



DEVELOPING COMPETENCES AS PART OF STUDENTS' PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

**Case Study at Laurea University of Applied Sciences,
Degree Program in Business Management**

Yulia Nevmerzhitskaya

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Abstract The aim of this development project was to analyse development of competences as part of students' professional growth. The project explored competence development process of first year students at Degree Program in Business Management at Laurea University of Applied Sciences. In the project subject-specific and generic competences needed in business education were explored and analyzed by revising students' competence essays and interviewing teachers-tutors. Based on the analysis, suggestions were made regarding facilitation of students' competence development process. The main outcome of analysis was that although all business students were able to achieve basic level of generic competences during their first year of study, many of them did not connect competences with the curriculum and did not see relationship between competences and their professional growth. Such methods of supporting competence development as discussions with tutors are not popular with the students. The conclusion was made that more time should be spent at the beginning of the studies to explain the meaning and importance of competences to students and its connection to their professionalism; and other methods of facilitating students' development process besides tutoring are needed		
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CONTENTS

1 INTRODUCTION	2
2 BACKGROUND	3
2.1 Role of Universities of Applied Sciences	3
2.2 Concept of competence	5
2.2.1 Definitions of the term “competence”	5
2.2.2 Competences as part of professional development.....	8
3 COMPETENCE-BASED CURRICULUM AT LAUREA UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED SCIENCES	9
3.1 Learning environment.....	9
3.2 Laurea’s competences.....	11
3.2.1 Ethical competence.....	12
3.2.2 Globalization competence	13
3.2.3 Innovative competence	13
3.2.4 Reflective competence.....	14
3.2.5 Network competence	14
3.3 Learning by Developing	17
3.4 Transformation of teachers’ and students’ roles.....	19
4 COMPETENCE DEVELOPMENT PROCESS AT DEGREE PROGRAM IN BUSINESS MANAGEMENT	21
4.1 Structure of Degree Program	21
4.2 Competences in Business Management	24
4.2.1 Professional/Knowledge-Based Competence.....	24
4.2.2 Professional/Skill-Based Competence.....	24
4.2.3 Ethical competence.....	25
4.2.4 Globalisation competence.....	26
4.2.5 Innovation competence.....	27
4.2.6 Network competence	27
4.2.7 Reflective competence.....	28
4.3 Facilitation of competence development.....	28
4.3.1 Development projects	29
4.3.2 Tutoring and guidance	30
4.3.3 Showcase portfolio	31
5 ASSESSMENT OF COMPETENCE DEVELOPMENT PROCESS	33
5.1 Analysis of competence essays.....	33
5.1.1 Ethical competence.....	34
5.1.2 Globalization competence	35
5.1.3 Reflective competence.....	35
5.1.4 Network competence	37
5.1.5 Connection between competences and students’ professional development ..	38
5.2 Interviews with tutor-lecturers.....	39
6 CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS	41
REFERENCES	45

1 INTRODUCTION

In today's business world things are changing so fast that sometimes it seems impossible to follow those changes. New business models emerge, new forms of cooperation are developed, and new leadership approaches are required. More and more companies are looking for employees that can adapt quickly to changing environment and show excellent performance in any circumstances. What becomes more important is not what you know (knowledge-based competence), but what you are able to do (skill-based competence).

In order to respond to these changes, new teaching and learning methods are needed. One solution adopted by many Universities of Applied Sciences in Finland is to use competence-based approach to studies. This approach helps to satisfy the needs of working life in competent workforce. Competence-based studies are designed to help students to develop skills, attitudes and practical knowledge needed for his or her professional development. They are orientated towards the future and aim at development of students' competences.

Competence development process is at the heart of professional development. Professional growth is based on recognising and reflecting on students' own performance, and on students' willingness to develop into an investigative and development-oriented professional in the field. Throughout the studies students learn how to develop generic and subject-specific competences in project-based or Learning by Developing-based content. Students' competence development process is reflected in competence essay and professional portfolio that is made in accordance with the objectives stated in their Personal Study Plans.

This Development Project aims to analyse competence development process of first year students of Degree Program in Business Management at Laurea University of Applied Sciences and provide some suggestions for teachers and tutors on how to help students in the process. Three interviews were conducted with teachers-tutors of BBA students and seven competence essays of first year BBA students were analysed qualitatively for this purpose.

The Development Project consists of four parts. The first part creates background for further analysis. First, the role of Universities of Applied Sciences as providers of knowledge and expertise is discussed based on laws and regulations (Polytechnics Act

351/2003) and Education and Research Development Plan 2003-2008 by Ministry of Education. Second, the concept of competence is discussed and different approaches to define the term “competence” and “competent” are presented. Link between competence and performance is shown and different types of competences are described.

The second part describes competence-based curriculum and supporting learning methods at Laurea University of Applied Sciences. Five generic competences are presented that are common for all degree programs at Laurea. They are ethical, innovative, network, reflective and globalization competences. General principles of competence evaluation are discussed.

The third part deals with competence development process at Degree Program in Business Management. The structure of the program and its connection to competences is presented and main ways of competence development: project work, showcase portfolio and competence essays are analysed. The review of seven competence essays is done and interviews with teachers-tutors are conducted to support the analysis.

The last part of the project contains suggestions for teachers and tutors related to facilitation of competence development process.

2 BACKGROUND

2.1 Role of Universities of Applied Sciences

In Finland higher education is provided by universities and universities of applied sciences (former polytechnics). The Finnish system of universities of applied sciences (UAS) is rather new. It was built in the 90s to diversify the higher education sector. The tasks of polytechnics (universities of applied sciences) are defined in the Polytechnics Act (351/2003). According to the Act, polytechnics carry out applied research and development serving polytechnic education, working life and regional development. Polytechnics mostly conduct R&D related to the needs of business and industry and usually linked to the structure and development of the regional economy. The tasks described in the Act include support for individual professional growth as

well. Thus, it is obvious that the main task of UAS is to satisfy demand for professional expertise of working life.

UASs are, more than universities, oriented towards practical working life and closely connected with their respective regions and regional development prospects. In the s Education and Research Development Plan 2003-2008 (Ministry of Education, 2004) this is stated that polytechnics should strengthen their links with working life and their competence in workplace development, especially as regards the needs of small and medium enterprises and regional development. Polytechnics should also promote R&D in cooperation with working life, while universities should focus on scientific basic research, scientific researcher training and basic teaching. Thus, the basis for development of UASs' teaching is closely connected with the working life of the region and its development.

The aim of UAS education is to provide business life with experts in the field. The emphasis in teaching and learning at UASs is made on development of competences needed by working life. UASs serve the needs of industry and business in their own geographical areas, and these needs are taken into consideration when planning teaching and content of degree programs. The UASs underline the importance of a development approach as a key element in professional competence. Professional competence is based on research-based knowledge, understanding the professional context, skills in doing and the ability to manage various workplace situations. Thus project-based R&D work is a growing element in studies. New teaching methods include project-based learning and problem-based learning, and learning by developing method.

Closeness to working life is an integral aspect of development at UASs and of their various forms of teaching. Often cooperation with industry and business is realized in a form of common projects. In some cases, the most important stakeholders in working life are also represented in the administration. There are different levels of cooperation with working life. At the simplest level, relations involve practical training placements, finding subjects for diploma projects and giving feedback on teaching and its development. At a deeper level, cooperation includes international cooperation, project-oriented diploma projects, systematic business services, increased assessment and feedback cooperation, and joint projects in R&D.

Although Finland has been able to make good use of the globalization trend in economies and technology, retaining existing development potential requires increased investment in competence and its use. Companies are constantly looking for high-quality knowledge and competence. The lack of competence in demanding expert and management positions in emerging companies is, in many cases, an outright obstacle to business growth, according to studies conducted by Suomen Yrittäjät ry. (Marttila, Kautonen 2006.) The demand for highly educated personnel is growing because of the constant increase in the contribution made by SMEs to turnover and employment in the private sector. UASs thus have an essential role in increasing competence in SMEs and creating development potential.

Competence development is seen as the main tool for influencing the development of the regions. Investments in competence can be seen to have a positive impact on regional employment, development of the business and industry structure, reinforcement of regional economies and other indirect social and cultural knock-on effects. The fact that society is becoming more open and more globalized means that the success of the regions is increasingly dependent on their position amid international competition. Success here requires investment in quality and a smooth innovation-to-product chain (Ministry of Education 2002.)

