

COMPETENCIES

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Introduction

As an academic, PhD, lecturer, researcher, or university staff member, you're part of a dynamic and challenging professional landscape. This document aims to help you navigate your career development by exploring the concept of competencies and how they apply to your unique position. Whether you're considering a career in academia or industry, simply want to enhance your professional profile or writing your resume, understanding and developing your competencies is crucial.

1 What are competencies

Before diving into the specifics, let's establish a clear understanding of what competencies are and why they matter in your academic and professional journey.

Competencies are the fundamental strengths or strategic advantages that you possess as an individual. They encompass a combination of knowledge, skills, abilities, and personal attributes that enable you to perform effectively in your role or context. It's important to recognize that competencies go beyond mere knowledge; they represent your capacity to apply that knowledge in practical situations.

In an academic and research context, competencies are particularly crucial as they form the foundation for success in various roles, from conducting groundbreaking research to teaching the next generation of scholars and collaborating with industry partners. These competencies can be broadly categorized into three main types:

1. **Technical competencies:** These are the specific skills related to your field of study or research area. For example, if you're a biologist, this might include skills in gene sequencing or microscopy techniques.
2. **Behavioral competencies:** These are your personal attributes and soft skills that influence how you interact with others and approach your work. Examples include communication skills, adaptability, and leadership.
3. **Functional competencies:** These are cross-disciplinary skills that are applicable across various roles and sectors. They might include project management, data analysis, or grant writing skills.

Understanding these different types of competencies will help you identify your strengths and areas for development, ultimately enhancing your professional profile.

2 How to identify your strengths

Now that you understand what competencies are, let's explore how you can identify your unique strengths. This self-awareness is crucial for your professional development and can guide your career decisions.

Identifying your strengths is a crucial step in understanding your competencies. Here are some effective methods you can use:

1. **Self-reflection:** Take time to analyze your past successes and activities that bring you joy and fulfillment. Ask yourself: What tasks do I excel at? What aspects of my work energize me?
2. **Ask for feedback:** Don't hesitate to ask trusted colleagues, mentors, or supervisors about what they perceive as your strengths. Their external perspective can provide valuable insights you might have overlooked. See the example in the handouts for the webinar Competencies: 'competencies assignment 360'.
3. **Keep a performance journal:** Start documenting your successes and challenges. This can help you identify patterns in your performance and areas where you consistently excel.
4. **Take assessments:** Utilize personality tests or skills assessments to gain insights into your strengths. Tools like the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator or the VIA Character Strengths Survey can offer valuable perspectives.
www.16personalities.com/free-personality-test www.viacharacter.org
5. **Analyze your work:** Review your past projects, publications, and achievements. Look for themes in the work you're most proud of or received the most recognition for.

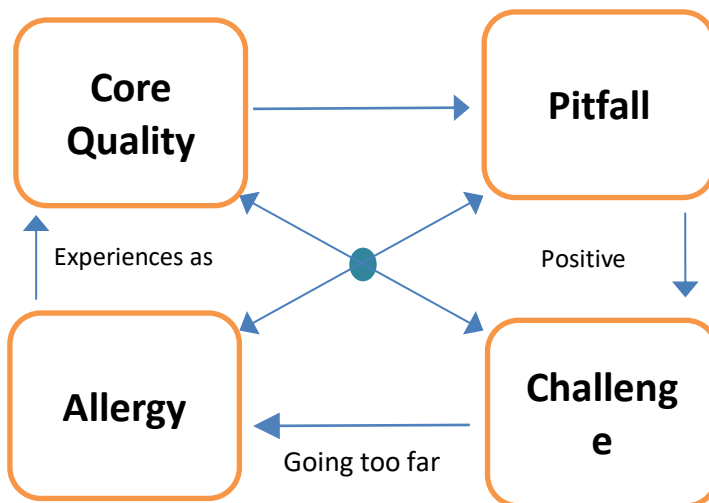
Remember, your strengths are not just about what you're good at, but also what energizes you and brings you satisfaction in your work. By identifying these areas, you can focus on roles and projects that allow you to leverage your natural talents.

3 The Core Quadrant of Daniel Ofman

To deepen your understanding of your strengths and how they relate to your areas for development, let's explore a powerful tool: Daniel Ofman's Core Quadrant.

The Core Quadrant is an insightful framework for personal development that helps you understand the relationship between your strengths and weaknesses. It's particularly useful for academics and researchers who often need to balance precision with big-picture thinking, or independence with collaboration.

The quadrant consists of four elements:



Core Quality: This is your main strength or positive trait. It's something that comes naturally to you and is a fundamental part of who you are.

Pitfall: This is the overextension of your core quality. When pushed too far, your strength can become a weakness.

Challenge: This is the positive opposite of your pitfall. It's an area for growth that can help balance your core quality.

Allergy: This is the negative opposite of your core quality. It's often a trait you find difficult to tolerate in others.

Let's consider an example relevant to your academic context:

Core Quality:	Attention to detail
Pitfall:	Perfectionism
Challenge:	Seeing the big picture
Allergy:	Sloppiness

In this example, your meticulous approach to research (attention to detail) is a strength. However, when overextended, it can lead to perfectionism, potentially slowing down your work or making it difficult to complete projects. Your challenge is to develop the ability to step back and see the bigger picture, which can help balance your detail-oriented nature. Meanwhile, you might find it particularly frustrating to work with colleagues who you perceive as sloppy or careless.

