

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Communication Competence and Stakeholder Communication as a Dimension of Distinctive Competence in Work Life: A Qualitative Research¹

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Abstract

This study was conducted with the aim of revealing employees' perception of competence and determining which competence domains and sub-components are most associated with competence. Adopting a qualitative research approach, the study was designed using a phenomenological pattern, and research data were collected through an in-depth interview method. The research findings were interpreted based on the responses provided by private sector employees to questions in line with their professional experiences, focusing on their perceptions of professional competence and the types of competencies they highlight as crucial for success in today's competitive business environment.

According to the findings, the perception of competence among private sector employees is categorized into three main themes, namely technical/functional, fundamental/managerial, and behavioral/personal, which align with the literature. The most significant research finding obtained within the scope of this study is the participants' emphasis on communication competence as the most crucial type of competence in today's context. Additionally, participants have further delineated sub-themes of communication competence by discussing various types of communication competencies within the realm of work life. Among all participants, 'stakeholder communication' stands out as the most highlighted type of communication competence. Following stakeholder communication is intra-team communication, effective communication skills, persuasive communication, social communication, and empathetic communication. Furthermore, network-focused communication, marketing communication, professional language in communication, listening-persuasion in communication, and trustworthiness in communication emerge as sub-themes highlighted within the overarching theme of communication competence in the work environment.

Keywords: Competence Perception, Communication Competence, Stakeholder Communication, Qualitative Research, Phenomenological Research.

Öz

Bu çalışma, çalışanların yetkinlik algısını ortaya koymak ve yetkinliğin en fazla hangi yetkinlik alanları ve alt bileşenleri ile ilişkilendirildiğini belirlemek amacıyla yürütülmüştür. Nitel araştırma yaklaşımının benimsendiği çalışma fenomenolojik desende tasarlanmış olup araştırma verileri derinlemesine görüşme yöntemi ile toplanmıştır. Araştırma bulguları, özel sektör çalışanlarının mesleki tecrübeleri doğrultusunda sorulara verdikleri cevaplar üzerinden mesleki yetkinlik algıları ve günümüz rekabetçi iş yaşamında başarılı olabilmek için öne çıkardıkları yetkinlik türleri üzerinden yorumlanmıştır.

Elde edilen bulgulara göre, özel sektör çalışanlarının yetkinlik algılarının literatürle paralel olarak teknik/fonksiyonel, temel/yönetimsel ve davranışsal/kişisel olmak üzere üç ana temada açıklandığı tespit edilmiştir. Araştırma kapsamında elde edilen en önemli araştırma bulgusu ise, katılımcılar tarafından günümüzde en önemli yetkinlik türünün iletişim yetkinliğine sahip olma olarak öne çıkarılmasıdır. Bununla birlikte katılımcılar, çalışma yaşamında iletişim yetkinliğinin farklı türlerinden bahsetmek sureti ile iletişim yetkinliğinin alt temalarını da belirginleştirmişlerdir. İletişim yetkinliği konusunda tüm katılımcılar tarafından "paydaş iletişiminin" en fazla öne çıkarılan iletişim yetkinlik türü olduğu görülmüştür. Paydaş iletişimini sırasıyla; ekip içi iletişim, etkili iletişim becerileri, ikna edici iletişim, sosyal iletişim ve empatik iletişim izlemektedir. Bunun yanı sıra; network odaklı iletişim, pazarlama iletişimi, mesleki dilde iletişim, iletişimde dinleme-ikna ve iletişimde güvenilir olma konuları çalışma yaşamında iletişim yetkinliği ana teması içerisinde öne çıkarılan alt temalardır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Yetkinlik Algısı, İletişim Yetkinliği, Paydaş İletişimi, Nitel Araştırma, Fenomenolojik Araştırma.

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Introduction

In today's circumstances, the competitive nature that has become more pronounced in the workplace demands management approaches and employee recruitment that are increasingly competitive. For businesses, this situation presents itself as a necessity to maintain their existence and enhance growth through a more qualified and specialized workforce. Under contemporary perspectives, the concept that has emerged to address this viewpoint is the concept of 'competence.' Defined as possessing the qualifications necessary to perform a task, this concept has gained prominence for organizations that embrace a competence-based management approach. For these organizations, competence serves as the key to competitiveness, symbolizing the possession of qualified, highly committed, and proficient employees who not only deliver high-quality products and services but also align with the essential principles of competence-oriented management.