2.2 Concept of competence

2.2.1 Definitions of the term “competence”

As discussed above, the main task of UASs is to satisfy demand for professional expertise of working life. It is done by helping students to develop competences needed in business. Competences are rapidly receiving recognition as an essential, required element of business life. But what is understood by the concept “competence”?

Nowadays competence is a term that is used quite often in everyday language. It has even become a fashionable word, but with vague meaning. In general, we know what the terms “competence”, “competences”, or “competent person” mean, without being able to precisely define or clearly differentiate them. Competences are those characteristics - knowledge, skills, mindsets, and the like – that, when used either singularly or in various combinations, result in successful performance (The

Competency Casebook 1998.) But the competence is more than just knowledge and skills. It involves the ability to meet complex demands, by drawing on and mobilising psychosocial resources (including skills and attitudes) in a particular context. For example, the ability to communicate effectively is a competency that may draw on an individual's knowledge of language, practical IT skills and attitudes towards those with whom he or she is communicating (OECD 2005.) Thus, the core meaning of competence is related to one's ability to perform.

A review of definitions of the terms "competence" and "competences" shows that these terms have variety of meanings. For example, "competence" is defined in Webster's dictionary as "the quality of being adequately or well qualified ... intellectually"; or as "fitness or ability". Words given as synonyms or related terms are "capability", "capacity", "efficiency", "proficiency" and "skill" (Webster's online dictionary, 2001.)

Some other definitions found by Weiner (2001) in his article Concept of Competence. A Conceptual Clarification are : (a) all performance abilities and skills; (b) only those inherited, domain specific prerequisites necessary for acquiring primary knowledge systems; (c) learned (demand-specific) knowledge and skills; (d) individual needs for effectiveness; (e) subjective evaluation of the self; and (f) the entire set of cognitive, motivational and social prerequisites for successful action (action competence). (Rychen & Salganik 2001.)

Because there are so many definitions of the concept of competence, it is impossible to identify a core definition. But all definitions can be put into two approaches: competence as intelligence and competence as practical skills. In the former case, we can speak about learned competence (i.e., skills can be learned)

But what does it mean to be a competent person? Still it is not clear and there are many approaches to define the term "competent". Historically competent person meant a person who is qualified (licensed) to do the job. But this says nothing about quality of one's performance. Oxford English dictionary defines "competent" as "...sufficient in amount, quality, or degree". This definition might have even a negative meaning when interpreting as someone who is adequate but not excellent (Eraut 2000.) Here the next question arises: can we say that competent person is a professional and to what extent? What is the level of one's competence? Pearson

(1984) expressed this meaning of competence by saying: “If we can think of continuum ranging from just knowing how to do something at one end to knowing how to do something very well at the other, knowing how to do something competently would fall somewhere along this continuum” (Eraut 2000.) Analysing this statement, we can say that the term “competence” has at least two dimensions: scope and quality. Scope of competence is related to range of tasks a person can do, roles and situations in which this competence can be used. At the same time the quality of competence can be measured by comparing performance of a beginner with an expert. Both dimensions of competence are important when speaking about one’s professionalism and performance.

Since competences are related to one’s performance, they illustrate the person’s proficiency, capacity and ability to perform in professional tasks. Finnish universities of applied sciences have decided to use a distinction between program-specific or subject-specific and generic competences with the objective to create competence categories that are clearly distinguishable and easy to evaluate as learning outcomes.

The subject-specific competences form a base for the student’s development in his/her career and expertise. Examples of subject-specific competences are: customer relationship competence, competence in industrial management, material competence etc.

The generic competences are common to different degree programmes and subject fields, but they may have different emphases and vary in importance in different professions and vocational tasks. For example, generic competences are ethical competence, globalization competence, learning competence etc.

The generic competences lay a foundation for the person’s participation and collaboration in working life as well as for his/her professional development. The desirable competences can be enhanced either through choosing appropriate educational contents or methods. The choice of contents is primarily done in line for subject-specific expertise. The development of generic competences often takes place while the student is acquiring special expertise. The solutions relating to pedagogy and learning environments play an important role in the development of generic competences required in working life (Generic Competences of Polytechnic Graduates 2006.)

2.2.2 Competences as part of professional development

Nevertheless, it would be incorrect to relate competences entirely to performance of a person. In cognitive psychology competence is distinguished from performance, because performance requires action, while the person can be competent to do something without actual doing. This approach is explained by Messick (1984):

“Competence refers to what a person knows and can do under ideal circumstances, whereas performance refers to what is actually done under existing circumstances. Competence embraces the structure of knowledge and abilities, whereas performance subsumes as well as the process of accessing and utilising those structures and a host of affective, motivational, attentional and stylistic factors that influence the ultimate responses. Thus, a student’s competence might not be validly revealed in either classroom performance or test performance because of personal or circumstantial factors that affect behaviour” (Eraut 2000.)

Competence as part of performance forms a basis for professional development. To better understand the relation between skills, knowledge, competence and performance in professional development, it is worth illustrating the process as series of steps as in Figure 1. The process begins with the acquisition of information. Information that is connected in a network of meaning leads, in the second step, to knowledge. If this knowledge is applied to a specific context, it can lead to ability. The ability needs to be combined, in the third step, with a specific attitude (which includes values and motivation) in order to result in an act of performance. If, in the fourth step, the action is consistent with given standards of adequacy or appropriateness, this adequate action leads to competence. In the final step, the competence, combined with a certain responsibility, will result in professionalisation (Schneckenberg & Wildt 2006.)

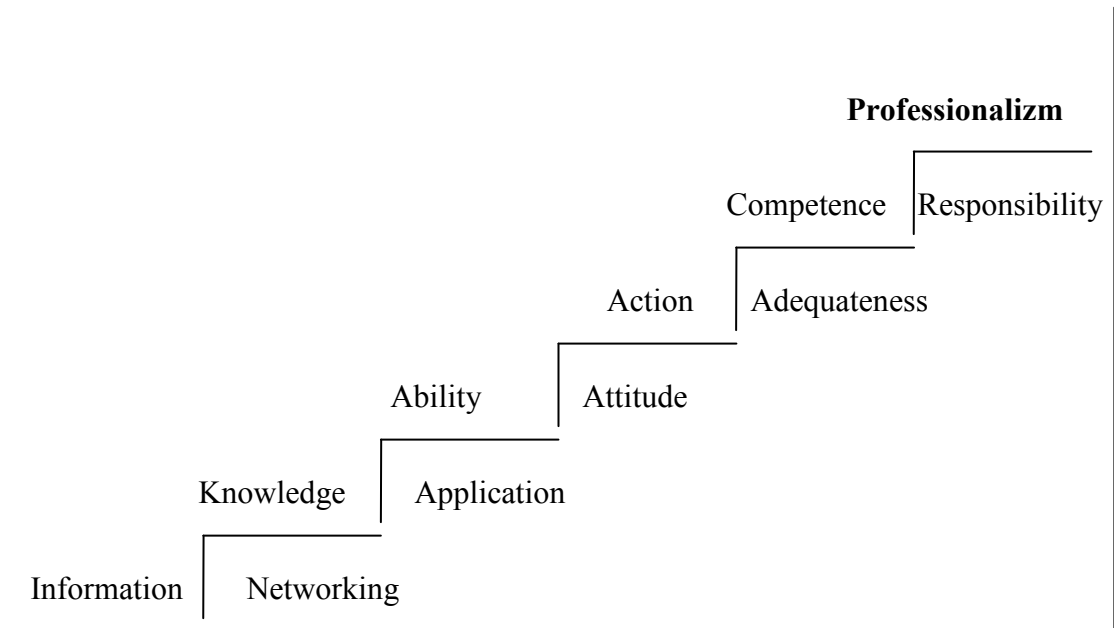


FIGURE 1. Steps towards professional development

Finally, it should be noted that performance is something that is directly observable, and competence is inferred from performance. So, when assessing person's competence, we often assess his or her performance in fact. Professional competences are those skills, attitudes and knowledge that a person possesses. Thus, a competency of a person is a combination of attributes underlying some aspect of successful performance.

3 COMPETENCE-BASED CURRICULUM AT LAUREA UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED SCIENCES

3.1 Learning environment

Laurea is Finland's third-largest multidisciplinary university of applied sciences. It operates in the Helsinki metropolitan area, where there is a high concentration of higher education and research establishments, innovative companies and nationally important innovators. Laurea is a specialist in welfare, business and information technologies. The degree programmes correspond to the business structure found in the area, and every Laurea location (among eight) is profiled according to the need for new expertise in regional development and the workplace (Laurea University of Applied Sciences 2007.)

