

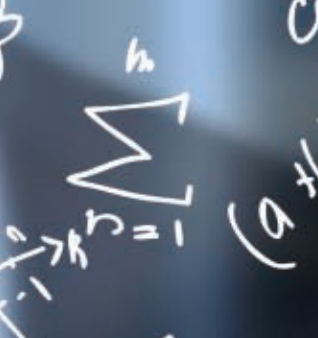
# Competent or merely well informed?

Many employers use competency as a measure to recruit employees. So why do schools and universities still value knowledge over competency? And how does the region compare? [▶](#)

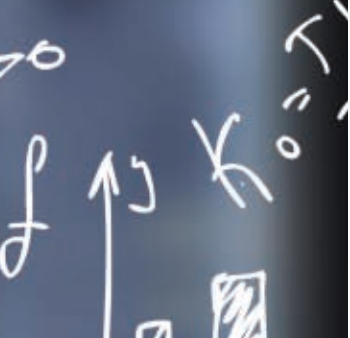
$F = ma$

$g \cdot \sin 30^\circ$

$\cos 1 = \frac{1}{2}$



$(a+b)(a-b) = a^2 - b^2$



$P(B) = \frac{P(A \cap B)}{P(B)}$

$\lim_{n \rightarrow \infty} \frac{A_n}{b_n}$

$3x^2 + 3xR + R^2 = 3x^2$

$x^2 = x - 1 = 0$

$C = 2\pi r$

$\lim_{x \rightarrow a} ax + bx + c = 0$

$\lim_{n \rightarrow \infty} \frac{a_n}{b_n}$

$\lim_{x \rightarrow a} f(x) = L$

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$\lim_{n \rightarrow \infty} \frac{a_n}{b_n}$

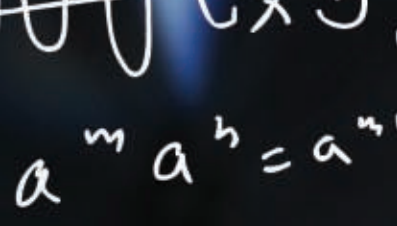
$\lim_{x \rightarrow a} f(x) = L$

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$(a+b)(a^2 - ab + b^2) = a^3 + b^3$



$f(x) = a(x-x_1)(x-x_2)$



$a^m a^n = a^{m+n}$

$\lim_{x \rightarrow a} c = c$



$\lim_{n \rightarrow \infty} \sum_{k=1}^n r^k$



$\sin(\pi + t) \sin(2\pi + t)$

$\cos(\frac{3\pi}{2} + t)$

$\langle a, b \rangle \cdot \langle a, d \rangle = ac + bd$

$\lim_{n \rightarrow \infty} \frac{a_n b_n}{c_n} = \frac{\lim a_n \lim b_n}{\lim c_n}$

$\lim_{x \rightarrow a} \frac{f(x)}{g(x)}$

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## The case for competency-based education

The role of education is to prepare people to play an active part in all aspects of society as it evolves. This includes preparation for employment. Most employers will carefully consider the skills, knowledge and abilities they require before they hire or promote at any level.

- Knowledge consists of specific facts, ideas, awareness or understanding in particular content areas or disciplines.
- Skill is the ability to perform a physical or mental activity that contributes to the effective performance of a job task.
- Abilities are enduring traits and capabilities that an individual possesses that enable the successful completion of a task through the application of knowledge and skills.

Collectively, these skills, knowledge and abilities are referred to as competency: A set of observable and measurable behaviors that are indicative of practical performance in a particular role.

Many employers use a competency model. This is a framework of various competencies that, viewed collectively, define what it means to be successful in particular roles when applied within an organization. The competencies described in a competency model should align with key organizational objectives and values that will help foster an organization's success. The competency model can be used by employers to inform decisions at different stages of the employee life cycle i.e. hiring, training, promotion, succession planning and separation. It can be used by employees to plan their own development prior to hire and during employment as they build their career, and helps them understand what is required of them. So, seeing the importance of competencies, you would expect schools and universities to focus on all elements of competency.

