

Competence Description for Personal Recommendations:

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Running head: COMPETENCE DESCRIPTION FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

Competence Description for Personal Recommendations:

The importance of identifying the complexity of learning and performance situations

Keywords: Competence description, learning and performance situations, personal recommender system

Abstract

For competences development of learners and professionals, target competences and corresponding competence development opportunities have to be identified. Personal Recommender Systems (PRS) provide personal recommendations for learners aimed at finding and selecting learning activities that best match their needs. This article argues that a clear-cut description of the concept of ‘competence’ is needed for appropriate system-based personal recommendations. It is proposed to extend current initiatives on standardization of modelling competences with the concept of ‘Learning and performance situation’ (LP-situation) and it is claimed that this extension has added value for personal recommendations for adequate selection of learning activities, for determining proficiency levels of competences, for the design of learning tasks, and for accreditation of prior knowledge. Advantages and disadvantages are discussed.

Competence Description for Personal Recommendations: The importance of identifying the complexity of learning and performance situations

The concept of *competence* is strongly associated with post-secondary education (e.g., Mulder, Wesselink, Biemans, Nieuwenhuis, & Poell, 2003; Stoof, Martens, & Van Merriënboer, in press; Westera, 2001) as well as professional development (e.g., Eraut, 1994). Many work organisations and educational institutes use the concept of ‘competence’ for describing performance ability for particular occupations or jobs or for describing educational objectives. For instance, in the Netherlands, the competence requirements of good quality teachers are classified in seven competences: interpersonal competence, pedagogical competence, subject knowledge & methodological competence, organizational competence, competence for collaboration with colleagues, competence for collaboration with the working environment, and competence for reflection and development (SBL, 2004). Similarly, psychology students of the Open University of the Netherlands have to acquire three competences: (1) research competence, (2) diagnosis competence, and (3) intervention competence.

For competences development of learners and professionals, target competences and corresponding competence development opportunities have to be identified. Thereupon, learners may acquire the target competences by participating in so-called Competence Development Programs (CDPs). A CDP is an ordered set of learning activities, either formal or informal, that are used to build competence in a certain discipline or job (Herder et al., 2006; Koper, 2006). An example of a CDP is a sequenced set of courses to be followed in order to get a Master of Science degree in psychology. Currently, many formal and informal CDPs exist, from different educational institutes and communities of practice, at different levels of proficiency, and situated in different disciplines, domains or job settings. Finding and choosing an appropriate CDP is not that easy for learners. The CDP has to match learners’ individual competence goals (e.g., MSc in Psychology), and their personal preferences (e.g., study location, didactical methods). Also, the course entry requirements should match learners’ already acquired competence profile (e.g., bachelor degree in psychology). Many learners do not have the adequate skills to find out which CDPs are

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5 offered and which are appropriate. Thus, these learners need to be supported when looking
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7 for an appropriate CDP. Within educational institutes, study advisers can be consulted for
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9 this, but when choices concern learning activities of more than one educational institute or
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11 even outside institutes, advice is scarce. Recently, Personal Recommender Systems (PRS) for
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13 learners are developed for that purpose. A PRS provides personal recommendations for
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15 learners aimed at finding and selecting CDPs that best match their needs (Drachsler et al., in
16
17 preparation; Van Setten, 2005). In an information-based PRS for learners, information
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19 concerning desired and acquired competence profiles are combined (Hummel et al, 2006).

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21 In order for a PRS to provide personal recommendations for a learner, a *competence*
22
23 *description* is needed that enables comparison of information concerning individual target
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25 competences and acquired competences on the one hand, and CDP-related information on the
26
27 other. In this article, current competence descriptions are examined for their usefulness for
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29 PRSs. It is argued that, although valuable for its purpose, current competence descriptions
30
31 should be extended with a description of the *learning and performance situation* (LP-
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33 situation). An adjusted, augmented competence description, including LP-situations, is
34
35 suggested. Moreover, examples are presented that demonstrate how PRSs can benefit from
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37 this augmented description.

