



Illustrative Case Study (D)

SME competence assessment and business card creation based upon the e-CF

ABOUT THE e-CF. The European e-Competence Framework (e-CF) provides a reference of 36 competences as required and applied at the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) workplace, using a common language for competences, skills and capability levels that can be understood across Europe. As the first sector-specific implementation of the European Qualifications Framework (EQF), the e-CF was designed and developed for application by ICT service, user and supply companies, for managers and human resource (HR) departments, and for education institutions and training bodies, and other organizations in public and private sectors.

The framework was developed under the umbrella of the CEN ICT Skills Workshop through a process of close cooperation between ICT business and human resource (HR) experts, stakeholders and policy institutions from many different countries and at the EU level. Published by CEN for the first time in 2008 and followed by a further enhanced version 2.0 in 2010, the framework brings benefits to a growing community of users throughout Europe and overseas.

To support e-CF application within multiple environments, a series of illustrative case studies provide examples, benefits and hints of how to make best use of the e-CF.

The following case study illuminates the e-CF application from the perspective of SME Gazelles and innovative, agile and lean, enterprises.

Key perspectives

- SME competence self-assessment
- Business card creation
- Business capability
- e-CF for SME consultants

Summary

IT SMEs find value in the e-CF as a support for assessing their core competences and for providing evidence of 'know-how' to their clients.

iTRACK¹, a small enterprise of 5 graduate employees, developing software and RFID technology for the international Automotive, Fashion and Frozen Food markets, used the e-CF to build a company business card.

Initially supported by a consultant, they investigated the e-CF, selected relevant e-competences to be presented to their clients, identified related evidence that proved them and then listed and described each item systematically. The company also intended to obtain formal recognition of their core competences from an external assessment; they are still reflecting on this action.

e-CF Value

Mapping skills and competences with the e-CF is straightforward. Enterprises are able to access standard e-CF vocabulary and definitions and if doubts arise, they can consult the e-CF user-guidelines or check with the official e-CF website where FAQs and answers are to be found.

For small IT enterprises, it is very useful to be able to demonstrate that they have the competences required to fulfill client demands. Customers no longer look for technical skills only, they seek business partners able to work in teams, manage projects and processes, and able to communicate. The e-CF describes such skills, providing full competence descriptions. Therefore the e-CF is an effective tool to help SMEs identify, articulate and communicate their complex 'know-how'.

Challenges encountered

Competence management is not universally adopted and therefore some ICT users are not familiar with the concept and language of competence. It is therefore necessary to provide an awareness of the e-CF and its structure to organizations unfamiliar with competence concepts. However the principles of the e-CF are easily understood and the framework quickly becomes a reference point for establishing a common language and for effective mutual communication.

Nonetheless, the assessment approach necessarily requires objective and shared criteria to evaluate the same e-competence items and dimensions. Currently there are no universal indicators available to support self-assessment and therefore it is based upon personal perceptions and impressions.

Benefits highlighted

Using the e-CF, enterprises have found a way to describe the technical and soft competences inclusively, which is a key ability when managing relationships with foreign companies.

¹iTRACK is a pseudonym for an SME interviewed in the "e-CF into SME" CEN project

The method adopted

iTRACK elected to use a consultant to support enterprise assessment and provide moderation to internal perceptions and impressions. The method adopted was based on face-to-face interviews with staff, lasting about 3 hours each. iTRACK had no previous awareness of the e-CF, and it was therefore necessary for them to be appraised of the structure and its principles. Then iTRACK described its core business, projects, services and products; strengths (and weaknesses), what clients usually ask for and their business strategy. iTRACK considers internationalization and networking of high importance. Moreover, the ability to relate with their clients, listen to them and meet their requirements is crucial; being able to working together is a core competence.

After the company overview, the employer went through the e-CF, guided by the consultant.

The details of the approach are briefly described as follows:

Step 1. The entrepreneur supported by one member of his staff and the consultant, used the four entry points illustrated in Annex (but they also used Dimension 1 of the e-CF), to look for e-competences linked to and clustered under those entry points. For each e-competence, iTRACK analyzed the relevance to its mission and strategy, writing down whether they are currently prevalent within the company or not and at which “intensity”; high, medium, low.

Step 2. After recognizing the main competences that describe the company, the entrepreneur and staff listed specific evidence proving those e-competences. These evidence examples were, products/services; developed projects; examples of clients, etc.

Step 3. The entrepreneur and staff were then able to identify assessment criteria to evaluate their e-competences.

The following Table 1 can support the three steps.