Understanding your Core Quadrant can help you leverage your strengths while being aware of potential pitfalls. It can guide your personal and professional development by highlighting areas where you might need to seek balance or develop complementary skills.

For further information: [Core Quality Quadrant Model explained - Toolshero](#)

4 Specific competencies of PhD's / Researchers

As a PhD candidate or researcher, you've developed a unique set of competencies through your academic journey. Recognizing and articulating these skills is crucial, whether you're pursuing a career in academia or considering opportunities in industry.

You possess a unique set of competencies that are highly valuable both in academia and industry. Some examples:

1. **Critical thinking:** You have honed your ability to analyze complex information, question assumptions, and draw logical conclusions. This skill is invaluable in any field that requires problem-solving and innovation.
2. **Research methodology:** You have expertise in designing and conducting research studies. This includes skills in literature review, hypothesis formation, and experimental design.

3. **Data analysis:** You've developed skills in interpreting and presenting complex data sets. Whether it's statistical analysis, qualitative data interpretation, or data visualization, these skills are highly sought after in many sectors.
4. **Scientific writing:** You have the capacity to communicate research findings effectively through publications and reports. This skill in clear, concise, and accurate writing is valuable in many professional contexts.
5. **Project management:** Through your research projects, you've developed the ability to plan, execute, and deliver complex projects within constraints of time and resources.
6. **Adaptability:** Your research experience has taught you to be flexible and adjust your approaches based on new findings or challenges. This adaptability is crucial in fast-paced professional environments.
7. **Collaboration:** You've likely worked on interdisciplinary projects or international collaborations, developing skills in working with diverse teams across various disciplines.
8. **Ethical reasoning:** You understand and apply ethical principles in research, a skill that translates well to ethical decision-making in any professional context.

These competencies form a strong foundation for various careers, both within and outside academia. As you progress in your career, continue to develop and refine these skills, and importantly, learn to articulate them effectively to potential employers or collaborators.

5 Bridging the gap between academic and industry perspectives

As you consider your career path, it's important to understand how your academic background is perceived in industry settings. This awareness can help you position yourself effectively and bridge any perceived gaps between academic and industry expectations.

Positive and negative stereotypes

Positive stereotypes of academics from industry's perspective are for example a deep subject matter expertise, strong analytical and problem-solving skills, capacity for innovative thinking, rigorous approach to research and data analysis.

Some negative stereotypes are a lack of practical, real-world experience, over-focus on theory rather than application, limited understanding of business contexts, difficulty in translating research into marketable products or services.

Highlight your transferable skills

Transferable skills are also called portable skills. They refer to your knowledge, experiences and abilities that you take with you from one job to another, even when you're switching roles or industries. To bridge the gap between academia and industry, you can focus on developing and highlighting your transferable skills.

1. **Communication:** Enhance your ability to explain complex concepts to non-expert audiences. Practice translating your research into language that resonates with different stakeholders.
2. **Commercial awareness:** Develop an understanding of how your research can be applied in business contexts. Stay informed about industry trends, competitors and challenges in your field.
3. **Teamwork:** Emphasize your experiences of collaborating in diverse, multidisciplinary teams. Highlight instances where you've worked effectively with colleagues from different backgrounds.

4. **Leadership:** Showcase instances where you've led research projects or mentored junior researchers. These experiences demonstrate your ability to guide and inspire others.
5. **Adaptability:** Highlight your ability to pivot research directions or methodologies based on new findings. This shows your flexibility and responsiveness to changing circumstances.
6. **Time management:** Demonstrate your capacity to manage multiple projects and meet deadlines. Your experience juggling research, teaching, and other academic responsibilities is valuable in any professional setting.
7. **Networking:** Build relationships with industry partners through conferences, collaborations, or internships. Expanding your professional network can open doors to new opportunities.
8. **Entrepreneurial mindset:** Develop skills in identifying potential applications or commercialization opportunities for your research. This shows your ability to bridge the gap between academic discovery and real-world impact.

By focusing on these transferable competencies, you can effectively demonstrate your value to potential industry employers or collaborators. It's crucial to frame your academic experiences in terms that resonate with industry needs, highlighting how your research skills can translate into solving real-world problems and driving innovation.

6 Conclusion

Understanding and developing a broad range of competencies is essential for your success in both academic and industry settings. By recognizing your strengths, addressing areas for development, and actively bridging the gap between academic and industry expectations, you can position yourself as a valuable asset in a variety of professional contexts.

Remember, your journey of professional development is ongoing. Regularly reassess your competencies, seek opportunities for growth, and stay open to new challenges. Whether you choose to pursue a career in academia, transition to industry, or forge a path that combines both worlds, your unique set of competencies will be your greatest asset.

Your background has equipped you with a powerful set of skills and knowledge. By continuing to refine these competencies and effectively communicating their value, you can navigate your career path with confidence and make meaningful contributions in whatever field you choose to pursue.

Used sources, s.a.

Indeed, LinkedIn, WUR, Peoplebox, toolshero, cheekyscientist, smartresearcher, research-and-innovation.ec.europa, catalisi, careersmart.org.