38 39 40 *Current competence descriptions*

41
42 The concept of competence can have quite different connotations and definitions
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44 (Cheetham & Chivers, 2005; Stoof et al., 2002; Van Merriënboer, Van der Klink, &
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46 Hendriks, 2002; Westera, 2001). It should also be noted that there is a distinction in the
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48 literature between the term ‘competence’ and the term ‘competency’ (De Coi et al., 2006;
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50 Eraut, 1994). Competence is given a generic or holistic meaning and refers to a person’s
51
52 overall capacity whereas competency refers to specific capabilities (knowledge, skill,
53
54 attitude, ability). Cheetham and Chivers (2005) offer the following rather general definition
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56 of competence:

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58 Effective overall performance within an occupation, which may range from the basic level of
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60 proficiency through the highest levels of excellence.
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Stoof et al. (2002), on the other hand, postulate that the meaning of the concept of competence is very unclear. They give a short overview of recent history of ‘competence’ and provide examples of current definitions, such as “a cluster of knowledge, skills and attitudes” or “the ability to handle a situation”. Stoof and colleagues conclude that it is useless to look for the true definition of competence and argue that everyone may construct their own competence definition instead, as long as it is viable. Viability of a competence definition increases when it is clear what the representations and opinions about competences are of the people who construct the competence definition. In addition, the goal of the competence definition should be made clear in order to construct a suitable and useful definition. Finally, it should be clear who the intended users of the definition are (Stoof et al., 2002).

However, idiosyncratic definitions of competence are insufficient for enabling system-based personal recommendations for selecting adequate CDPs. These recommendations could be based on learners’ needs (i.e., their competence goals), their preferences (e.g., preferred study mode, preferred learning style, preferred delivery mode, preferred task characteristics such as performance situation), and CDP-related information. Thus, for personal recommendations, retrieval, exchange and reuse of learning units for international educational institutes is needed. A learning unit refers to each unit where learning can take place, and it can be large or small. Examples are a course, a module, and a CDP. For an effective exchange of learning units, educational institutes need to use a common format of competence description. In the same vein, a common format of competence description is needed when educational designers aim to design formal CDPs that could be used and reused by international educational institutes. These designers of CDPs, as well as the users of the programs, need to know what learners should be able to do when learners have completed a CDP, that is, which competences should be acquired in the CDP. Thus, designers should make sure that they explicitly describe the necessary elements of the competence aimed at in the designed CDPs. Moreover, learners want to know what competences are needed for a particular job (the so-called job profile or required competence profile), what competences they already have acquired (their acquired competence profile,

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5 e.g., accreditation of prior learning), what competences still have to be acquired (their
6 competence gap profile), and where to find existing CDPs to reduce the gap between the
7 acquired competence profile and job profile. For the goals of learners, educational designers,
8 and educational institutes, a sound competence description or model that specifies all relevant
9 ingredients is needed.

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15 Some valuable initiatives on standardization of modelling competencies exist, such as
16 those of IMS RDCEO (2002), IEEE-RCD (2006), and HR-XML (2006). The main purpose of
17 these initiatives is to enable interoperability among learning systems that deal with
18 competency information by providing a means for them to refer to common definitions with
19 common meanings. Central repositories are build that define competencies and these
20 competency definitions can be referenced by external data structures. All three definitions
21 include titles and descriptions that need to be interpreted by human beings. Furthermore, the
22 objective of these descriptions is to represent formally the key characteristics of a
23 competency, independently of its use in any particular context or environment. Thus, these
24 approaches to modelling competencies exclude 'context' from their definitions, because
25 when information concerning context becomes part of the competency definition, its
26 reusability is drastically reduced (De Coi et al., 2006). On the other hand, when selecting an
27 adequate CDP, the context to which a CDP refers to may be very important to the learner. For
28 instance, a professional teacher who wants to develop her teaching competences may
29 particularly look for urban, cross-cultural work situations. Thus, for adequate
30 recommendations, PRSs should be able to retrieve and exchange information concerning
31 context. Several theorists (e.g., Sandberg, 2000) argue that competences used in
32 accomplishing work are not primarily context-free but are situational, or context dependent.
33 Also Koper (2006), in his definition of competence, links competence to context or situations,
34 by him labelled as 'ecological niche' (an occupation, a hobby, a market, a sport, etc.). We
35 conclude that context is an important element related to competence and that context should
36 be modelled. In order to maximize reuse, competence and context should be considered as
37 different dimensions that should be modelled separately (De Coi et al., 2006).
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Conceptualizing context

Tessmer and Richey (1997, p. 87) define context as “multilevel body of factors in which learning and performance are embedded”. Context is thus perceived as the simultaneous interaction of a number of mutually influential factors. The multi-level nature of context means that different spatial and temporal levels of contexts need to be considered, such as the immediate and surrounding contexts.