This approach emphasizes employee alignment with organizational policies and objectives, enhancing a company's competitive advantage. Consequently, enterprises have come to view employees equipped with mission-aligned competencies as an integral part of their intellectual capital. Thus, businesses have formulated human resource policies aimed at targeting and cultivating employees possessing such supportive competencies to achieve success and realize their organizational missions.

In the present, competence-based enterprises, rooted in this management approach, employ numerous human resource policies, including employee selection, placement, promotions, salary adjustments, rewards, training and development, and career management. The underlying rationale for the acceptance of competence-based management approach and human resource practices by businesses is the fact that, in a competitive market, the presence of qualified, highly committed, and proficient employees has become an indispensable prerequisite, in addition to delivering high-quality products and services, to differentiate themselves and make an impact.

For businesses rooted in today's competence-based management approach, shaped by employee competencies, another essential precondition for the success of this approach is the awareness of employees about the competencies required by their jobs and their willingness to enhance these competencies. In other words, an additional critical aspect for businesses is that the competencies deemed indispensable today must also be recognized by employees as determinants for aspects such as job selection, workplace choice, professional specialization, and career planning. Their awareness and efforts in this regard constitute another prominent dimension.

Taking the concept of competence from the employees' perspective necessitates exploring it from various determinants such as competition, job satisfaction, and professional success. It is not incorrect to state that individuals' occupations shape their societal position, way of life, attitudes, thoughts, and more. In this sense, individuals making the right career choices based on their competencies becomes a significant consideration for daily, societal, and professional harmony. Therefore, it is important to emphasize that individuals aligning their competencies with the focus of their work have a significant impact on their personal and professional lives.

In summary, the concept of competence is multidimensional, varies across different professions/industries, and is subject to constant change due to the evolving nature of professions, work methodologies, and diversified fields in today's world. These conditions underscore the necessity for interdisciplinary studies in the realm of competence, given that the concept necessitates an in-depth understanding. Consequently, in the current era, it becomes crucial to measure employees' perceptions of competence specific to their professions and identify the competence domains that come to the forefront due to changes. This practice facilitates individuals in planning the necessary levels of competence for their careers, updating their competencies according to career goals, and effectively aligning the workforce with competency-driven roles. In essence, this pursuit encompasses an important area of study.

With this purpose in mind, the present study has been conducted to elucidate employees'

perception of competence and determine the competence domains and sub-components most strongly associated with this perception. The study is structured into three main sections. The first section encompasses the definition of the competence concept, the dimensions of competence, and a review of the literature on related studies. In the second section, the methodology employed in the research to reveal employees' perception of competence and to identify the most significant competence domains and sub-components is explained. The third section presents the findings of the research, which are discussed in relation to the existing literature.

Literature Summary

The Concept of Competence

Competence is a term that has been borrowed from the English word 'competency' into our language (Güler, 2010, p.3). When examining the definitions related to the concept, it can be observed that the Turkish Language Association (TDK) defines competence as 'the state of being competent, maturity, excellence' (TDK, 2020). The derivation of the term 'competence' from the word 'competent,' which refers to an individual possessing the qualifications to carry out a task, provides a clue to the definition of the concept (Arat, 2008, p. 15). In the context of its broader application, competence encompasses not only knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behaviors but also related abilities concerning organizations and processes that enhance an individual's performance, representing the observable aspects of behavioral dimensions (Demircan, 2020, p. 11). According to another similar definition, competence refers to the knowledge and skills of an individual and team concerning job performance in the context of the organization, necessary knowledge and skills for future success, individual and team examples of mental and behavioral successes aimed at exceptional performance, and abilities related to processes that enhance organizational or job performance. Furthermore, it represents new ways of thinking and behaving that provide a specific competitive

advantage, embodying particular abilities (Uyargil, 2017, p. 59).

A common perception regarding competence is that its definition and measurement are challenging. In contemporary times, efforts have frequently been directed toward shifting this concept from an abstract plane to a tangible standpoint by focusing on behavioral patterns. Therefore, studies related to competence aim to identify significant factors contributing to the success of employees in performing their tasks within an organization. Following the identification of these behaviors, a distinction emerges between successful employees and those who are unsuccessful or mediocre. In other words, even when two employees possess the same skills and perform the same tasks, differences in competence lead to variations in their achievements. Thus, in the realm of professional success, focusing solely on the requisite knowledge and skills is insufficient. Equipping one's knowledge and skills with competence serves as the most crucial benchmark for success (Yves, 1997, p. 53).