Laurea strives to foster students' professional growth into an expert in the field, combining competences from various sectors, developing the surrounding area of operation and labour market and facilitating internationalisation as part of the studies.

The new learning environments were implemented at Laurea in recent years to generate new competences. They allowed implementing the Learning by Developing (LbD) model and supporting the everyday fulfilment of competence-based curricula. The learning environments facilitate the creation of enriching networks, the appearance of communities of shared expertise and the generation of new competence. They are an implementation of Laurea's target-oriented development work and act as an interaction mechanism for the innovation environment's value network. From the point of view of R&D activities, the learning environments work as innovation environments for development.

The learning environment is built as a research and development project. It can be examined from the points of view of knowledge, skills, values and experiences. As a knowledge environment, it includes the knowledge and information related to each development project. As a skill environment, it contains a requirement for facilitating the necessary abilities. As a value environment, it comprises values agreed and identified jointly by the community, which direct and justify choices and actions. As an experiential environment, it focuses on individuals' experiences, the meanings awarded to these and the sharing of experiences between project participants. An experiential environment also includes tacit knowledge, which is shared either verbally or through actions in order to promote the learning process of the individual and the participating organisation (Study Guide 2006.)

The learning environment is also a physical, psychological and virtual meeting place. The physical learning environment consists of various teaching spaces, workshops and laboratories. The environments offered by various employer-oriented job placements arranged to foster competence in practice can also be seen as workshops. Workshops transmit culture-related knowledge. They provide tools in the form of concepts and skills needed for the progress of the development projects and the students' competence. Labs all have special significance related to their specific purposes.

As a psychological meeting space, the learning environment allows different experts to meet as partners, finding new possibilities in their differences, developing and

refining their own and their partners' competence, and sharing competence in order to develop the operating environment.

The virtual learning environment utilises technology and allows for participation, transcending the limitations of time and place. The virtual environment facilitates meetings carried out at various distances, at the times that best suit the participants. The concept of online learning is located in the virtual environment, where people meet in relation to guidance, counselling and challenges contained in various learning exercises (Study Guide, 2006).

Practical applications of these new kinds of learning environments include initiatives and projects carried out as innovation environments in networks, as well as various operating spaces designed for learning and development, skill hubs and development labs. Work consists of collaboration based on shared expertise, which is supported by methods of sharing competence, such as tutoring, lecturing sessions, demonstrations, team meetings, feedback events and seminars. The learning environments form an arena for competence development and sharing. The networked learning environment deepens the students' knowledge of evidence-based information and workplace phenomena, their skill-based competence, and their ability to manage different situations.

Laurea's units still focus much of their development efforts on the learning environments. There are special environments designed for competence development in every Laurea unit. For example, at Central and Northern Uusimaa unit there are Nursing and Counselling Development Centre, IT Lab, Rural & Urban Lab, Service Business Lab and Velo – Research & Development. The learning environments are complemented by studies offered at the Finnish Virtual Polytechnic and by international student mobility.

3.2 Laurea's competences

Laurea adopted new curricula for all degree programmes in the autumn of 2006. Laurea's curricula are built out of themes and generic competences. Generic competences refer to competences shared by all degree programmes. These competences are developed throughout the programmes and are defined as follows:

- ethical

- globalisation
- innovative
- reflective
- network competence.

The generic competences are linked to the themes and study units. The themes and study units define the core competence for each degree programme, consisting of skill-based and knowledge-based professional competence. Students develop towards expertise in the generic competences during their subject-specific study units.

In Laurea Study Guide 2006-2007 the competencies are described as follows:

3.2.1 Ethical competence

Ethical competence consists of ethical rules and principles, virtues and values. In the generic competence of ethical competence, morals and ethics are fundamentally linked together, because students' moral competence forms a basis for their ethical competence. Ethical competence consists of four components:

- ethical sensitivity;
- ethical motivation;
- moral-ethical problem-solving;
- ethical implementation skills.

Ethical sensitivity is characterised by professional interaction skills, which are a target for active development throughout each degree. Ethical motivation refers to committing to moral-ethical values and taking responsibility for one's own actions. The students' responsibility grows from the personal level to the communal and social levels. In order to develop their ethical motivation, they must also know the value bases of their fields and participate in discussions on values. Moral-ethical problem-solving refers to the ability to solve ethical problems through critical argumentation. Moral implementation skills refer to the ability to take target-oriented action to solve ethical problems (negotiation and conflict-solving skills), as well as the courage to act in accordance with ethical values, even in complex situations. In order for professional activities to be ethically sustainable, competence must be developed in all these components.

3.2.2 Globalization competence

Globalisation refers to series of events and processes that cause the world to merge into a single, all-encompassing social system. In other words, globalisation refers to the processes by which things acquire worldwide scope. “Globalised” refers to worldwide phenomena and the results of the globalisation process: a fully integrated world. Sustainable development in relation to globalisation is a globalised political programme, whose aim is to increase welfare with environmental responsibility, within the limits of environmental capacity.

Global interaction can be classified as financial, cultural, political or social interaction. The science of globalisation also includes questions of ecology and biology. Sustainable development brings all these dimensions together, with the aim of observing economic growth, cultural diversity, social welfare and ecology in politics and practice.

3.2.3 Innovative competence

All of the processes of our modern society are undergoing constant changes. Laurea has followed the examples of the EU and Finland in choosing a positive attitude towards change as one of its strategic operating methods. The aim is not just to cope with change but also to see it as an opportunity, which requires constant innovation in order to be embraced. According to these strategies, future professionals must have abilities in innovation, so it is essential to include innovative competence in Laurea’s generic competences.

Innovation refers to a novelty that is implemented to generate added value productively. There are three separate elements to this definition: 1) novelty; 2) implementation; and 3) added value. In other words, an idea by itself is not an innovation, nor does a wealth of ideas make a person an innovator.

The innovation process can be divided into three stages: continuous evaluation of the situation; generating innovative ideas; and carrying out an implementation project. In terms of people, innovation can take place on five levels: individual, team, organisation, network and societal level.

3.2.4 Reflective competence

Reflection means professional growth and competence led by human metacognitive abilities. In the process of becoming an expert, reflection forms part of an investigative and developmental approach towards work. It emphasises critical analysis of one's own principles, starting points and consequences. Reflection is a liberating process that combines the universal element of consciousness with individual emotion through will. Will is embodied as both coming from within and being expressed externally through a specific content. Questioning previous competence provides new meanings and renews competence.

Reflection is a thought process. It is linked to time and to a broader conception of oneself in relation to others. It also relates to the ability to process and present the objects of learning – and thus to influence communities, societies and nations – produced together with others. Reflection is dialogue and problem-solving based on proven arguments. In open dialogue between people, different perspectives provide new challenges. Learners participating in dialogue can look at different perspectives in order to create shared meanings. Deep thought gives time and space for solving encountered problems by examining and investigating them using research methods.

In order to extend their understanding of themselves in relation to other students, customers, work communities and writers, students need skills in self-examination, critical peer evaluation and analysis of their own resources. Self-management emphasises communality and shared participation.

Critical awareness helps students to identify their own learning opportunities and the factors that affect them. Shared reflection on their own activities allows students to test their thoughts and share them with others.

3.2.5 Network competence

The generic competence of network competence encompasses a broad range of competences, from individual communication skills to organisation networking and strategic network leadership. Communication is essential to communality and a functioning society. Only with communication can we create shared meanings. Networking and the development of network processes are fuelled by interpersonal and interorganisational communication. In order for social and economic structures to

become networked, new kinds of skills and attitudes are needed in the network's participants. Dialogue and interaction are essential resources of a networked society. Laurea's aim is to promote and develop its students' network competence in diverse ways, creating innovative network competence models.

Network competence refers to time-based management of internal and external efficiency in order to significantly increase the efficiency of common practices. Network competence can include networking and network leadership. Network competence and strategic networks are often synonymous. Networking, on the other hand, is a cooperation model for companies and organisations, and may involve operators from various fields. Network leadership is the model used to manage a network.

Network competence is largely based on the communication skills of the people participating in the networks in question. Without communication and interaction, there can be no functioning networks. Organisations must be able to operate flexibly in a changing operating environment and also to influence the development of the environment. A learning organisation has communication and interaction skills as a central tool for creating functioning networks and developing network competence.