According to Cheetham and Chivers (2005), a person could be extremely competent in one particular context, but becomes much less so if the context or environment changes. For instance, a teacher in primary education can feel highly confident in his ability to control a class of a rural town school, but a definite lack of confidence when supposed to control a class of a school in a big city. Here, both contexts ask for similar competences (e.g., ‘interpersonal competence’), but one would agree that the latter ‘context’ is much more complex. This difference in complexity is determined by several complexity factors, such as class size or social economic background of learners and parents. In the revised competence model of Cheetham and Chivers (2005), context of work has an important place. They define context of work quite generally as ‘the particular working situation in which an individual is required to operate’. Also Van Merriënboer, Van der Klink and Hendriks (2002) argue that competences are context-specific. They examined several competence definitions, representing eleven approaches to competences. Nearly all approaches that were mentioned in the study of Van Merriënboer et al. emphasized the context-specificity. That doesn’t mean, however, that all theorists perceived ‘context’ the same way. As a matter of fact, Van Merriënboer et al. concluded that ‘context’ is hardly defined at all. According to De Coi et al. (2006), modeling context may be a complex task, as it may coincide with a whole domain. So are we replacing the problem of defining competence by the problem of defining context? Not really. We argue that identifying the most relevant *complexity factors* to typify a ‘context’ could make the concept of ‘context’ valuable and usable for exchange and reuse.

Instead of ‘context’, we prefer the term *learning and performance situation* (LP-situation) for two reasons. First, ‘context’ can refer to very abstract or concrete notion of circumstances such as (1) a culture or environment (e.g., a school in a suburb), (2) types of

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4 situations (e.g., classes with medium class size and children of two cultures, with complexity
5 factor class size set to medium and complexity factor cultural diversity set to two), and (3) to
6 very specific cases (e.g., a particular class with John, Paul, George, Mohammed, Ahmed, ...).
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8 It is the middle level of abstraction, that is, types of situations that we consider to be
9 appropriate for reuse. Second, we like to speak of ‘*learning and performance* situation’ rather
10 than of ‘work situation’ or just ‘situation’. In education as well as in professional
11 development, the actions learners perform when acquiring competences can also refer to
12 other situations than situations directly related to work or occupations whereas such actions
13 can still be very important for the acquisition of relevant competences. These other situations
14 may have a lot of characteristics in common with the work situations, though.
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26 *Advantages and disadvantages of identifying complexity factors*

27 LP-situations are considered to be typified by interplay of various complexity factors.
28 Including LP-situations and, consequently, complexity factors, in characterizing CDPs has
29 advantages as well as disadvantages. The first, and most important advantage, is that by
30 including LP-situations in characterizing CDPs, personal recommendations can be *tuned* to
31 the needs of the learner and the learner will be confronted with most relevant tasks when
32 actually participating in a CDP. Second, LP-situation may support the determination of the
33 *proficiency levels* of competences which are used within a competence specification/standard.
34 Third, a series of LP-situations and the complexity factors within it, ranging from relatively
35 easy to complex, may be very helpful for the *design* of learning tasks. Fourth, descriptions of
36 relevant performance situations may be useful for *accreditation of prior knowledge*. As our
37 approach makes it possible to have an unequivocal mapping from LP-situation to proficiency
38 levels within a competence specification standard, one can argue that LP-situations comply
39 with the need to be able to exchange learning units between CDPs. A disadvantage of the
40 inclusion of LP-situations in competence descriptions is that it makes a competence
41 description more complex. Moreover, agreement between stakeholders (learners, educational
42 institutes, professions and even politicians) concerning the relevant LP-situations and the
43 corresponding complexity factors should be established. This will probably impede the
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5 debate and negotiation with respect to competences and proficiency levels for domains,
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7 whereas already existing agreements on competence maps need to be extended with LP-
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9 situations.

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11 We will illustrate our claims with an example. Imagine that a learner wants to learn
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13 how to ride an All Terrain Bike (ATB) in all circumstances. In Table 1, the already acquired
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15 competence profile, the target competence profile and the complexity factors of LP-situations
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17 are specified. The already acquired competence profile refers to the collection of a person's
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19 already acquired competences that are relevant for the competence goal. The desired
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21 competence profile refers to the collection of relevant competences the person needs to
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23 achieve for proving he/she has reached the competence goal.

