Clay Workshop as Staff's Competency Self-Evaluation Related to Business Strategy

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This case study examines staff members' self-evaluations of competency relative to a set business strategy and firm's strategic goals. The study employed a rarely utilized arts-based research approach focused on a clay workshop in conjunction with storytelling. The data was collected via interviews with 16 staff members participating in strategy discussions. The research demonstrated that the inclusion of staff members in a firm's strategy efforts can produce more diversity and greater creativity by increasing the utilization of reflection as a strategic method. The originality of this study lies in the methodology: a clay-centered workshop was utilized to produce staff's reflections.

Keywords: self-evaluation, competency, clay workshop, case study, Finland

Introduction

Today the question of staff involvement in a firm's strategic and developmental processes is fundamental (Kamesky, 2010; Salih & Doll, 2013). As Kärnä (2012) noted, the role of staff as active participants in a company's strategy process has not been recognized or developed enough. The most advanced companies effectively involve all parties, including their board, managers and staff, in their strategy process. On the other hand, as Mantere, Suominen, and Vaara (2011) argue, a company's board of directors and managers often think that holding on to the responsibility for drafting business strategy is a strong way to maximize control over an organization (see Klimkeita & Reihlen, 2016). It is for that reason that many organizations continue to implement a top-down strategy and do not encourage open discussion.

A firm's human resources are based on the staff's competencies. Competency requirements are changing rapidly, and firms and organizations are now facing increasingly complex situations (Tregaskis & Brewster, 2006; Van der Heijde & Van der Heijden, 2006). According to Hodkinson (1992), in daily work, each individual has to reflect on and use dialogue that relates

to his or her competencies involving performance, actions and even culture. However, scant attention has been paid to staff members' self-reflection and self-evaluation related to their professional competencies and to their relationship with the firm's future strategic goals.

Reflection is the essence of learning and of the so-called 'meta-competency,' which is the process of thinking, acting, experiencing and thinking, evaluating and analyzing alone and together, tied to the surrounding social reality or the context (Fernandez et al., 2012). Furthermore, reflection helps to raise awareness and understanding and to reform (Argyris & Schön, 1996; Boud, Cressy, & Docherty, 2006). The ability to reflect and thus evaluate means that an individual is able to observe his or her own thoughts and feelings, is able to express them, and knows how to deal with them as a part of his or her own competencies.

Any arts-based methods can add tacit or active knowledge to finding new meanings of things, because such methods do not have the restrictions found in the traditional frameworks of qualitative studies (Fraser & al Sayah, 2011). Arts-based methods such as clay workshops remain little used in business research, despite their versatility (Ibbotson, 2008; Taylor & Ladkin, 2009). However, the use of an arts-based perspective to explore organizational development and to understand change has increased (Adler, 2006, Rhee 2010). Using clay to design objects raises metaphorical conversations that can benefit the development of company strategy, as well as the realization of a company's future strategic goals. The metaphors are linked to the reflection, and working with clay can be an opportunity for discussion about unpleasant or difficult topics (Warren & Parker, 2009). The clay-workshop method employed in this study is an indirect tool to express sensations and self-evaluation, and is a gateway or bridge to storytelling or metaphors (Leavy, 2009) binding the body and mind together.

In order to study an arts-based method in business strategy development, this research examined two primary questions: How did an arts-based clay workshop method fit the company's strategy process? (RQ1). And how did staff members reflect on and evaluate their own future competency needs and requirements? (RQ2).

This case study was conducted in a social-sector development company in southeast Finland. The company's goals are based on proactively creating new service models and experiments that ensure flexibility and innovativeness in the social sector. Several of the company's projects and service models in the case study have involved various arts-based methods related to customer service experience, leading the company to be a willing case study of the suitability of the clay-workshop method for client work.

This study offers an approach to the involvement of staff in a firm's strategy and vision process. The staff defined their own competencies related

to their firm's strategic goals for the future in an arts-based clay workshop. The results of the empirical qualitative case study include the staff's visions of tacit knowledge and competency, as well as aspects of managing future digital technology in the social sector.

Next, the paper presents a theoretical discussion of the classification of competencies related to this research phenomenon and its occurrence in an organization's activities, as well as of the staff members' ability to reflect on their competencies. This paper then presents the empirical aspects of this study, including the practical structuring of the research and the reference framework for methods and findings. Finally, this paper discusses the findings of this study and their implications.