In addition to the five shared generic competences, each degree program's core competences are classified as skill-based professional competences or knowledge-based professional competences. Laurea's pedagogical conception of knowledge parts from the premise that knowledge and skills are not separate entities but instead merge together to form professional competence. Skill-based and knowledge-based professional competences are defined in detail in each degree programme's themes and study units.

The generic competences are structured through competence levels 1 to 3: basic, intermediate and advanced. Level 1 means ability to understand and apply competences as individuals. Level 2 refers to ability of a student to use the competences within the organization he or she is working. Level 3 means ability to apply competences taking into account other stakeholders, i.e. ability to use competences in social context. The competence development process progresses from the personal level to mastery first of the organisational perspective and then of the social perspective. All Laurea students must reach at least Level 1 in all generic

competences. The desired generic competence levels are set in each degree programme's curriculum. The development of generic competences is evaluated during the study units and before graduation with the help of portfolio.

In Laurea's curricula, professional competence forms a unified whole in which knowledge and skills are not separate entities but instead merge closely together. Competence is evaluated during the study units in accordance with the principle of developmental evaluation, using varied methods including self-evaluation, peer evaluation and joint evaluation. Laurea's extensive competence units require process-based, continuous evaluation as part of a participatory guidance effort. The curricula define the generic competences involved in each degree programme, their levels, all the themes, their development targets, the learning process and the study units. For the study units there are general descriptions, learning outcomes for professional competence and the generic competences, a description of the learning process, and the related contents. The curricula also determine the prerequisites for participating in each study unit. The information in the curricula is complemented by syllabuses which can be obtained from Laurea's web-pages. Syllabuses include at least descriptions of the content and aims of each study unit, implementation schedules, descriptions of the learning process, bibliographies, evaluation contents and criteria, links to projects and delineations of the general workplace skills obtained on the study unit.

The evaluation of competence demonstrates how well targets have been met by students. Competence is seen on the one hand as knowledge of information, skills and values, and on the other hand as experiential competence, which includes individuals' and their community's know-how. Evaluation in a development project looks at individuals' and the project community's learning, the progress and significance of different processes, and the results achieved. Evaluation is based on the objectives provided in the competence-based curriculum. These objectives define the requirements that students have to meet to achieve their degrees. The generic competences describe the competences shared by all Laurea students as meta-competence placed in a professional context. Themes, on the other hand, define the substance of subject-specific competence, which is deepened by the generic competences. The generic competences build a level of education needed at a higher education institution and at work; meanwhile, the themes build competence needed for employment.

3.3 Learning by Developing

Laurea's pedagogical work is based on combining instruction, research and development, and regional development. Learning by Developing is a practical model for achieving this. LbD is Laurea's new pedagogical operating model, which redefines the learning process as a research and development process. Learning is based on real life, an investigative approach and face-to-face encounters, and leads to innovations.

The origins of LbD model are rooted in UASs' main tasks: pedagogy, regional development and R&D which are merged into a single process of creating new expertise and knowledge. The model can be seen as an extension of problem-based learning and inquiry-based learning, but it has its own, specific features as well. The Learning by Developing action model is based on a development project that is genuinely rooted in the world of work, which aims to produce new practices and competences and demands collaboration between lecturers, students and experts from the world of work in order to progress.(Raij 2007.)

In LbD model professional development is seen as a competence-generating process. Competence is generated through work in a community of experts, which is focused on shared areas of development. The LbD model seeks to provide systematic research-based solutions to authentic problems which cannot be solved with existing knowledge. In practice, authenticity is manifested in the R&D projects carried out as part of study units. Development tasks are based on research questions which aim to understand a new issue or to solve a problem. The most important thing is to identify the core phenomena of each problem and the concepts with which these phenomena can be analysed. R&D tasks are used to link studies to innovation work and to turn genuine workplace issues into objects of evaluation. The opportunity to participate as developers in R&D projects helps students to grow into people who can change established workplace practices, into developers and into opinion leaders. When developers create something new, they also learn something themselves.

LbD relates to actions carried out together. By doing together problem based skills are developed and new knowledge is created. The development project process contains continuous evaluations of one's own learning, of what has been learnt together, of the progress and effectiveness of the project and of the generation of new knowledge. This is done by sharing experiences and testing their significance. The acquired

competence is identified as knowledge-related, skill-related, value-related or experiential. The aim of each development project is to achieve change. The development project ends as results are shared in the form of research reports and, depending on the nature of the partnership with the world of work, possibly also through their commercialisation; but the learning process continues, offering a new competence base for the learners to participate as individuals or communities in new development projects. Figure 2 illustrates the process.



FIGURE 2. Stages of Learning by Developing. (Raji 2007)

Development projects are implemented by development teams in which shared expertise is generated through face-to-face encounters. The development teams are tasked with managing partnership networks and handling the progress of the project. The development teams organise work activities and methods. They include lecturers, students and other experts. Lecturers are appointed to development teams in accordance with their areas of expertise, and they also develop their expertise while guiding the students' learning process. Lecturers do not organise and set targets for the project teams' activities in advance; instead, the team members take joint responsibility for this. Students participate in R&D projects as equal players, receiving

experience of working as fully authorised experts. Thus projects facilitate an unlimited learning process, where no glass ceilings are set by curricula, textbooks or exercises. Project work enables individuality in learning.

3.4 Transformation of teachers' and students' roles

So, what does LbD model together from competence-based curriculum require from teachers and students? The competence-based curriculum makes teacher's role even more challenging than before. Teaching faces new challenges due to the generic competences and because the emphasis is on working life the teacher needs to act in the roles of advisor, inspirer and tutor.

The contents of study units broaden and thus increase the need of cooperation between teachers. The teachers become in increasing way as advisors in learning processes.

In Learning by Developing projects the teacher acts as an intermediary and advisor. He/she supports the partnerships with working life and the interaction between students, and creates an atmosphere which is exhilarating and motivates independent working. Teacher encourages students to use creative solutions and helps them with problem solving.

Some lecturers work as researchers, publishing reports that demonstrate the effectiveness of development projects as reformers and developers of competence in the labour market. Others act as developers, responsible for identifying and refining the processes of development projects. The third role of lecturers is in workshops, which transmit and share cultural knowledge, and provide students with tools. Lecturership also involves partnerships with the labour market. The industry experts participating in development projects contribute the knowledge contained in workplace competence, while lecturers ensure that evidence-based data are available for explaining this competence. They join forces to produce new know-how for developing and reforming the labour market. The role of lecturers in development projects can also be described as that of an expert, a participant and a pedagogical leader, who facilitates the students' growth and development into experts in their fields.

Teachers are experts on their fields and together with students' network partners with companies and organisations. The challenge of adapting Learning by Developing –

model for teachers is the building of community of shared expertise in interaction with student, colleagues and cooperation partners. At the same time students are seen as researchers and expert in development project done in cooperation with companies. The new model creates challenges for students as well!

Studies include study units and actual working life projects which are executed according to the Learning by Developing –model. Project based working methods develop student's interaction and reasoning skills, and teaches to use feedback as a constructive factor in work community. Through development projects the student understands the meaning of responsibility in his/her actions. Taking responsibility increases the chances to succeed in working life.

Development projects concretise the results the students have achieved and increase motivation to study. Motivation has an important role when it comes to succeeding in studies. In project work the different kinds of roles from basic worker to project manager become concrete and the meaning of teamwork becomes emphasised. The student understands the importance of his/her actions for the project and feels that his/her input is significant.

Students participate as partners who increase their competence by learning how to use new tools and by taking part in various research and development initiatives. Competence is founded on research-based knowledge, understanding the professional context, handling the necessary tasks and managing various workplace situations, to the extent that these skills are needed for each student's degree. Students create and set targets for their own study plans, identifying the competence needed for participation in a development project and the competence that can be obtained by participating in the project. In the development projects, students learn as individuals while also participating in shared learning and in producing new know-how (Laurea Facts 2006)

In Laurea's work-oriented research and development projects, the concept of partnership implies cooperation between lecturers, experts from the labour market and students. The cooperation is based on responsible commitment to the project. All participants are seen as learners, because the development projects aim to produce change and generate new things. Partnership also means mutual respect and

appreciation for diverse skills. The progress of the development project depends on sharing competence and building new competence out of different areas of expertise.

4 COMPETENCE DEVELOPMENT PROCESS AT DEGREE PROGRAM IN BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

4.1 Structure of Degree Program

Degree Program in Business Management offered at Laurea University of Applied Sciences lead to Bachelor of Business Administration (BBA), or tradenomi degree. Its extent is 210 study credits that should be obtained in three and a half year of studies. Starting from 2006 – 2007 academic year, the structure of the program had been changed according to new competence-based curriculum and new pedagogical model, Learning by Developing.