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27 Insert Table 1 about here

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31 As can be seen from Table 1, by considering LP-situations in characterizing CDPs,
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33 personal recommendations can be tuned to the needs of the learner (first advantage), and the
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35 learner will be confronted with most relevant tasks when actually participating in a CDP. In
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37 our example, a personal recommendation system will search for CDPs that – in the end -
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39 include *cases* (most specific level of abstraction) for riding an ATB on unpaved, hilly and
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41 curved roads, during traffic peaks and during heavy rainfall which will not exceed spending
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43 maximally 20 hours a week in training sessions. A case is considered as an *instantiation* of a
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45 LP-situation, including an assignment or task. At the level of concrete learning materials
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47 included in the CDP, this could be a case on descending the road safely just outside Adis
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49 Abeda at 8 o'clock in the morning during the rainy season, but it could also be a case on the
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51 Karakoram Highway just near the border with Pakistan on a Friday afternoon during the rainy
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53 season, or a case on descending safely from the suburbs on the Altiplano to the center city of
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55 La Paz at 7 o'clock in the evening during the rainy season. The identification of LP-
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57 situations, including complexity factors, makes it possible that learners will be recommended
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59 with gradually more complex CDPs. This increases their chance of acquiring their goal (e.g.,
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61 Van Merriënboer, 1997).

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5 LP-situations can also support the determination of the *proficiency levels* of
6 competences within a competence specification/standard (second advantage). Educational
7 institutes as well as work organizations use different idiosyncratic scales to represent
8 proficiency level, but they are often arbitrary, because the grounds on which the standards for
9 each proficiency level are determined are very often unclear (Eraut, 1994). We suggest using
10 the complexity factors and their scales within LP-situations for the determination of
11 proficiency levels. For instance, a learner could very well ride an ATB on a paved quiet road,
12 but not on an unpaved road during peak hours. Similarly, a teacher could very well act
13 effectively in a situation in which s/he has to instruct ten students without learning problems.
14 However, the same teacher may fail to act adequately in a situation in which s/he has to
15 instruct thirty students with learning problems. These two situations differ concerning the
16 ‘number of students’ and the ‘number of students with learning problems’. These two
17 complexity factors, in fact, determine the LP-situation. The values of these complexity
18 factors in a specific situation could very well determine the proficiency level on which a
19 teacher can act effectively. By combining the complexity factors, one could create a scale of
20 several levels of proficiency. For instance, a combination of two complexity levels of
21 complexity factor A (values a and A) and two complexity levels of complexity factor B
22 (values b and B) results in four different complexity levels (ab, Ab, aB, and AB), creating a
23 scale with three or four proficiency levels. When several complexity levels can be identified,
24 as is the case in job situations of teachers, and when these factors have more than two levels,
25 the number of proficiency levels may increase very fast. It is therefore suggested not to just
26 determine and rank proficiency levels but also to explicitly describe proficiency levels in
27 terms of complexity factors. This issue will be addressed when a worked out example is
28 presented at the end of this article.
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52 Third, performance complexity characterized via complexity factors may be helpful
53 for the design of learning tasks and CDPs (third advantage). In his 4C/ID-model, Van
54 Merriënboer (1997), advocates a whole-task approach of instruction. In a whole-task
55 approach, the learner is taught all constituent skills at the same time, but conditions under
56 which the whole skill is trained become more complex during the training. Conditions that
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4 may simplify the performance of a complex skill, that is, complexity factors, must be
5 identified in order to create authentic cases that differ in complexity. A learner starts with the
6 simplest authentic case that a professional may encounter. During the training, the
7 simplifying conditions should be relaxed one at a time, so that the cases for instruction
8 become more and more complex. For instance, suppose that a novice teacher in training
9 wants to work on her 'competence for collaboration with the working environment'. For this,
10 she must, among other things, keep in touch with students' parents or guardians, give them
11 professional information, and use the information she gets from them. Authentic cases that
12 differ in complexity must be created, for instance cases in which the teacher in training has a
13 meeting with student's parents. Complexity factors for such an authentic case could be: (1)
14 the possibility of learning problems of the student, (2) the possibility of social problems of
15 the students, (3) the social skills of the parents, and (4) whether the student joins the meeting
16 between teacher and parents. In our view, a novice teacher in training should start practicing
17 with an authentic case in which she meets socially skilled parents of a student without
18 learning and social problems, with the student being absent. Thus, all complexity factors
19 should be set on the simplest option. In that relatively simple authentic case, the teacher in
20 training can practice all the skills, procedures and scripts that are relevant for adequate
21 performance. During training, the complexity factors can be set to a more complex value one
22 at the time. It should be noticed that for every case, no matter how complex, learners should
23 meet similar performance criteria. For instance, in all cases concerning meetings with parents
24 or guardians, the teacher should be able to (1) explicit the goal of the meeting, (2) provide
25 relevant information to the parents, (3) get relevant information from the parents, (4) sustain a
26 good relationship with the parents, and (5) make appointments for future activities. At the
27 Open University of The Netherlands, a large set of job situations and learning tasks for
28 teachers were designed based on variation of complexity factors (Van Gog, Joosten-Ten
29 Brinke, Sluijsmans, & Prins, 2006).