According to Uyargil (2004), competence models are defined as tools that determine the abilities, knowledge, skills, and behaviors required by employees to perform their job roles effectively, enabling the organization to achieve its strategic objectives. These competence models are essentially expressed through three fundamental approaches. The first approach, research-based, suggests gathering data from employees who exhibit effective performance in relation to competencies. The second approach, strategy-based, aims to ensure that the necessary competencies in personnel are provided to enact the business strategy. Lastly, the values-based approach emphasizes the opinions of managers within organizations, asserting that the consideration of managerial insights plays a critical role in achieving success."

When examining the development of the competence concept, it is observed that it was initially used by White (1959); however, the concept found its primary place in the field of human resources with McClelland's article published in 1973 (cited from Kierstead, 1988, as cited in Bayraktar, 2018, p. 302). Another

significant contribution to the competence concept is Bandura's scientific work titled 'Self-Efficacy: Toward a Unifying Theory of Behavioral Change', published in 1977. Bandura's definition of competence revolves around the belief in one's ability to perform a skill in various situations and contexts rather than just measuring the extent of an individual's skill level. Between 1986 and 1995, Bandura defined competence as the self-belief in one's capability to execute any skill across different situations and goals. In another definition in 1997, Bandura described competence as the organizational capability individuals need to possess to achieve desired outcomes in the face of responsibility, coupled with the belief in actualizing it (Çelikaleli and Akbay, 2013, p. 239).

In subsequent years, practical studies conducted by Boyatzis, Spencer, and Spencer further enriched the content of the competence concept, enhancing its essence (cited from Kierstead, 1988, as cited in Bayraktar, 2018, p. 302). Over the years, the collective efforts and applications related to competence have played a crucial role in the evolution of the concept, shaping its current understanding.

Dimensions and Sub-components of Competence

Fundamentally, when examined in the literature, the concept of competence is defined within three sub-dimensions: fundamental/managerial, behavioral/personal, and functional (technical) (Görer, 2019, p. 35). In addition to this, each of the three sub-dimensions of competence is further detailed with its own sub-components.

Fundamental/Managerial Competencies

The first sub-dimension is classified as fundamental/managerial competencies. This dimension consists of sub-competency components referred to as communication competence, openness to development and learning (lifelong learning), teamwork, analytical thinking, change focus/innovativeness, and conflict management/crisis management. This competency dimension is considered at the top of the hierarchy and a mandatory type of competence

for individuals to succeed in their professions. Distinct from the functionally/technically developed competencies in a professional sense, this dimension denotes the foundational skills that precede the acquisition of those competencies.

Communication: Communication can be defined as the sharing of ideas, information, attitudes, emotions, and skills with the aim of inducing behavioral change (Çilenti, 1984, p. 43). Alternatively, it can be characterized as a psychosocial process where at least two individuals mutually exchange information, emotions, and thoughts through specific methods (Kaya, 2017).

Openness to Development-Learning: Continuously progressing, planned activity (Demiralp, 2016) that supports the acquisition of knowledge and skills necessary for individuals and the entire society to succeed in professional and social contexts.

Teamwork: Teamwork is distinct from individual performance and involves the ability to collaborate with others, being open to communication, sharing knowledge and skills, and fostering mutual development (Tanyeri, 2015).

Analytical thinking: An individual's ability to view problems from multiple perspectives, make accurate decisions, comprehend problems, and implement solutions (Turhanlar, 2021).

Change focus/innovativeness: Employees systematically review and renew their goals and expectations for adapting to changing conditions in the workplace (Akgeyik, 2001).

Conflict management/crisis management: Able to foresee the possibility of a crisis/conflict occurring or by analyzing the ongoing crisis/conflict process, addressing the emerging problems, and navigating through the process with minimal damage (Küçük and Bayuk, 2007).

Behavioral/Personal Competencies

The second sub-dimension is classified as behavioral/personal competencies. This dimension consists of sub-competency components referred to as taking responsibility/using initiative, information search/openness to new information, achievement orientation/focus, organizational commitment/corporate loyalty, work ethics and

integrity, self-control (self-management/self-efficacy), self-confidence, and empathy. Behavioral competencies encompass behavioral traits that contribute to individuals' professional success.

Able to take responsibility/use initiative: The individual's capability to assume responsibility beyond their designated role and adapt their job description according to internal organizational circumstances (Akin, 2014).

