Therefore, the findings cannot be generalized in to a larger extent. However, to ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, we employed criteria for qualitative research (Yin, 2009; Crewell, 2013). We improved credibility by employing two forms of research methods, including using multiple sources of data. Information was gathered from 16 employees (all employees in the case company) using two methods: storytelling and focus group interviews.

In the future studies, both qualitative and quantitative methods are needed. It would be interesting to repeat the study with personnel in different contexts, such as male-dominated industries and organizations. Another case could examine a scenario where self-reflection is one tool to develop and realize an individual's own approaches related to work tasks. It is worth noting that self-reflection has been an untapped potential, but employees are willing to utilize it, even though their courage has been missing. In addition, there are several factors which need more research related to the identification of the holistic competence view. Nevertheless, we believe that the current study—limitations and all—has provided a starting point for such work.

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