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Fourth, it is increasingly acknowledged that much of the learning takes place in both
informal and non-formal situations. When enrolling formal education, for instance
Psychology at the Open University of the Netherlands, learners may already have acquired

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5 competences in informal situations that are also part of the formal CDP (i.e., curriculum
6 offered by the Open University of the Netherlands). But how could accreditation of prior
7 learning be reached? What information should the learners provide in order to convince the
8 Psychology institute of the fact that the learner has already acquired relevant competences?
9 We suggest that the LP-situation, mapped towards a competence specification/standard, may
10 function as the missing link between informal learning and formal accreditation (fourth
11 advantage). For instance, an individual who has been a volunteer counselor for Kids Help
12 Phone received an informal training and has a lot of experience with counseling
13 conversations. The instantiations of the LP-situations in which the individual acted
14 effectively, that is, particular cases, show many similarities with the LP-situations in which a
15 clinical psychologist could be involved, including roles and performance indicators. When
16 this is the case, the learners may be considered for exemption for some modules of the
17 clinical psychology curriculum.
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31 Thus, in our opinion, professionals and educational institutes should describe their
32 LP-situations when characterizing their CDPs. It is interesting to notice that some initiatives
33 are aimed at describing characteristics of situations in which professionals are supposed to
34 perform. For instance, the Occupational Information Network (O*Net) is a comprehensive
35 database of worker attributes and job characteristics. O*NET is being developed as a timely,
36 easy-to-use resource that supports public and private sector efforts to identify and develop the
37 skills of the American workforce. It provides a common language for defining and describing
38 occupations. Its flexible design also captures rapidly changing job requirements. Part of
39 O*Net is a description of work context. Work context of occupations is determined by a 57
40 item questionnaire in which several dimensions of work context are listed, for instance,
41 contact with others, responsibility for health and safety, conflict situations, and telephone
42 conversations. Many of these items refer to work conditions (temperature, body vibration,
43 radiation) but some of the 57 items can be used for a description of a LP-situation, as long as
44 it concerns a relevant complexity factor for the particular job or occupation. Note that a
45 complexity factor must be a variable that, depending on its value, makes performance for a
46 professional in his or her job, more simple or complex.
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5 Thus, in the proposed competence description, competence is linked to proficiency
6 level, which, in turn, is determined by complexity factors of several LP-situations. Evidence
7 of acquired competences will be based on performance in instantiated LP-situations, that is,
8 in cases of particular complexity. In our view, a competence description that is useful for a
9 PRS contains the elements that are specified in Table 2.
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22 *An example of a CDP selection problem*