The new curriculum consists of themes which are of 10 to 40 study credits. Themes are depicted as know-how in relation to corresponding work life. The generic competences are included both in study units and in work life projects. In study units the new core curriculum realises as a theme or as a part of a theme which can be completed during one term. Study units consist generally of 10 credits

The program consists of compulsory and optional studies. Compulsory studies worth 150 study credits focus on skills relating to business operations. They include such themes as Company and Business Operating Environments, Innovative Business Models and Strategies and Practices in a Network Economy, which are combined with job placements and the thesis.

Besides compulsory themes, students in Business Management have possibility to choose between two specialization themes: Managing a Business in the Global Marketplace in Espoo and Global Approach to Service Marketing in Hyvinkää. Both themes are designed taking the needs of working life into consideration. By choosing either first or second theme, students decide to concentrate more on business operations in the first case or services in the former case. Also the program contains 30 study credits in elective studies. The structure of Degree Program in Business Management is presented in Table 1.

101 COMPANY AND BUSINESS OPERATING ENVIRONMENTS 45+0 CR		
00302B Industries and Business Operating Environments	10 CR	1st yr
00303B Business Operations and Processes	15 CR	1st yr
00304B Professional Skills to Support Business Operations	15 CR	1st yr
00305B Basic Finnish Language	5 CR	1st yr
00306B Company in focus (in Swedish)	5 CR	1st yr
102 INNOVATIVE BUSINESS MODELS 45+0 CR		
00307B Business Opportunities and Setting Up a Business	10 CR	1st yr
00308B Commercialisation of Products and Services	15 CR	2nd yr
00310B Intermediate Finnish language	5 CR	1st yr
00306B Company in focus (in Swedish)	5 CR	1st yr
00309J Job Placement I, Degree Programme in Business Management	15 CR	1st yr
103 STRATEGIES AND PRACTICES IN A NETWORK ECONOMY 30+0 CR		
00312B From Strategy to Practice	20 CR	2nd yr
00313B Management and Leadership in a Network Economy	10 CR	2nd yr
104 MANAGING A BUSINESS IN THE GLOBAL MARKETPLACE 45+30 CR		
00314B Strategic B-to-B Marketing Management in a Global Context	30 CR	3rd yr
00316B Highlighting a Target Market	10 CR	3rd yr
00315J Job Placement II, Degree Programme in Business Management	15 CR	3rd yr
00317B Customer Relationship Management from the Perspective of Supply Chain Management	10 CR	3rd yr
00319B Design and Brand Management	10 CR	3rd yr
00320B Developing Service Innovations	10 CR	3rd yr
00321B Financial Management	10 CR	3rd yr
106 GLOBAL APPROACH TO SERVICE MARKETING 45+30 CR		
00322B Developing and Managing Services in an International Context	20 CR	3rd yr
00323B Business Research in Services Context	10 CR	3rd yr
00315J Job Placement II, Degree Programme in Business Management	15 CR	3rd yr
00327B Business -to-Business Marketing	10 CR	3rd yr
00324B Personal Selling and Key Account Management	10 CR	3rd yr
00325B Selling Fun, Feeling and Fantasies – Marketing Services to Consumers	10 CR	3rd yr
00326B Service Business Development – Running a Business	10 CR	3rd yr
00320B Developing Service Innovations	10 CR	3rd yr
107 THESIS 15+0 CR		

TABLE 1. The structure of Degree Program in Business Management

The program is designed to facilitate competence development process of students. During the program, students develop competences in recognising areas of development in the workplace, turning them into development projects and carrying out these projects. They learn to adopt these skills in the context of Learning by Developing.

Attention is paid in the curriculum to the systematic progress of students from the basic level to the advanced level. Professional growth starts with familiarisation with networked business operations, business operating environments and clusters,

business operations and processes, rules and regulations. Professional growth and the talent to produce new knowledge are supplemented by the information management, communication and interaction skills required in a multicultural business environment. From studying the basics of business operations, students move on to setting up business operations and to questions relating to the commercialisation of new products and service innovations.

Professional knowledge- and skill-based competences are strengthened by ethical, globalisation, innovation and network competences. Students systematically reflect on the development of acquired competences within the professional growth process.

Having successfully completed the compulsory themes, students deepen their competences in accordance with their personal study plans. Optional studies and the thesis give further depth to the personal study plan and help students to obtain roles as innovators in their selected fields.

Each theme is based on several competences at different levels. The development of the competences is connected to the study units of the theme in a way that during each theme students learn aspects of globalization, innovation and so on. The first theme that students learn is Company and Business Operating Environment. Connection between the themes and the competences is realized as presented in Table 2.

101 – COMPANY AND BUSINESS OPERATING ENVIRONMENT					
Generic competencies	Ethical	Globalisation	Innovation	Reflective	Network
Study Units					
Industries and Business Operating Environments		Level 1			
Business Operations and Processes	Level 1				
Professional Skills to Support Business Operations				Level 1	Level 1

TABLE 2. Competence development during the first theme

Business Management graduates understand the opportunities for continuous updating of their competences and see the Bachelor of Business Administration studies as part of a lifelong learning process.

4.2 Competences in Business Management

The generic competences (ethical, reflective, innovative, network and globalization) described in previous part are same for all degree programs at Laurea, but the way they are embedded into study modules differs from program to program. In business life these competences are a must together with knowledge and professional skills. Thus, the whole program is designed in such a way that students first learn the basics of business environment, rules and norms of business game; thus acquiring basic levels of competences. Generic competences support knowledge-based and skills-based competences that are specified for every program.

4.2.1 Professional/Knowledge-Based Competence

Knowledge-based competence is based on theoretical background of the studies. Capability theories form the basis for the professional and knowledge-based competence of graduates in Business Management. In accordance with capability theories, graduates will understand that in the present rapidly changing operating environment, the most competitive companies are often those that have broken loose from traditional perceptions (e.g. competitors can also be partners; companies can aim at both growth and profitability).

This competence is evaluated through assignments, tests and exams during the whole period of studies. This competence can be called a theoretical framework of a business professional. Students develop this competence by attending lectures, reading books and other literature and by applying theory into practice with the help of partner companies. This competence is related to a question: “What does a graduate in Business Management know?”

4.2.2 Professional/Skill-Based Competence

Business Management graduates are able to acquire and produce information for various business needs and master the most relevant methods for analysing and developing business operations. Graduates can work in a networked operating environment, anticipating the challenges and opportunities that this environment offers. They understand the dynamics influencing the operating environment – such as economic development, customer needs, changing markets, the competitive structures

of industries, technological development, internationalisation and legislative developments.

Business Management graduates have strong general knowledge of business economics and master business structures and processes both at the conceptual and the operational level. They see the company as part of a network and can make reliable estimates and proposals for the development of business operations. Graduates can make development plans based on company strategy and know how to implement the plans. They can carry out various analyses as a basis for strategic planning.

Graduates understand the aspects of a company – who the customers are, how to create value for the customer, the earnings logic, the critical capabilities and who the partners are – as well as the meaning of core business processes as critical success factors and the resulting added value for the customer. They are aware of different types of value chains and networks, understanding the strategic importance of partnerships and customer relationships and being able to develop customer relationships. The graduates have an innovative attitude towards business operations and have the skills required for commercialising innovations and establishing profitable business operations.

The graduates have good skills in oral and written communication in English, as well as good presentation skills. Their skills in information technology meet business requirements. They are able to work in teams and projects both as members and as leaders.

Skill-based competence is evaluated through different projects carried out by students in cooperation with companies, as well as through tests and exams. Most important from the student's point of view assignments and other documents that show his or her skill-based competence form showcase portfolio that students develop throughout their studies. The main question here is: "What can a graduate do?"

4.2.3 Ethical competence

Ethical competence refers to the development of ethical sensitivity, ethical motivation, ethical decision- making and ethical implementation described in previous part.

At the basic level, students know the main regulations governing business and are able to apply them in their work. They can work in confidence and in a responsible manner with customers, co-workers and partners, and understand the meaning to the customer of the ethical value of products and operations. Basic level is related to individual context of ethics, i.e. ability to be ethical in one's own actions and decisions. This level is achieved during the first theme during first year of studies.