Information search/openness to new information: Identifying the most suitable information among various sources to address needs and making a selection (Najjari, 2010).

Achievement orientation/focus: A strong belief and emotional state toward factors that emerge to achieve goals (DeShon and Gillespie, 2005).

Organizational commitment/corporate loyalty: Demonstrating a strong belief and acceptance of the organization's goals and values, a willingness to expend significant effort for the organization, and a strong desire to continue working for the organization (Mowday, Porter, and Steers, 1982).

Work ethics and integrity: Inclination to adhere to ethical and legal norms that guide what to do in situations encountered during the execution of a specific profession (İyi and Tepe, 2019).

Self-control (self-management/self-efficacy): The ability to suppress or alter destructive emotions and impulses that arise internally (Goleman, 2000).

Self-confidence: One's belief in their ability to successfully perform an activity, having confidence in their inherent abilities and decisions (Feltz, 1988).

Empathy: Being able to place oneself in another's shoes and have an understanding from their perspective (Dökmen, 2013).

Functional/Technical Competencies

The third dimension is classified as functional/technical competencies. This dimension consists of sub-competency components referred to as knowledge, skills, and experiences. This type of competency should not be compared to the basic skill requirements expressed as fundamental competencies for any career. Functional/technical competencies are more specific attributes that

stand out within professions and their respective operational fields.

Methodology

This study is grounded in a qualitative research approach with the aim of determining the perceptions of competence among private sector professionals and identifying the competency domains most strongly associated with competence. The qualitative research approach involves an essential methodology for deeply investigating and comprehending social phenomena and events within their contextual environment (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2013, p. 45). The study is designed within the framework of the phenomenological (phenomenon-based) research design, which is one of the patterns used in qualitative research approaches. Phenomenological research design focuses on investigating phenomena (events, experiences, orientations, perceptions, situations, concepts, etc.) that we are familiar with but lack a thorough and detailed understanding of, making it suitable for studies aiming to explore these phenomena (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2013). The phenomenon-based design involves descriptive research that centers on individuals' subjective experiences, emphasizing detailed descriptions of phenomena rather than making generalizations (Akturan and Esen, 2008). Within the scope of this phenomenological design study, the aim is to uncover the perceptions of professional competence by examining participants' responses to questions based on their professional experiences.

To ensure the validity and reliability of the research, a thorough research approach was adopted throughout the processes of formulating the data collection instrument, gathering data, analyzing data, and interpreting findings. When determining the study group for the research, the purposive sampling method of maximum diversity sampling was employed as the basis.

In phenomenological research, the process of determining the sample focuses on selecting individuals who have experienced the phenomenon under investigation within the scope of the study and can describe their experience

(Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2008). In other words, selecting participants who can provide the most accurate answers to the researcher's questions and contribute to achieving the research objectives is a crucial aspect (Creswell, 2017, p. 189). The current study, which aims to identify the competence perceptions of private sector employees, is based on a study group consisting of private sector employees from the İzmir province.

For phenomenological research, the number of participants for interviews is typically indicated to be between 6 and 8 individuals. Within these limits, the research sample was determined based on the principles of data saturation and representation of various professions, using a purposive sampling method relying on volunteers. A total of 132 participants were interviewed, representing different professions, genders, age groups, levels of experience, and educational backgrounds (Table 1).

Table 1. Distribution of Participants by Demographic Characteristics

Sector	N	Age	N
Transportation & Logistics	9	21-34	59
Health	24	35-50	52
Financ	8	51+	21
Training & Consultancy	16		
Energy	9	Experience	N
Industry	13	1-15	80
Tourism	11	16-30	41
Information Technologies	9	31 ve üstü	11
Communication Services	20		
Construction/Real Estate	13		
		Education	N
Gender	N	High school	7
Female	48	Undergraduate	89
Male	84	Postgraduate	36
TOTAL	132		

The distribution of participants in the sample with respect to various demographic variables is as follows:

- 48 of them are female, and 84 are male.
- 59 fall within the age range of 21-34, 52 are between 35-50, and 21 are 51 years or older.
- 80 have 1-15 years of experience, 41 have 16-30 years, 11 have 31 years or more of experience.
- 7 have completed high school, 89 hold a bachelor's degree, and 36 possess a master's degree.

- 9 of them are from transportation and logistics, 24 are from health, 8 are from finance, 16 are from education and consultancy, 9 are from energy, 13 are from industry, 11 are from tourism, 9 are from information technologies, 20 are from communication services and 13 are from construction/real estate sectors.