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24 To illustrate the claims above, in this paragraph an example of a CDP selection
25 problem is presented. The example is based on the competence requirements for teachers,
26 defined by the Association for the Professional Quality of Teachers, SBL (SBL, 2004).
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28 Imagine that a young teacher wants to acquire the *competence for collaboration with the*
29 *working environment* of a teacher in pre-higher education. There are many CDPs around in
30 several educational institutes for attaining this competence goal. The young teacher decides
31 to consult a PRS. Besides using personal preferences within PRS, additional input for the
32 PRS is the already acquired competence profile, consisting of relevant certificates as well as
33 experiences in relevant job situations, and the desired competence profile. The experiences in
34 relevant job situations may very well be matched with LP-situations with several values of
35 corresponding complexity factors. Which of the LP-situations is the young teacher familiar
36 with? In which of the LP-situations, including values of corresponding complexity factors,
37 was the young teacher successful? Similarly, the young teacher can identify in which of the
38 LP-situations, including values of corresponding complexity factors, wants the young teacher
39 to be successful. After the young teacher's input of information concerning acquired and
40 desired competence profile, as well as personal preferences, the PRS will search for CDPs
41 that match personal needs, preferences, and competence profiles. Subsequently, the PRS
42 recommends and provides access to possible cases, that is, possible learning activities in
43 instantiated situations with determined values of complexity factors. In order to do so, a
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5 competence description is needed in which LP-situations, with corresponding complexity
6 factors, are identified. In Table 3, an overview of a possible competence description of this
7 example is presented, including proficiency levels, performance situation, complexity factors
8 and values. The example aims at illustrating our claims and is thus not a complete description
9 of this competence. That means that for instance other LP-situations as well as complexity
10 factors can be added to the example.
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17 As can be seen, one competence can refer to many LP-situations and many
18 complexity factors determine a LP-situation. Therefore, it is important to reduce the number
19 of performance situations and complexity factors. In our example, two LP-situations are
20 identified, of which one is described in terms of complexity factors and performance
21 indicators. These LP-situations and complexity factors are helpful for the purposes of
22 competence descriptions that we described above. For the determination of the proficiency
23 levels (in this example three), the LP-situations and corresponding complexity levels are
24 combined. A teacher can be considered to be at the expert level when adequate performance
25 is shown in cases corresponding to half of the LP-situations of top complexity.
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34 This example illustrated the first, second and fourth advantage of matching LP-
35 situation to a competence description. In order for the PRS to select appropriate CDPs based
36 on LP-situations and complexity factors, learning activities and CDPs should be designed
37 based on a variation of these LP-situations.
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44 *Discussion and conclusion*

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46 In this article, it was argued that a clear-cut description of the concept of ‘competence’ to
47 characterize CDPs, individuals’ acquired and target competence profile, is needed for system-
48 based personal recommendations for selecting appropriate CDPs. We proposed to extend
49 current initiatives on standardization of modelling competencies with the concept of ‘LP-
50 situation’ and claimed that this extension has added value for personal recommendations for
51 adequate CDP selection, for determining proficiency levels of competences, for the design of
52 learning tasks, and for accreditation of prior knowledge.
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5 This leads to the question how and by whom the LP-situations should be designed.
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7 We suggest that professionals and educational institutes should collaboratively describe LP-
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9 situations for their domain in a systematic way, including complexity factors and their
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11 possible values, and, for each competence agree on the mapping towards proficiency levels.
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13 In the Netherlands, the Association for the Professional Quality of Teachers (SBL, 2004)
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15 succeeded in agreeing on the competence requirements for teachers. The next step is to agree
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17 on a systematic description of LP-situations. Further research is needed to examine whether
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19 professions are willing and able to add LP-situations and corresponding complexity factors to
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21 job descriptions and competence requirements. Moreover, research is needed to determine
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23 methods and procedures for communities of practitioners to define characteristic LP-situation
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25 with corresponding complexity factors. Special tools, such as the web-based support for
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27 constructing competence maps of Stoof et al. (in press), could be designed or adjusted for
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29 explicit support concerning systematic description of LP-situations.

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31 Not all competences are equally context-specific (Van Merriënboer et al., 2002).
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33 Some competences are applicable to many LP-situations of many domains (e.g., social
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35 competence) and others are limited to a specific domain or to a few characteristic LP-
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37 situations. Consequently, general competences can be linked to many LP-situations, and thus,
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39 learners almost have an unlimited choice of LP-situations that can be used to develop this
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41 general competence. On the other hand, many relevant but domain-independent LP-situations
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43 could make it more difficult to distinguish a limited number of proficiency levels. It is a
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45 challenge for educational designers to select the appropriate LP-situations in a particular
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47 domain. For practical reasons, the number of relevant complexity factors and their possible
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49 values should be limited, otherwise many proficiency levels could be distinguished. It is open
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51 to discussion how many complexity factors and how many values for each of them are
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53 relevant to distinguish. Suppose one already agreed to distinguish between, lets say, three
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55 proficiency levels, then one needs to specify how the complexity factors and their possible
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57 values will be mapped towards those three proficiency levels. If the acquired competence
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59 profile would equal level one and desired competence profile would equal level three,
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61 personal recommendations would firstly offer CDPs that aim at level two. Often, the model
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5 of Dreyfus (2000) is used, in which five proficiency levels are described. In our opinion, each
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7 of these levels should be described in terms of LP-situations, which makes the proficiency
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9 levels concrete and attainable.