Arts-Based Approach and Reflection of Competencies

Incorporating Arts-Based Clay Workshops in the Strategy Process

An arts-based approach to strategy development allows for art and creative methods to become a qualitative scientific source of research (Leavy, 2009). The methods in an arts-based approach are of a holistic nature, and include reflection, description, problem layout and solution. They require the ability to identify with intuition and creativity (Leavy, 2009). In addition, Weick (2007) argues that the traditional business thinking of logic and rationality are suitable for complex and chaotic environments, and the arts-based method can offer a different means from which to access the world. Thus, the arts-based view offers people the opportunity to use creative intelligence to create more accurate, original and smarter descriptions than the more traditional, verbal, and mathematical ones (Taylor & Ladkin 2009). The development of work life through arts-based methods has been studied to some degree (Antal & Strauß, 2013; Pässilä, 2012). However, the scope of the research has been limited to the effects of the action analytical. Furthermore, there is scant systematic research data, and whatever data is available is primarily focused on organizational culture and experienced wellbeing (Antal & Strauß, 2013; Darsø, 2004).

The distinguishing features of clay in relation to other materials are its plasticity, texture, dimensionality, naturalness, immediate touch and reworking ability. Working with clay was among the first forms of human communication. Its primacy, basicity and elementality as a substance have given clay a fundamental use throughout human history (Sholt & Gavron, 2006). Henley (2002) argues that emotions, even those that are suppressed or blocked, often find expression through clay, and that working with clay helps to reach the deepest dimensions of human psyche. According to McNiff (1998), underlying arts-based methods can be seen as a primary way of understanding human experiences.

The involvement of staff in the development of a company strategy has in-

creased since the 1980s, and has been found to relate to business growth (Lawler, Mohrman, & Ledford, 1995; Luthans & Peterson, 2002). Furthermore, staff involvement in strategy development has led to increases in work motivation, as well as to staff satisfaction and productivity (Luthans & Peterson, 2002). According to Cooper-Hakim and Viswesvaran (2005), job involvement is 'the degree to which an employee psychologically relates to his or her job and the work performed therein.' Brown (1996) argues that a 'state of involvement implies a positive and relatively complete state of engagement of core aspects of self in the job.' Staff involvement practices are expected to improve staff knowledge and competencies, as well as strengthen motivation, autonomy and decision-making authority (Combs, Liu, Hall, & Ketchen, 2006), usually combined with positive outcomes for the organization or company (Yalabik et al., 2008). The staff involvement process can also be seen as an innovation or elaboration process (Yang & Konrad, 2011). Several positive outcomes empower workers by developing their competencies (Yang & Konrad, 2011), and increasing their experience of meaning, self-reflection, resilience, attitudes and innovation ability (Spreitzer, 2007).

Competencies Are the Resource of a Company

Competencies are aspects of behavior that a person must have and be able to display to perform professional tasks and functions competently. The ability to apply one's own experiences, knowledge and attitudes to one's daily work (Le Deist & Winterton, 2005) and perform well professionally (Nordhaug & Grønhaug, 1994) is a significant matter. A performance-based competency approach can also be considered to have a behavioral aspect (Manley & Garbett, 2000, Lönnblad & Vartiainen, 2012). It refers to the descriptions of action and behavior that highlight an individual's own operations and environment detection-related tasks, as well as the evaluation of and reflection on one's own tasks. Thus, when evaluating individuals' competencies, it is wise to examine what a person can do or should be able to do (Mansfield & Mitchell, 1996). It is for this reason that performance or behavior is highlighted as an approach, rather than knowledge and cognitive ability, as it influences an individual's performance imperceptibly behind the scenes (Elliott, 1991). This approach can be employed successfully only with the necessary knowledge and understanding (Gibson & Soanes, 2000; Pietiläinen, 2010).

Holistic View of Competencies

A holistic view of visible and invisible competencies is necessary because cognitive and functional competencies no longer comprehensively explain competency identification, nor its needs or the requirements of the world of

work (Cheetham & Chivers, 1998). Rychen and Salganik (2003) noted that staff competencies cannot be observed solely through the significance of cognitive competencies. Instead, they found that competencies are associated more extensively with an individual's life, which includes the life cycle, life experiences, and the individual's membership in various communities and in society at large. This wider perspective is necessary because in addition to basic cognitive capacities, each person's competencies include ethical, motivational, social and operational competencies (Le Deist & Winterton, 2005; Hodkinson & Issitt, 1995), and those competencies affect an organization's involvement processes.

Le Deist and Winterton (2005) presented a holistic classification of competencies (see also Cheetham & Chivers, 1998). If this concept of competency is used without further attributes, it refers to different dimensions of the work context. Cognitive competency covers knowledge and understanding and functional competency and includes skills, in particular practical ones. Social competency includes behavior and attitudes. Meta-competency differs from other types in that its mission is to contribute to the achievement of all other competencies. Personal conceptual (meta-competency) and operational (social competency) factors are also important competency areas. They are related to self-efficacy, as part of the self-regulatory process (Zimmerman, 2000). Thoughts, emotions and motivation connect them to self-management (cognitive and functional) as professional competencies develop.