In the study designed within the phenomenological framework, which is based on a qualitative research approach, the interview technique was employed for data collection. A semi-structured interview guide was utilized to uncover the perceptions of professional experts regarding the phenomenon of competence. The aim was to gather detailed information from the opinions of these experts. The formulation of the semi-structured interview guide drew from relevant literature on the subject. The interviews were conducted with participants' consent and were also recorded for accuracy.

For data coding and analysis, the MAXQDA qualitative analysis software was utilized, and the content analysis technique was applied to analyze the data. Through the established coding process, categories, subthemes, and main themes were successively derived and identified.

To collect data from participants, Ethics Committee Approval was obtained on 10 August 2020 from the Beykent University Ethics Committee for Social and Humanities Sciences Publications Ethics. Voluntary consent was also obtained from each participant.

Results

The study findings were analyzed using the content analysis method. The results were interpreted under two main headings: 'competency perception theme and sub-theme analysis' and 'communication competency perception theme analysis'.

Competency Perception Themes and Sub-Themes

Participants' perceptions of the competency concept were evaluated around three main themes, namely 'fundamental/managerial,'

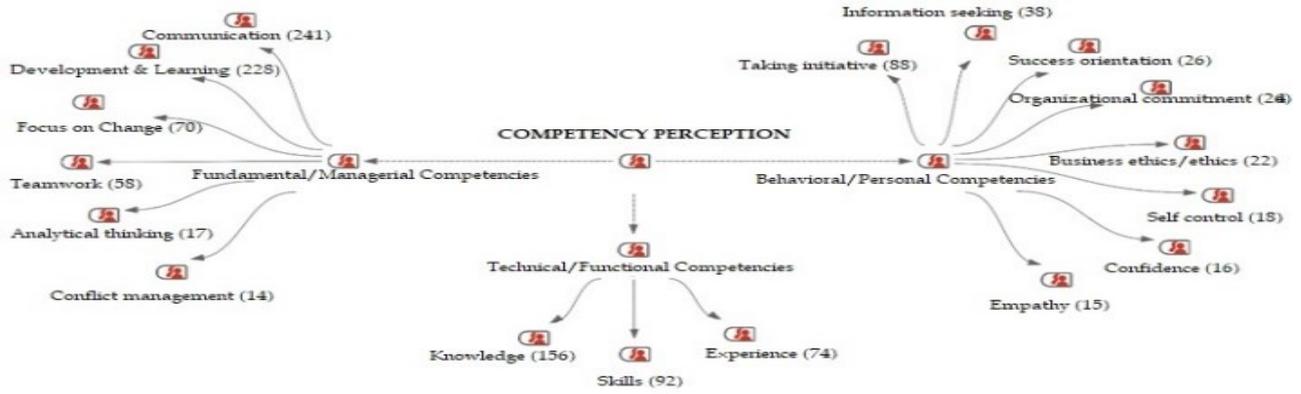


Figure 1. Competency Perception Theme and Sub-Theme Analysis

'behavioral/personal,' and 'technical/functional,' in line with the literature. Furthermore, each competency theme includes its own sub-themes (Figure 1).

Perceptions of Fundamental/Managerial Competencies

As depicted in Figure 1, participants' perceptions of possessing fundamental/managerial competencies are aligned with the literature and encompass six sub-themes. Participants predominantly highlighted the essential fundamental/managerial sub-competencies (respectively): communication, openness to growth and learning, change focus, teamwork, analytical thinking, and conflict management (Table 2).

Table 2. Views on Fundamental/Managerial Competencies

Sub-Theme	Participant Perspectives	Frequencies
Communication	"In my profession, if we talk about it, the most important competency, in my opinion, is communication skills. Because a person with communication skills knows how to communicate in mutual interactions. It provides ease in understanding each other." (Female, Insurance Agent, 29).	f=241
	"You need to be open to improvement and exploration. When you try a product and fail a couple of times, you shouldn't give up. It might take ten or a hundred attempts, but you should never give up until you reach what you've planned. From a progress perspective, it's the same for students; I tell them, 'Don't say I'm the boss; be open to development, be open to exploration. Don't say I'm done.'" (Male, Chef, 49).	

Focus on Change
f=70
In our country, we see that learning ends with school. Unfortunately, there's a widespread belief like that, although real learning actually begins after school. Because conditions are changing very rapidly in the world, and what you've learned today may not be sufficient or valid tomorrow. Therefore, you need to constantly learn new things. You need to experience new things. You need to be ready for changes at any moment. This also means learning new things every day." (Female, Foreign Trade, 56).