At the intermediate level, students know the importance of company values in business operations and can assess the ethics of business operations. They understand the interests and rights of different stakeholders and have the skills to develop business practices from financial, social, ecological and ethical angles. This level is related to organizational context. Students are not only making ethical decisions by themselves, but are able to take organizational interests into consideration and act as company's representative in any decision process.

At the advanced level, students are able to critically recognise and assess the interrelationships between the society, the economy and moral-political values in the global and networked world. Students are able to understand the positive and negative effects of economic growth on the welfare of individuals, organisations and the environment, and are committed to assuming social responsibility. This level is related to social aspect of ethical actions and is intended to be achieved by Master students, thus, it is not evaluated in Degree program.

4.2.4 Globalisation competence

Globalisation competence refers to the ability to understand the mechanisms through which global incidents are reflected on local business operations and vice versa. Since internationalization and globalization are crucial aspects of today's company's business operations, graduates in Business Management should master this competence. Degree program's learning environment also helps to achieve this competence, since the groups are multicultural by their nature, so the students have a great chance to share information about business practices in different countries based on students' own experiences.

At the basic level, students know how to take into account multiculturalism and the different social backgrounds of employees and partners in a work environment and in

business operations. Students understand that, due to globalisation, decisions and operations may have consequences that affect more parties than just one company.

At the intermediate level, students understand that business operations in the global operating environment are based on company values, objectives and strategic choices, which should be reflected in all business activities.

At the advanced level, students are aware of the most important forces in the global economy and their operating principles and objectives. They have mastered the methods used by companies, organisations and individuals when aiming to influence the rules of the global economy.

4.2.5 Innovation competence

Innovation competence refers to the ability to act as an innovator at personal and organisational level. This competence is essential for all programs offered by Universities of Applied Sciences, since one of their main tasks is to be a centre of innovations in the region they operate in.

At the basic level, students know the principles of creative work and teamwork and can apply them to processes such as product and service development and the creation of new business operations. Student can participate in or lead development projects.

At the intermediate level, students can identify proposals from within the company or its stakeholders for the development of the company, and refine them into concrete development plans. Students know how to manage projects.

At the advanced level, students are able to start discussions on the need for change and to direct the operation of networks in a change situation.

4.2.6 Network competence

Network competence refers to the development of communication and interaction skills, networking of organisations and managing strategic networks. This competence is interrelated with all the other competences and can not be separated from them.

At the basic level, students are able to work in various business projects, teams and networks and have written and oral communication skills that meet business requirements.

At the intermediate level, students have the skills to communicate in a team and to carry out business negotiations. They can recognise strategic partnerships, promote the networking of an organisation and enter network relationships.

At the advanced level, students can manage a strategic network and analyse the operations of a network. They are able to foresee trends in the industry, a cluster or the society.

4.2.7 Reflective competence

Reflective competence is a central part of professional growth and of adopting an investigative, development-oriented approach to work. Students start mastering reflective competence already from the very beginning of their studies by writing Personal Learning Plan where they state their goals and learning objectives. They update PLP continuously as their studies progress.

At the basic level, students are able to set development goals both personally and for the team. They can work in development projects demonstrating awareness of and taking into account the different backgrounds of team members.

At the intermediate level, students can assess and develop business operations, being sensitive to the interests of different stakeholders. They can view things from the point of view of the business or other parties when developing business operations.

At the advanced level, students produce knowledge by searching for answers and investigating.

4.3 Facilitation of competence development

Students develop their competences throughout their studies. Already at the beginning they decide which level of competence they want to achieve; and then plan their studies according to desired level of competence. The idea is that all BBA students will achieve level one, individual level of competences. But having researched Laurea's Study Guide and curriculum, I noticed that in fact it does not matter which

level students want to achieve, because according to Laurea evaluation policy, in BBA program competences are evaluated only as basic or intermediate level, since advanced level can only be achieved through Master studies.

Nevertheless, student can decide to concentrate more on one of the competences and achieve higher level in some of the competences. Also previous experience and knowledge is taken into consideration when planning the development process. Students' learning objectives and desired levels of competences form the basic of Personal Learning Plans, or, they should form. By saying "should" I would like to stress that in reality competences were not mentioned in students PLPs this year. It happened because the curriculum was new and 2006-2007 academic year was the first implementation year, so all materials related to competences were delivered to students in a hurry and a bit late, when they already started their studies. Because of that the scope of this Development project does not include analysis of PLPs as part of competence development process of students.

According to new curriculum, the competences are acquired through development projects that form the basis for Learning by Developing approach and facilitated by guidance and tutoring offered to every student. The competence development process is assessed through students' portfolios.

4.3.1 Development projects

Development projects are the starting point for new competence-based curriculum and learning methods. The idea of development projects came from working life. It can be described as follows: students participate in projects done with companies and for companies, thus developing professional skills by applying theoretical knowledge into real-life situations. By participating in development projects students are able to achieve competences already during their studies, and not after, as it was when using traditional instruction-based approach to learning.

The development project is seen as a learning environment that involves knowledge included in the workplace (knowledge in practice), knowledge acquired about it through research (knowledge of practice); and the new knowledge produced for the workspace (knowledge for practice) (Raij 2007.) So, three types of knowledge are generated through development projects: descriptive, explanatory and creative.

Since this project is aimed at analysing competence development process of first year students, it is hard to assess their competences through development projects, because students do not have many of the projects during the first year. Nevertheless, it should be mentioned that in the future development project will be the main tool to evaluate students' competencies.

4.3.2 Tutoring and guidance

According to competence-based curriculum, each student has a right to receive guidance and tutoring done by assigned tutor-lecturers. The idea is that students are not alone in their competence development process. Guidance and tutoring are offered individually and in groups, during study units and in projects.

Guidance relates to Laurea's whole educational service system, which consists of the organisation of various guidance-related functions. Guidance also refers to professional assistance, i.e. expert counselling to help students create meaningful study and learning processes.

The main purpose of guidance at Laurea is to support the students' professional growth and development. Principle of participatory guidance provides learning environments which facilitate competence development and allow for common ground between authentic opportunities and students' needs (Laurea facts 2006)

Laurea's guidance services consist of guidance, counselling and knowledge-sharing functions. Guidance is used to foster the students' ability to take their studies in their desired direction through dialogue. Counselling helps students find suitable ways of working in different situations.

Guidance and tutoring is implemented by lecturers which are appointed to every student at the beginning of their studies. Their purpose is to help students, to provide information about studies, to help planning their studies, to give advice and so on.

At the early stage of the studies, tutors familiarise students with Laurea's learning environment and practices. They help in formulating the students' personal study plans. During their studies, students receive guidance in relation to career planning, job placements, international exchanges and theses.

There are two tutor-lecturers for almost twenty degree students. They organize meetings, both group and individual, with students during their studies. There are compulsory meetings during which tutors give essential information related to studies and give instructions related to Personal Study Plans, competencies and other study related issues. Compulsory meetings also include feedback discussions. For example, individual interviews are a part of competence development process. They follow competence essays and are conducted based on these essays. Such interviews are needed to assess student's competencies and to establish future paths of competence development.

The tutor-lecturers are also available for individual consultations based on students' requests. It means that if a student has any questions related to his or her studies, professional growth, competence development process or other issues, he or she can ask for a meeting with tutor-lecturer. But during the first year nobody has used this opportunity! It can partly be explained by students' attitudes towards student-teacher relationships: although in the new curriculum it is stated that students and teachers are partners, it is not easy to change students' (and teachers' as well!) perceptions. Another explanation comes from the fact that implementation of new learning environment has started only this academic year and often tutors themselves are frustrated and not able to provide adequate guidance.

4.3.3 Showcase portfolio

Portfolios are a common-known tool to show professional development of a person. From a teacher's point of view, it is also a tool to evaluate competence development process of students. Portfolios are made, updated and revised during the whole study period.

Each student of Degree Program in Business Management has its own space at Optima, Laurea's web platform, to build personal portfolio. The structure of personal portfolio is as follows.

1. *Documentation Portfolio*
2. *Showcase Portfolios*
 - 2.1. *Professional Competence*
 - 2.2. *Laurea Competences*
 - 2.2.1. *Ethical Competence*

- 2.2.2. *Globalisation Competence*
- 2.2.3. *Innovation Competence*
- 2.2.4. *Reflective Competence*
- 2.2.5. *Network Competence*
- 2.3. *Other Showcase Portfolios*

There are two types of portfolio included: documentation, which is a collection of all documents, assignments, presentations and other materials related to student's studies, and showcase portfolio, which is intended to show professional development of a student.

