

N°15-12 – December 2015

From KSAs to much higher competencies

First, let's define the terms

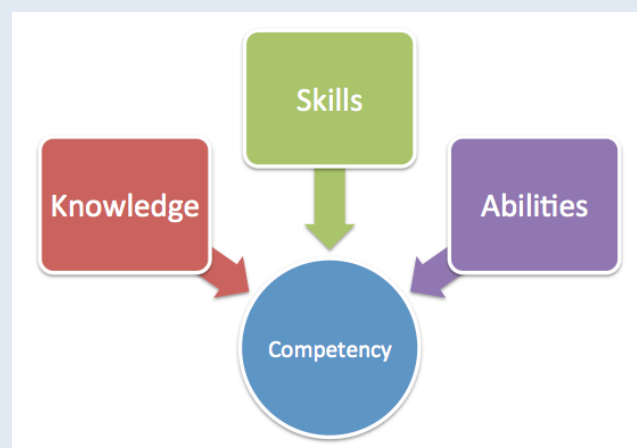
When applying to a Federal Government job in USA, you had better know what “KSA” means and what it is about. KSA means Knowledge, Skills and Abilities and is a list of special qualifications and personal attributes that are required.

Apart from HR people, other managers or employees often use these terms interchangeably. In our opinion, it is worth making a clear distinction between them for an effective personal or team development.

“Knowledge” means an organized body of information, usually factual or procedural in nature. It is the understanding of a subject.

“Skill” means the proficient manual, verbal, or mental manipulation of data or things. It is a proficiency often acquired through effort.

“Ability” means the power or capacity to perform an activity or task. It is often an innate quality.

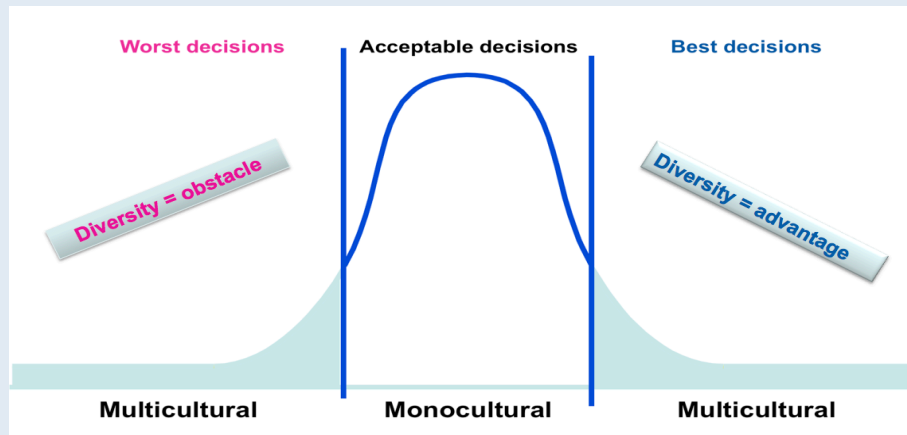


Three of them together nurture a “Competency”, which enables a person to act effectively in a job.

From a given ability to a higher level of competency

What is interesting to us is that, until you are fully aware of your abilities, you will probably not improve your level of competency. Once you have recognized and decided to work on enhancing a given ability, it may become a skill and you will most likely be able to improve your level of competency.

Real-life example: an international team made of 8 nationalities was culturally diverse and had been working for 6 months on a given project. More than others in this company, this team and its team leader were recognized as competent for this very technical job. Until the team was taken as an example, its members were not particularly aware of this, working fairly happily together with a fair degree of performance, helping and technically complementing one another. Their performance was just stable. Once they were put under the spotlight, however, their performance and level of competency improved significantly for the following 6 months until the end of the project. They could experience the benefits of the best multi-cultural teams and they felt it especially in their decision-making process.



From knowledge to a higher level of competency

Exactly the same could be said about knowledge. In the paragraph above, just change “awareness” to “capacity to communicate”. In other terms, knowledgeable persons can go beyond their present levels of competency by working on their capacities to communicate their knowledge better. In our opinion, this is often much more effective than going deeper in their knowledge/expertise.

So, you want to reach a higher of competency, the graph above needs be developed as below:

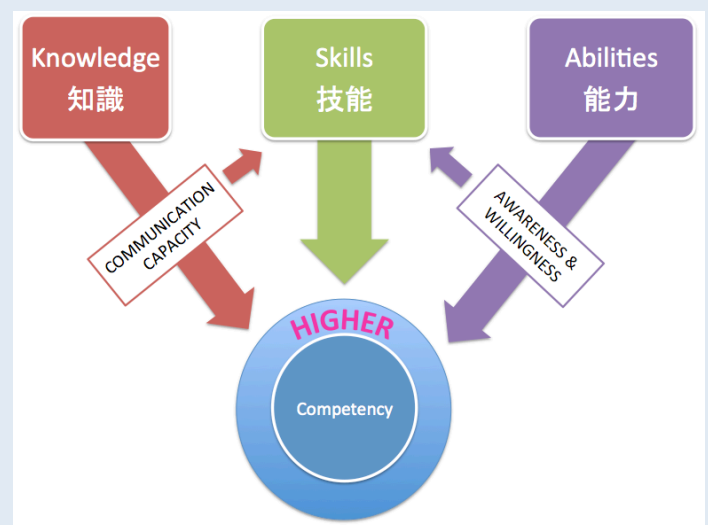
Last, lessons from the China & Japan for a higher level of competency

The Chinese ideograms and Japanese characters may help us differentiate further the fine lines between those three terms:

知識 (knowledge): knowledge + distinction = To know and to distinguish

技能 (skills): techniques + abilities = To have both technique/art and ability

能力 (abilities): abilities + power = To have both ability and power/force



As a conclusion, we strongly suggest to work hard with your teams so that they are able to transform knowledge and abilities into skills and ultimately into a higher competency. There is so much value for the company and so much joy for individuals and teams in this exercise.

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