Teamwork
f=58
"Printing is an exceptionally broad field. Therefore, when creating that box, every single detail must be meticulously planned. It should be highly organized to ensure a favorable outcome. This is entirely a team effort. Excellently executing the printing or neatly folding the box doesn't automatically guarantee the box will be of excellent quality. True excellence emerges when all the skilled individuals come together. Hence, a predisposition for teamwork is extremely crucial." (Male, Graphic Designer, 51).

Analytical thinking
f=17
"...Analytical thinking has become increasingly important... Human Resources is a social function, but it's gradually becoming data-driven with the advancement of technology. We talk about things like Big Data and artificial intelligence... Industry 5.0 is being discussed now, as Industry 4.0 is coming to an end. That's why an HR professional needs to have a high level of analytical intelligence" (Female, HR Specialist, 28).

Conflict management
f=14
"Firstly, solution-orientedness and the ability to think in a solution-oriented manner are very important to me. Life will always present us with problems. It's the same in this job and in personal life. If a person has a mindset based on solving problems, they will generate and find solutions. But if not, they will constantly be in a complaining state." (Female, Child Development Specialist, 45).

Perceptions of Behavioral/Personal Competencies

As can be observed from Figure 1, possessing behavioral/personal competency, from the participants' perspective, has been explained

through eight sub-themes similar to the literature. The participants primarily identified the behavioral/personal sub-competencies that need to be possessed as follows: "taking initiative, information seeking/openness, achievement orientation, organizational commitment, work ethics/ethics, self-control, self-confidence, and empathy," as indicated in Table 3.

Table 3. Perspectives on Behavioral/Personal Competencies

Sub-Theme	Participant Perspectives
Self control f=18	"Especially stress management. Now, with the decreasing number of candidates in the final stages of recruitment and the need to select one out of two, making a very accurate decision is crucial. Similarly, when downsizing the workforce, unfortunately, one must set aside personal emotions and conduct the process within the framework of necessary ethical standards." (Female, HR Specialist, 28).
Confidence f=16	"A person with self-confidence is already a person with professional competence. A manager with good self-confidence is a successful manager. Completing self-confidence is also a professional competence," (Male, Technician, 45).
Empathy f=15	"If we consider the processes, they really need to have control over their nerves. Putting ourselves in their shoes, they also need to show a bit of empathy," (Male, Health Officer, 40).
Taking initiative f=88	"Being able to work in harmony with team members within the team while also being capable of taking on some of the tasks from their supervisor, having the capacity to truly independently manage all tasks that align with one's job description – these are all really important within the professional context," (Female, HR Specialist, 35).
Information seeking f=38	"You will be curious without a doubt. If you're curious, you can learn things. Sometimes, even though I am experienced, they mention a word, and I don't know what it is... What do I do? I immediately look up the word on the internet to find out what it means, and then I act accordingly after learning about that word. So, you can learn something new every day... You can't know everything. But we should be curious. We have the internet at our fingertips. I say, let's keep researching, let's stay curious," (Male, OHS Specialist, 54).
Success orientation f=26	"Sustainability shouldn't be perceived solely in terms of environmental aspects or other dimensions. At the same time, we can view it as focusing on sustainable success when considering it as a competency... In this sense, one of the important concepts for us is focusing on sustainable success, but doing so with the help of a person's internal motivators" (Male, HR Specialist, 34).
Organizational commitment f=24	"Professional competencies, in a way, well, if you love this job, if you want to engage in this profession, considering the current conditions, they have to do this job continuously for 30-40 years. In order to retire and continue their lives, in this regard, first and foremost, continuity and passion for the work are absolutely essential." (Female, Biologist, 47).
Business ethics/ethics f=22	"When considering all fields of work, ethical values are highly valuable. One should not operate outside of ethical values." (Male, Biologist, 31).

Perceptions of Technical/Functional Competencies

As can be observed from Figure 1, possessing technical/functional competency, from the participants' perspective, has been explained through six sub-themes similar to the literature. The participants primarily identified the technical/functional sub-competencies that need to be possessed as follows: knowledge, skill, and experience.