Table 1 for company assessment (example)

	STEP 1		STEP 2	STEP 3
e-CF (Dimension 1) e-competences	e-competence practiced in my company <i>Please select competences from the e-CF full list with “X”</i>	<i>At which level</i> <i>High Mediu m Low</i>	<i>Pieces of evidence</i>	<i>Assessment criteria</i>
A.1.				
A.2.				
A.n.				

	STEP 1		STEP 2	STEP 3
e-CF (Dimension 1) e-competences	e-competence practiced in my company <i>Please select competences from the e-CF full list with "X"</i>	<i>At which level</i> <i>High Mediu m Low</i>	<i>Pieces of evidence</i>	<i>Assessment criteria</i>
B.1. Design and Development Designs and engineers software and/ or hardware components to meet required specifications, including energy efficiency issues. Follows a systematic methodology to analyse and build the required components and interfaces. Performs unit and system testing to ensure requirements are met.	X	High	Examples of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> enterprise approach to meet customer specifications, e.g. the use of agile methods components integrated systems elaborated testing procedures 	Standard procedures Compliance with the quality standards Getting through the testing phase
B.2. Systems Integration				
C.n.				
D.n.				
E.4. Relationship Management Establishes and maintains positive business relationships between the client and provider (internal or external) deploying and complying with organisational processes. Maintains regular communication with client/ partner/ supplier, and addresses needs through empathy with their environment and managing supply chain communications. Ensures that client/ partner/ supplier needs, concerns or complaints are understood and addressed in accordance with organisational policy.	X	Mediu m	Long-term relationships with clients Examples of partnerships The company CRM Awards, prizes, own patents in use by clients	Duration of relationships with clients Number of partnerships Number of successful projects and outcomes
E.n.				

Expansion to other examples

The above illustrates how the e-CF can be used as an assessment tool for SMEs.

Within this context, the e-CF can also support:

- SME e-competence need analysis as a compass and dashboard for the company development (see case study C)
- Communication of ICT supply's competences to customers, as a business card

Reference

- CEN Workshop Agreement (CWA) 16367: „e-CF into SME's“
<http://www.cen.eu/cen/Sectors/Sectors/ISSS/CWAdownload/Pages/ICT-Skills.aspx>

Annex

Table 2: Business areas entry point for e-competences

1 Company Overview	Competence to be checked
1.1 Description of company management	A.1. IS and business strategy Alignment
	A.4. Product or project planning
	D.1. Information security strategy development
	D.2. ICT quality strategy development
	D.10. Information and Knowledge Management
	E.2. Project and portfolio management
	E.3. Risk management
	E.6. ICT quality management
1.2 Description of company organisation/departments	E.9. IT governance
	D.4. Purchasing
	D.5. Sales proposal development
	D.7. Sales Management
	D.8. Contract Management
E.8. Information security management	
2 Markets and Customers	Competence to be checked
2.1 Main products & services offered - also if the product(s)/service(s) are standard and/or customised	A.2. Service Level Management
	B.5. Documentation Production
	C.1. User Support
	C.2. Change support
	C.3. Service delivery
	C.4. Problem management
2.2 Target market sectors – describe also if the market is horizontal, vertical and/or both	D.6. Channel management

1 Company Overview	Competence to be checked
2.3 Market differentiators (<i>what differentiates their offering within the marketplace?</i>): includes factors such as: <i>technology; product range; customer service; aftersales support; user focus (i.e. in design/application); skills; price.</i>	A.5. Architecture Design
	A.6. Application Design
	B.1. Design and development
	B.2. System integration
	B.3. Testing
B.4. Solution Deployment	
2.4 Future positioning: Market trends and how they will change their strategy or approach to the market as a result.	E.1. Forecast development
	E.5. Process improvement
	E.7. Business change management
2.5 Description of main marketing channels: (<i>e.g. advertising, web, exhibitions & fairs, business networks, etc</i>)	E.4. Relationship management
3 Innovation and Research	Competence to be checked
3.1. Nature of 'technology watch' activities. (<i>Potential sources include: conferences & seminars; vendor partner programmes; in-house seminars; one-to-one client interactions; technical user forums & focus groups; feedback from distributors</i>)	A.7. Technology Watching
4 Business Environment and Business Competences	Competence to be checked
4.1 Business model and Business processes	A.3. Business Plan Development
	A.8. Sustainable development
4.2 Human resources: In context of the above include discussion of aspects such as:	D.9. Personnel development
4.3 Approach to training and personal development (inc. job rotation, percentage of HR turnover)	D.3. Education and training