Why then do schools and universities focus so much more on standardized tests with a focus on knowledge? Generally standardized tests have little to say about how well students are able to apply their knowledge outside the test context. Perhaps it is time for schools and universities to consider extending the use of competency-based education. Even when traditional learning models include measures of competency the student experience is usually time-based or time-restricted. Schools have a traditional school day and nine-month school year where students advance after the required time has elapsed. Students are grouped by age and learn through knowledge-based courses that involve occasional standardized knowledge tests on set dates.

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Competency-based education measures learning with little or no regard for time. It links progression to competency achievement, not a fixed timescale. It therefore has the potential to allow students a more individualized experience, which should potentially improve motivation and thus, learning outcomes. Such an approach has many implications for the way in which schools and universities are organized. Most notably:

- Teachers or faculty stop being “a sage on the stage” and become “a guide on the side.” They move from lectures to working alongside students, guiding learning, answering questions, leading discussions, and helping students synthesize and apply knowledge. Some teachers do this already but the change in practice would need to become widespread.
- Computer-assisted learning helps to individualize learning for each student if planned appropriately and linked to the student classroom experience.

The potential benefits of competency-based learning for businesses in terms of accelerating learning and competence acquisition are summarized in this exchange referenced by the Clayton Christensen Institute, a think tank based on the theories of Harvard Business School professor Clayton M. Christensen: A researcher went to work[...]in Toyota's plant[...] First, he went to a training station where he was told, “These are the seven steps required to install this seat successfully. You don't have the privilege of learning step 2 until you've demonstrated mastery of step 1. If you master step 1 in a minute, you can begin learning step 2 a minute from now. If step 1 takes you an hour, then you can learn step 2 in an hour. And if it takes you a day, then you can learn step 2 tomorrow. It makes no sense for us to teach you subsequent steps if you can't do the prior ones correctly.”<sup>1</sup>

At this time of technological, economic and social change applying competency-based education has benefits for those who have left education but need to adapt to changed circumstances. Adult learners have varied experiences and backgrounds. Effective competency-based education recognizes what competencies learners already have, what they need/want and focuses the learning process on skills and knowledge

gaps, saving time and expense and avoiding unnecessary repetition. Business input is essential to identify relevant competencies. Successful competency-based learning also requires assessments that are relevant, consistent and reliable i.e. are a realistic indicator of performance. These features are more likely to make qualifications attractive to employers and employees.

Teaching Program its number one best value in teacher education and the National League for Nursing named WGU's College of Health Professions a Center of Excellence.

National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) used in England are competency-based qualifications taken by thousands of adults and young people in schools,

Australia, Sri Lanka, and India also have a similar approach and apply industry-influenced competency-based frameworks.

Some countries in the Middle East region have already started their competency-based journey. Saudi Skills Standards and Abu Dhabi Centre for Technical and Vocational Education and Training (ACTVET) provide competency-based qualification frameworks. But for employers to access the skilled workforce on the scale required in the future they need to support these education and training bodies offering competency-based learning. Employers can help in the development and delivery of competency-based standards and assessment. They should also be prepared to recognize and reward competence-based qualifications and achievements. How else can the theory be productively put into practice? ●

by **Richard Barrett**, Director, Education and Skills Consulting, Deloitte, Middle East

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### Yes we can?

Is it possible to move to a competency-based education system? The American online Western Governors University (WGU), based in Salt Lake City, Utah, provides competency-based programs. It is an accredited institution offering bachelor degrees in four areas using technology to provide instruction, assessment, and student support. Founded by a consortium of 19 U.S. state governors, it has awarded competency-based college degrees since 1997. In 2015, the National Council on Teacher Quality (NCTQ) rated WGU's Secondary

colleges and the workplace. To gain an NVQ, candidates demonstrate competencies to the required standard. These National Occupational Standards are produced in consultation with employers and relate to various job roles. NVQs are taken by employees or by school and college students with a work placement or part-time job that enables them to develop the appropriate competencies. There is no age limit and no special entry requirements or set course hours. Scottish Vocational Qualifications (SVQs) are available in Scotland and operate in the same way.

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### Sources

1. 'How Competency-Based Education Is Evolving In New Hampshire', Clayton Christensen Institute, 2014