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11 After agreement about the LP-situations and the complexity factors in the community
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13 of practitioners, technology should come in to define the competences in terms of the current
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15 initiatives such as RDCEO, HR-XML, and IEEE RCD and link these definitions to modeled
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17 LP-situations. In this way, our approach towards competence description complies with
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19 existing initiatives for referencing and exchanging competences between learning systems,
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21 human resource systems, and competency or skill repositories (De Coi et al., 2006).
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Table 1. *Use case riding an All Terrain Bike (ATB) for a learner with a specific goal and preferences*

Goal:	I want to be able to ride an ATB in all circumstances
Acquired competence profile:	I can ride an ATB on a paved, quiet, and flat place when the sun is shining:
Desired competence profile	I can ride an ATB when descending an unpaved mountain highway during a traffic peak and heavy rainfall
Complexity factors:	a. surface structure of the road
	b. amount of traffic on the road
	c. shape of the road
	d. weather conditions
Values for complexity factors:	a. surface structure of the road (paved, unpaved)
	b. amount of traffic on the road (quiet, peak)
	c. shape of the road (flat & straight, hilly & curved)
	d. weather conditions (bright & sunny, heavy rain)
Preferences for the learner:	I can maximally spend 20 hours a week on training

Table 2. Elements of a competence description					
No.	Name	Explanation	Reqd	Mult	Type
0	Competence description	This element specifies the competence description.	-	-	Sequence
0.1	<i>Identifier</i>	A unique label that identifies this competence description (ID).	M	1	ID
0.2	Title	A single text label for the competence description. This is a human-readable name for the competence. The title may be repeated in multiple languages.	O	0..1	String
0.3	Description	A human-readable description of the competence. Unstructured string meant to be interpretable only for humans. The description may be repeated in multiple languages.	O	0..1	String
0.4	Definition	A structured definition of the competence description.	O	0..1	String
0.5	Learning-Performance-Situation-ref	Refers to a learning performance situation.	O	0..*	Sequence
0.6	Complexity-Factor-ref	Refers to a complexity factor.	M	1..*	Sequence
0.7	Proficiency-Level-ref	Refers to a proficiency level.	M	1	Sequence
0.8	Performance-Indicator-ref	Refers to a performance indicator.	O	0..1	Sequence
0.9	Mapping-function	Description of how the multiple values of the complexity variables are mapped towards all single-value proficiency levels. All possible combinations should be mapped towards a proficiency level and all possible values for proficiency level should be used at least once.	O	0..1	String
0.10	Metadata	Placeholder for metadata. Include IMS Meta-Data here, using its namespace.	O	0..1	Sequence

Learning-Performance-Situation					
No.	Name	Explanation	Reqd	Mult	Type
0	Learning-Performance-Situation	This element contains a sequence of elements for learning and performance situations definitions.	O	0..*	Sequence
0.1	<i>Identifier</i>	A unique label that identifies this learning performance situation.	M	1	ID
0.2	Title	A single text label for the learning and performance situation. This is a human-readable name for the learning and performance situations. The title may be repeated in multiple languages.	O	0..1	String
0.3	Description	A human-readable description of the learning and performance situation. Unstructured string meant to be interpretable only for humans. The description may be repeated in multiple languages.	O	0..1	String
0.4	Definition	A structured definition of the learning and performance situations.	O	0..1	String

Complexity -Factor					
No.	Name	Explanation	Reqd	Mult	Type
0	Complexity-Factor	This element contains a sequence of elements for complexity factor definitions.	M	1..*	Sequence
0.1	<i>Identifier</i>	A globally unique label that identifies the complexity factor.	M	1	ID
0.2	Title	Text label of the complexity factor that has impact on the complexity of a learning and performance situation.	O	0..1	String
0.3	Description	Description of the complexity factor that has impact on the complexity of a learning and performance situation.	O	0..1	String
0.4	Definition	A structured definition of the complexity factor.	O	0..1	String
0.5	{itemvalue}	Schema group that enumerates the possible values of each complexity factor.	M	1	Group