Since participant opinions regarding technical/functional sub-competencies vary significantly across different fields, they are not detailed in the table. Participant opinions have been summarized by categorizing them under sub-themes. In this context, participants have indicated:

Possessing professional knowledge; includes knowledge of regulations, familiarity with occupational safety instructions, program knowledge, legal understanding, knowledge of personal data protection, understanding of official correspondence procedures, and the ability to comprehend and follow them, etc.

Possessing professional skills; entails proficiency in foreign languages, technological aptitude, project management, risk management, organizational skills, etc.

Possessing professional experience; encompasses mastery of the field and attainment of professional expertise.

Communication Competence in Work Life and Communication with Stakeholders

Among the competence sub-themes, participants have highlighted communication competence the most. Communication competence has been emphasized by participants 241 times, and in contrast to the sub-themes of themes, participants have provided detailed insights into the sub-components of communication competence.

When it comes to communication competence, "stakeholder communication" is the most prominently highlighted type of communication by all participants. Following stakeholder communication is, respectively intra-team communication, effective communication skills, persuasive communication, social communication, and empathetic communication. Additionally, network-focused communication, marketing communication, communication in professional language, listening-persuasion in communication, and being trustworthy in communication have also been expressed by participants as aspects of communication competence. Table 4 presents some of the communication types that participants have emphasized in terms of communication sub-competencies and includes some of the participant' opinions.

Table 4. Perspectives on Communication Competence Sub-Themes

Sub-Theme	Participant Perspectives Frequencies
Stakeholder Communication f=75	"Let's say this person will work in an office. In that office, they will interact with the truck driver, they will learn the language of the truck driver, they will have conversations with the bus driver and with customers, they will establish communication with the people there, and they will be able to speak their language" (Male, Journalist, 45).
Team communication f=52	"Communication is extremely important. Cinema is a collaborative effort. Therefore, it is crucial for the coordination among the team members" (Male, Video Production, 56).
Effective communication f=42	"Actually, communication is crucial not only in terms of profession but for all human relationships. If we talk about our profession, being able to convey a task in written and verbal form or explaining a problem in written and verbal ways is a very important concept. Communicating with the other person to reach a solution is essential" (Male, Mechanical Engineer, 32).

Persuasive communication
f=28

"I mean, similar to doctors, we know the illness, we know the solution, but if we can't convince the patient, it's meaningless. Just like if we create a great design or if we have a fantastic idea in the field of restoration, if we can't convince the necessary individuals or institutions through our communication, then it doesn't make any sense" (Female, Architect, 40).

social communication
f=25

"It's highly important. The work we do and the projects we undertake will influence the environment and society beyond ourselves. Therefore, since we are engaged in artistic and societal endeavors, it's not possible to carry out that work without communicating with other individuals in society and having a completely independent mindset" (Male, Producer, 64).

empathic communication
f=19

"In communication, our job is not just words, it's communication. Words account for only one-fourth of communication. Body language, focus, the energy you emit, the emotions you convey to the other person, that's 95% of our job" (Male, Public Relations, 45).

Results and Discussion

Due to reasons such as technological advancements, globalization, and accelerated competition, professional competencies have become a significant determinant of success in today's evolving business world. Therefore, the utilization of individuals' technical competencies; which encompass their professional knowledge, skills, and experiences, their fundamental competencies that encompass general knowledge and skills, and their behavioral competencies that include personal attributes, has become more crucial than ever in their careers. In the realm of professional life, technical competencies determine how tasks are performed, fundamental competencies influence how work is managed, and behavioral competencies shape how work is perceived and work relationships are formed. The balanced integration of these three types of competencies ensures an individual's sustainable success in the business world.

In this research, conducted with the aim of revealing employees' perceptions of competence and determining which competency areas and sub-components are most strongly associated with competence, the first step was to identify the perception of being competent. The findings obtained from in-depth interviews with private sector employees revealed that employees

evaluate their competence status with a holistic perspective in three main themes: fundamental/managerial, technical, and functional/behavioral competencies, which are similar to the literature. One notable aspect is that employees' perception of professional competence is most focused on "fundamental/managerial" competencies. Following this, perceptions related to technical and functional competencies are observed. Consistent with the current research findings, Yetkin (2006) emphasized the significance of fundamental competencies, which signify the ability to perform a job alongside the acquired knowledge to be competent in a particular area. He highlighted that possessing technical expertise alone, without the ability to apply that knowledge (fundamental competencies), is insufficient. Furthermore, he underscored the presence of functional competencies as a prerequisite for the transformation of professional technical competencies into observable behaviors. In his study evaluating individual performance through competencies, Mansfield (1996) emphasized that assessing competence solely based on technical knowledge and skills is inadequate. Instead, he emphasized that individuals should primarily possess basic competencies that allow them to acquire professional technical knowledge and should incorporate behavioral traits that distinguish them from peers with similar knowledge into their work processes, as this behavioral dimension sets them apart.