Documentation portfolio is like an archive of student's works. It is used to help building showcase portfolio in a sense that students can choose what to include; they can evaluate their own progress and see what should be improved.

The difference between documentation and showcase portfolios is that the former is a public tool; it is built to be shown, for example, when applying for job, or in other occasions. Showcase portfolio is an evidence of student's competence development process.

According to Laurea's structure, showcase portfolio includes professional competencies and Laurea's generic competencies. In Professional Competence folder students include all the various documents that have been created during the first theme. The documents should portray students' personal development. With this portfolio they can present their own competence in e.g. job searching situations. The development of the professional competence has been evaluated during the study units so this portfolio is not evaluated separately. The idea is that students collect materials that show their progress in skills-based and knowledge-based competence in first case, and reflect on generic competences in the second case. Students are free to include any material they believe to be relevant in their portfolios.

Portfolio is build starting from the first theme. One way to start building portfolio is a competence essay written by all degree students after the first theme. The students write an essay concerning his or her development in the competencies. The parts of the essay regarding different competences are taken into their respective folders within the Optima. In addition students can also save different kinds of documents

into the competences folders that they think will show their knowledge in that particular competence.

5 ASSESSMENT OF COMPETENCE DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

5.1 Analysis of competence essays

Seven competence essays of first year degree students were analysed during this development project. The main questions were: how business students understand generic competences and their connection to the studies and how students develop these competences during their first year of studies at Laurea.

All students received instructions made by my tutor-lecturer regarding competence essay. Instructions include general guidelines for essay writing and specific questions related to Laurea's competences. For example, the following questions were given for reflective competence:

1. *How would you evaluate the development of your own competence?*
 - *What tools do you have for evaluating the development of your own activities?*
 - *In which things do you think you have developed well in regard to your expectations and goals? And in what do you think you should still develop yourself?*

Such questions were intended to ease the process of essay writing by providing better understanding of the nature of competence. All questions were related to the basic level of competence development, or individual level, according to structure of Degree Program and curriculum objectives for the first study year.

Based on essay analysis, I can say that all students were able to understand and develop competences on individual level, although their understanding is shaped by their cultural background and previous work experience. Some of the students were even able to develop their competences beyond individual level, while the others learned only the basics.

5.1.1 Ethical competence

The following definitions were given to ethical competence:

“Ethics to me means a lot of different things even inside the company. I consider ethical behaviour to mean a good lifestyle that takes everyone and everything in consideration. We need to know what kind of consequences actions can have. It is not just about the profits or what is good for you. Ethical behaviour is doing things because they are simply right thing to do.”

“Ethical competence is a capacity, a psychological skill, a way of dealing with ethical problems. The competence aspect is that of being able to follow the rules of the game.”

“Ethical principles are the guideline for respect. They are designed to guide people’s actions towards one another, as well as towards the environment. Ethical principles are closely interlinked to cultural influence, and therefore they can be studied together with globalisation”

In most essays students underline that being ethical means being responsible for own actions and always taking into consideration other people. They understand different components of ethical competence and can relate them to own principles and norms of behaviour.

Some students mention that they have not achieved desired level of ethical competence yet. In my opinion this is a very good sign of self-assessment, since students are able to evaluate own progress critically and see areas of future development.

Nevertheless, when reading essays, I did not find any connection between ethical competence and curricula. Although students can define the competence and can explain their own ethical principles, they do not relate this competence with their studies and do not mention how they can develop the competence through the studies. One of the reasons might be lack of discussions with tutor-lecturers. The other reason is that ethical competence is interrelated with other competences and there are many facets of it, so it is hard to relate study modules with the competence.

5.1.2 Globalization competence

All students among analysed were able to define globalization and explain its impact on business operations. They understand that whether the companies want to be global or not, it is a must for those firms that want to become leaders in their business fields. Many students consider culture as an important part of globalization. They mention that companies are becoming more international and that building a brand requires global approach nowadays.

As for their own globalization competence development, students state the following:

“I have maintained a neutral approach to the influence of globalisation. I understand the advantages of a united world, but I also realise the disadvantages. While large multinational companies are growing even larger through acquisitions and expansions, smaller local companies are suffering from higher costs of both raw material and labour. This in turn increases the price for the customer who then switches to a larger supplier due to the economies of scale.”

“From my own assumption, I assume that globalization has enlightened me to understand other people s cultures and beliefs as well as to live with them as one people .In addition to that, I accept the liberalization that has been brought by the globalization. It has brought the world economy more closely interlinked through the global markets”

5.1.3 Reflective competence

In analysed competence essays students paid a lot of attention to reflective competence. They connect this competence with their teamwork and ability to do the assignments in time. Some of the students also mention ability to perform in public as part of the skills they relate to reflective competence.

Time management is an issue most of the students include in their reflective competence. This can be explained by the fact that instructions given to students included questions related to time management.

As for other aspects, most of the students tried to critically evaluate what they have learnt during the first year and what skills they have gained. Students see reflective competence as ability to assess their professional development at this stage of their studies.

Some interesting comments were:

“There is always reason for further development. Although my time utilisation has always been reasonably good, it can occasionally be difficult to efficiently organise the time available. This is true especially at times when many different projects’ deadlines overlap, and the time must be divided unequally. This causes compromising of the target result to ensure that every project will be finished when required. Efficient time consumption becomes even more complicated when working in a team which finds it difficult to agree on a common schedule. Also in this case, compromising becomes the main priority”

“I think that the meaning of school is not to give you the qualification to some job but to encourage to think and to give tools that you can apply in real life. You don’t need to know all the names and theories but to understand what things can be done in some situation. If we wouldn’t have the tools we would have to figure out all of those theories by ourselves. That wouldn’t be reasonable because they have already been invented. But we can try to understand better and develop new techniques based on the old ones or invent new ones since we know what already exists “

One thing that I have noticed in almost all essays is that students are able to see their strong and weak sides and set the goals for future development. They clearly see if they miss some skills and they know what should be done to develop those skills.

Very important aspect is that students take responsibility for their studies. Even though sometimes they are not satisfied with the quality of teaching, they do not blame lecturers for lack of their skills. Rather, they plan to spend more time on those areas that they consider as being poorly taught.

5.1.4 Network competence

Networking is understood by most students as interactions between business actors. They define network competence as *“all things that have a connection to the company. Networks for a company can be partners, suppliers, government, banks and others”*.

Teamwork is how students evaluate their network competence. Most of the students were not fully satisfied with their teamwork. Among the reasons are: inability to adjust to different cultures, different learning styles, bad delegation and lack of leaders in a team. At the same time students mention that they value teamwork experience and will try to develop their interaction and communication skills further on.

Following are the most common comments:

“Teamwork is not very easy for a lot of reasons. And it can be specifically difficult if there are no common goals and rules for the team. It is good to understand the fact that no one in your group might not see the things same way as you do. It is also important to respect everyone’s opinion and let everyone to be in charge of something. I haven’t confronted too many difficulties in teams or networks. I don’t know why, but I guess that I am little more task orientated than interested to fight with a group or its members”

“I consider myself as occasionally being too demanding when it comes to a team assignment or a project. I set high standards for my work and wrongly expect other people to comply with them. Generally, I am a very competitive person and this I have discovered to occasionally cause conflicts within the team. During the first time I have however developed my compromising skills to some extent in order to eliminate the conflicts caused by my competitiveness”

“... I have always been a silent observer. This does not apply, however, if something needs to be done. In these situations I have found myself taking the leading role by ensuring efficient teamwork. This means eliminating distracting and insignificant factors and keeping the group in the subject. Even in these situations I have never forced anyone to intensively follow the subject, but gently guided them in the desired direction.”

5.1.5 Connection between competences and students' professional development

When analysing students' competence essays, an important issue is how students relate competences to their professional development. According to the aims of competence-based curriculum, competences are seen as the main tool of professionalism. Nevertheless, students are not always able to assess their professional development process from the competence point of view.

Many students mention in their competence essay that they do not feel much of a progress in their personal development. They appreciate studies and admit that they learnt a lot, but they do not relate knowledge gained with professional competence. Below is one such comment:

"[I] don't think that any enormous steps have been taken when it comes to the development of my own competence during these few months at Laurea University of Applied Sciences. This said, it doesn't mean that any development whatsoever hasn't happened..."