Competence description for recommendations 24

Proficiency-Level					
No.	Name	Explanation	Reqd	Mult	Type
0	Proficiency-Level	This element contains a sequence of elements for proficiency level definitions.	M	1	Sequence
0.1	<i>Identifier</i>	A globally unique label that identifies the proficiency level.	M	1	ID
0.2	Title	Text label of the proficiency level.	O	0..1	String
0.3	Description	A human-readable description of the proficiency level.	O	0..1	String
0.4	Definition	A structured definition of the proficiency level.	O	0..1	String
0.5	{itemvalue}	Schema group that enumerates the values of the proficiency levels.	M	1	Group

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Competence description for recommendations 25

Performance-Indicator					
No.	Name	Explanation	Reqd	Mult	Type
0	Performance-Indicator	This element contains a sequence of elements for performance indicator definitions.	O	0..1	Sequence
0.1	<i>Identifier</i>	A globally unique label that identifies the performance indicator.	M	1	ID
0.2	Title	Text label of the performance indicator.	O	0..1	String
0.3	Description	A human-readable description of the performance indicator.	O	0..1	String
0.4	Definition	A structured definition of the performance indicator.	O	0..1	String
0.5	{itemvalue}	Schema group that enumerates the values of the performance indicators.	O	1	Group

Competence description for recommendations 26

{itemvalue}					
No.	Name	Explanation	Reqd	Mult	Type
0	Itemvalue	A schema group for values.	-	-	Sequence
0.1	<i>Identifier</i>	A globally unique label that identifies the item.	M	1	ID
0.2	Title	Text label of the item.	O	0..1	String
0.3	Values	List of values (separated by commas) that can be used.	M	0..1	String
0.4	Datatype	The data type of the item. Possible values: string, boolean, integer, real	M	1	Token
0.5	Scale-type	Type of the scale used. Possible values: ordered, ratio	O	1	Token
0.6	Min-value	Minimum possible value.	O	1	String
0.7	Max-value	Maximum possible value.	O	1	String

Table 3. Example of a competence description

	Name	Explanation
0	CompetenceDescription	
0.1	Identifier	
0.2	Title	Competence for collaboration with the working environment
0.3	Description	The teacher in pre-higher education must keep in touch with the students' parents or guardians, and with colleagues of educational and youth welfare institutions his/her school collaborates with. He/she must make sure that his/her professional actions are in line with those of others outside the school. Furthermore, he/she must contribute to a good development of collaboration between his/her school and the institutions concerned.
0.4	Definition	The teacher in pre-higher education must keep in touch with the students' parents or guardians, and with colleagues of educational and youth welfare institutions his/her school collaborates with.

0.5	Learning-Performance-Situation	
0.5.1	Title	Planned meeting with parents or guardians
0.5.2	Description	In a planned meeting, a teacher meets with student's parents or guardians to discuss cognitive, social, and/or affective progress of the student. The teacher gives parents and other parties involved professional information about the students, and uses information the teacher gets from them.
0.5.3	Definition	In a planned meeting, a teacher meets with student's parents or guardians to discuss cognitive, social, and/or affective progress of the student.

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Competence description for recommendations 28

0.6	Complexity-Factor	
0.6.1	<i>Identifier</i>	
0.6.2	Title	Social problems of student
0.6.3	Description	The student has social problems, such as aggressive behavior in school, ...
0.6.4	Definition	The student has social problems.

0.7	Proficiency-Level	
0.7.1	Identifier	
0.7.2	Title	Novice
0.7.3	Description	Performs adequately in for this competence relevant learning and performance situations in which all three complexity factors have the least complex value.
0.7.4	Definition	Performs adequately in for this competence relevant learning and performance situations in which all three complexity factors have the least complex value.

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Competence description for recommendations 29

0.8	Performance-Indicator	
0.8.1	Title	Explicit goals of meeting
0.8.2	Description	The teacher explicits the goal of the meeting by giving relevant information concerning characteristics of the student
0.8.3	Definition	The teacher explicits the goal of the meeting

Running head: COMPETENCE DESCRIPTION FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

Competence Description for Personal Recommendations:
The importance of identifying the complexity of learning and performance situations

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