After uncovering employees' perceptions of competencies through thematic analysis, the second objective of the study is to determine the association between the main themes of competence and the types of competencies. In this context, sub-theme analysis has been conducted for the themes of fundamental/managerial, behavioral/personal, and technical/functional competencies.

The results of the sub-theme analysis indicated that possessing fundamental/managerial competency is described by participants in terms of six sub-themes, namely communication, development and learning, teamwork, analytical thinking, change orientation, and conflict management.

Having the behavioral/personal competency, which is the second main competency area, is primarily emphasized by participants in terms of taking initiative. The association between being competent in the behavioral/personal aspect and taking initiative is supported by numerous studies in the literature. Many studies that examine the relationship between taking initiative and job performance (Wihler et al., 2017, p. 1388; Rooks, Sserwanga, & Frese, 2016, p. 99; Frese & Zapf, 1994, p. 271) have determined that individuals who can take initiative in the workplace exhibit higher performance. Lisbona et al. (2018, p. 89) have investigated the impact of initiative-taking on work engagement and self-efficacy. Herrmann and Felfe (2014, p. 209) have conducted research on the influence of leadership style, creativity techniques, and taking initiative on employee creativity. Demir and Arslan (2018, p. 103) have examined the relationship between organizational trust and taking initiative. Hakanen, Perhoniemi, and Toppinen-Tanner (2008, p. 78) have found that work engagement and using initiative will affect innovation within work units.

The sub-themes of taking initiative include information search/openness, achievement orientation, organizational commitment, work ethics/ethics, self-control, self-confidence, and empathy.

Lastly, the technical/functional competency, which encompasses more specific characteristics highlighting employees' professions and the areas of their activities, is described with three sub-competency themes: knowledge, skills, and experience.

Possessing professional knowledge is perceived as having familiarity with regulations, knowledge of occupational safety instructions, familiarity with software programs, legal knowledge, understanding of personal data protection, awareness of official correspondence procedures, and the ability to follow them.

The second aspect, possessing professional skills, is defined as foreign language proficiency, technological aptitude, project management, risk management, and organizational skills.

Finally, possessing professional experience is expressed as domain expertise and access to professional specialization.

The most significant research finding obtained from the study is that participants from all occupational groups highlighted communication competency as the most crucial competency area for achieving professional success. Regarding communication competency, all participants have emphasized "stakeholder communication" as the most prominent communication type. Following stakeholder communication, the hierarchy includes team communication, effective communication skills, persuasive communication, social communication, and empathetic communication. Additionally, network-focused communication, marketing communication, communication in professional language, listening-persuasion in communication, and being trustworthy in communication have been expressed by participants as components of communication competency. Similar studies on competency (Demirtaş-Madran, 2018; Buluş, Atan, & Sarıkaya, 2017) have also defined communication competency through various communication types such as effective communication, persuasive communication, being trustworthy in communication, and building empathy.

In addition to communication competency being prominently emphasized by participants as the most significant component of their competency perception, another notable finding is that communication competency is expressed as a key component of numerous other competency types. In line with this finding, Konuk's study (2017) confirms that possessing communication competency is associated with having an inclination toward teamwork. Another competency type that participants associate with communication competency in the study is change management. In the literature, communication and interpersonal relationship development skills are counted among the necessary competency requirements for effectively managing change (Akgeyik, 2001, pp. 118-119), aligning with the results of this study.

In conclusion, in parallel with the evolving business world and modes of operation, communication competency stands out as a unique and indispensable skill, distinct from other competency types. Supported by the findings of

this research, communication competency manifests itself as a differentiating factor for individuals in their professional lives, serving as a catalyst for the effectiveness of other competency types and weaving together various abilities for advancement. As technology continues to advance and global connections deepen, the ability to clearly convey ideas, exhibit empathy towards different perspectives, and adapt communication styles becomes increasingly vital. In this sense, unlike other abilities, communication competency not only drives professional success for individuals but also encourages richer personal relationships and sustains organizational progress. Given these aspects, it would not be incorrect to state that communication competency requires multidimensional and interdisciplinary studies to fully comprehend its intricacies.

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