On the other hand, there were more optimistic opinions about own progress. For example:

"When analysing the result of all of the four competences implemented in the first theme, a few very important words can be raised from the text. These words are Respect, Culture and Compromise; and they can be understood as the core needs for development in the particular competences. Out of these three simple but powerful words, one can be comprehended as the most important one of them all. This word is Compromise, and it summarises the main direction for my personal future development need"

To summarize the analysis of competence essays, it can be noticed that most of the first year business students understand the idea of competence-based studies. They are able to define generic competences and analyze how to develop these competences on individual level. Students understand importance of competence development as part of professional growth and they know, what they have to do to facilitate own development process.

5.2 Interviews with tutor-lecturers

Three interviews were conducted as part of this development project with tutor-lecturers who guide degree students in business management. The interviews were unstructured, in a form of discussion, but four main questions were discussed in each interview:

- 1) *How the competences put into practice in the new curriculum?*
- 2) *What are the indicators of students' competence development?*
- 3) *How to assess development of competences by students?*
- 4) *Based on 1st and 2nd theme, are the targets set in curriculum regarding competences met by students?*

Interviewees were all familiar with the process of planning new curriculum and by asking the first question I was trying to find out the origins of the concept and practical solutions to stated target: facilitation of students' professional development. According to the tutors, the idea is that the competences are developed throughout the study period by each student by participating in different projects. The interviewees do not define these projects as development project; rather, they call it "practical assignments". By practical assignments they understand tasks that students do in teams for real companies. There were five partner-companies during the first year that gave presentations to students and provided materials necessary to complete the assignments.

According to the interviewed persons, new curriculum is more practice-oriented than it was before. Students do much more work by themselves than last year. Tutors mention that competence-based curriculum requires more efforts both from teachers and from students. Besides normal contact hours a lot of individual and teamwork was done by students outside classrooms. This is how students develop practical skills. By teamwork students develop leadership skills, communication and interaction skills, and ability to manage different types of projects and deal with different types of people. At the same time one of the tutors mentioned that in her opinion students were overloaded by different assignments. She said that next year more contact hours should be offered so that the students will be able to receive guidance and learn theoretical approaches to phenomenon they study.

When it comes to discussion about indicators of students' competence development, mainly competence essays were named. Two of three interviewees said that the intention was to use discussions with tutors as a tool to monitor development process, but so far this idea failed, because students do not use their tutors for this purpose. This is also seen as a reason why some students are still frustrated about the competences. The solution offered is to increase amount of compulsory sessions with tutor-lecturers.

Another tool to monitor competence development is through study progress. This means that during each study theme teachers emphasize relation of subject to competences and assess generic competences together with knowledge-based and skill-based competences.

Also students own motivation to study is mentioned as an indicator of development process. The problem of degree program in business management is that every year some students drop the program. Only those students who are really interested in professional development stay and study. Thus, if student is motivated and willing to learn, it can be one indicator of his professional growth and competence development.

Evaluation of competences is based on qualitative methods. According to the interviewees, it means that competences are evaluated continuously, by teachers and tutors, during the whole period of studies. During the first year the main tool is competence essay, because there students reflect on their own progress and set goals for further studies. As for the competence essays, tutors said that in general they were satisfied with the essays. They think most of the students were able to achieve basic level of competences. They admit that some students were not able to connect studies with competences, but discussions with tutors following the essay writing helped them. Interviewees said that luckily all students passed the basic level. "Luckily" in this respect refers to the point that no official procedure of what to do if a student fails initial level of competence development is available. This is one of the weakest moments in new learning environment: the studies are based on a stage principle, meaning that students progress from the basic levels to a more advanced, and according to new curriculum it is not able (or, at least, there are no stated procedures) to go back and master basics of competences. Of course, there are re-examinations, but they are related evaluation of knowledge but not competences as such.

Another problem mentioned in the interviews regarding to evaluation of competences is qualifications of teachers and tutors. It means that not all teachers have sufficient level of ethical, reflective, network, innovative and globalization competences, and these teachers have to assess students' development process. So far there are no programs or tools or guidance for teachers in relation to competences, and this result in a situation that neither teachers nor students see connection between study units and competence development.

Evaluation based on competence essays was also discussed. At the first glance it seems to be a good tool to evaluate students' professional growth. But on the other hand the essays are made by students at the end of the first theme (in January 2007) and then revised at the end of the second theme (in May 2007). It means that evaluation based on essays can be done only twice a year, which is not enough to be able to monitor the process and, which is more important, to guide this process.

Nevertheless, all lecturers interviewed said that in their opinions the targets set in the curriculum were met by the students. One person mentioned that next year more time should be allocated to explain the idea of competence-based curriculum and learning methods to students in the very beginning of their studies.

6 CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Competence development process is at the heart of professional development. Professional growth is based on recognising and reflecting on students' own performance, and on students' willingness to develop into an investigative and development-oriented professional in the field. Throughout the studies students learn how to develop generic and subject-specific competences in project-based or Learning by Developing-based content. Students' competence development process is monitored and supported by tutor-lecturers and evaluated continuously during the whole study period.

At Laurea University of Applied Sciences competence-based curriculum is implemented to facilitate students' professional development. According to new curriculum, studies are organized into themes, where each theme includes several competences that students should develop by the end of the theme. This development project's objective was to analyze and assess competence development process of

degree students during their first study year, and give suggestions for teachers regarding facilitation of the process.

Based on analysis made in this development project, several conclusions can be made regarding students' competence development process as part of their professional growth.

First, the analysis revealed that although the target set in the curriculum for the first year: to achieve level one in four of five generic competences, is met by business students, still there can be seen problems in defining the term "competence" by students. It means that further consultations are needed to better explain the idea of competences and how they are connected with the studies.

Second, the ways to monitor competence development process are needed. Nowadays the main tool is competence essay, but it is not enough if the idea is to support students' development process throughout the studies.

Third, the question of competence assessment when students fail to develop the competence is not clear. As for now, the curriculum is built taking into account that all students will be able to achieve basic level during the first year of their studies, and during the second year they are supposed to move on to organizational level. There are no written instructions regarding those students that were not successful in the development process.

Fourth, the competence level of teachers themselves is questioned. In some cases those teachers that assess students' development do not have needed competences.

And last, tutoring and guidance system is not working as it is planned. It means that students do not use the opportunity to receive individual guidance or consulting. Only compulsory meetings are attended by students.

In order to deal with the issues revealed by this project, some suggestions are made regarding facilitation of competence development process. The main idea is that teachers, not only tutor-lecturers but all the teachers that interact with students, will go through PD (professional development) program that is organized every year. It is needed because teachers are the ones who help and guide students in their development process, so they need to be qualified for that. PD program is probably the

only way for teachers to learn about competences and learning methods supporting competence development.

As for tutoring and guidance, I suggest tutor-lecturers to motivate students to meetings and discussions by establishing wide communication net. For example, use Optima as discussion place. It is already used quite a lot, but mostly to put announcements or study related information, and students just read it but not reply. One possibility would be to create FAQ module and put there most typical questions related to competences, study progress and professional growth in more informal style. For example, a lot is written about competences in Study Guide, but the language is hard to follow even for teachers! Students are afraid to ask for explanation, because they think they will be recommended to read Study Guide again. So, my suggestion is to “translate” this official language into simple words that are close to students. To form FAQs, a survey can be made among business students.

Another way to facilitate competence development process and at the same time facilitate interaction between students themselves is to use blog- or journal-type virtual communities. Blog, or web log, is a kind of diary with possibility to leave comments. It can be public or available only for members of community. Such blog could be a tool to discuss matters related to studies. Usually virtual communities are very helpful if you don't want to ask directly or you need alternative opinions, support and / or critics. Blogging is already available for Laurea staff. Same principle can be used for students.

So far suggestions were made mostly about explanation of competences. But when it comes to actual study process, there are many ways to facilitate students' development process. Some ways are already defined in the Study Guide: to encourage students to participate in development projects, to give them practical tasks as assignments, to promote teamwork and cooperation.

One of the most important ways to foster competences is practical studies. Practical studies consist of job placements that are arranged either in Finland or abroad. But for degree students, especially of non-Finnish origin, it is extremely hard to find suitable company: very few companies are eager to take a person who hardly speaks Finnish. One solution is to make an agreement with partner companies that students that were

successful during their assignments and other tasks will have a possibility to do their job placements in these companies.

Last suggestion is to use web-based studies as alternative to traditional classes.

Optima, Laurea's web platform, is widely used already, but there are no purely web-based courses available. Web-based courses give flexibility to studies. Students can decide when they will do the course and plan their time accordingly. This is especially important for second and third year students who work and study at the same time.

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