Reflection as a Super Meta-Competency

Reflection is the essence of learning and a so-called meta-competency. It is the process of thinking, acting, experiencing and thinking. It is also the process of evaluating and analyzing, both alone and in relation to the surrounding social context (Fernandez et al., 2012). Furthermore, it helps to increase awareness, understanding and renewal (Argyris & Schön, 1996; Boud et al., 2006). Cheetham and Chivers (1998) stress reflection as a super meta-competency. They define it as the ability to reflect and evaluate oneself and one's own activities. They further state that the importance and objectives of one's own work and the work of others are guided by a person's activity, understanding and professionalism.

The ability to reflect means that an individual is able to observe his or her own thoughts and feelings, is able to express them, and knows how to deal with them as a part of his or her competencies. According to Moon (2002) and Ruohotie (2005), reflection is a mental activity wherein one creates distance from tasks, situations and events, and is able to view them more objectively. In doing so, it is possible to see reflection as a process that enables one to use one's experiences and determine one's competencies

by mirroring tasks and events against actual experiences. Utilizing reflection in this way, it is possible to discover new activities and features to support better decision-making. As Seibert (1996) has argued, evaluation, critical review and learning through experience are the key aspects of genuine and realistic reflection. Rampersad (2004) has developed the definition further positing that, in addition to actual experience, individuals' opinions and principles also play a significant role, while one's surrounding environment and context have to be taken into account during reflection (see also Fernandez et al., 2012).

Research Design and Methodology

Research Design

The approach of this empirical research is qualitative, and is aimed at a deep understanding and analysis of staff members' self-evaluation of their present and future competencies. Qualitative research (Merriam, 2009) examines the understanding and interpretation of social reality, enabling the interpretation of people's social reality and the meanings of their reflections and experiences. A chosen case-study strategy, in turn, is often applied to research that focuses on a given phenomenon in a real-life context (Ghauri & Grønhaug, 2005). The phenomenon studied here uses a clay workshop as a tool for staff to self-evaluate their competencies relative to the company's strategy. The case study employs a justified research method, in which the aim of the study is to describe actual phenomena in their own context without a researcher maneuvers actions being the objects of research (Yin, 1994). The objects of the study are 16 staff members, and their reflections and self-evaluations of their individual competencies.

Research Method and Data Collection

An arts-based approach was employed, because this study examines new ways of involving staff in strategic work and of encouraging them to evaluate their competencies through personal reflection. A clay workshop, in which staff members shape clay objects, was chosen for the functional, creative and sensorial expression phases. Arts-based research is normally conducted in the social sciences (MacIntyre, 1984) based on social interactions (Hyvärinen, 2006). This business study uses a clay workshop as the research medium because it focuses on individuals, and aims to form a comprehensive view of their reflections and evaluations of their competencies. The impetus to use an arts-based approach came from the company, as a result of the the board's interest in discovering new knowledge, a new strategical involvement method, and a new channel for gathering staff's thoughts and opinions. The board was also seeking to employ new creative
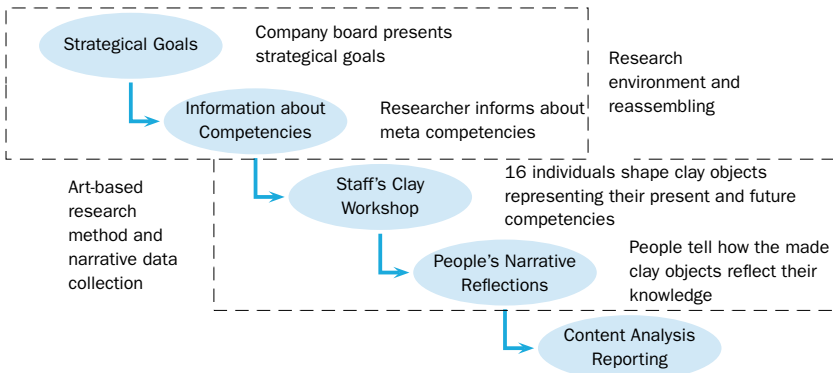
Figure 1 Research Process and Arrangement

combinations to implement stronger strategic principles and sounder thinking. Additionally, the company itself desired to test the clay workshop as a tool to evaluate its suitability to the firm's strategy work and utilize later it in their client work.

Data collection for this study utilized narratives, which have generally been used in management research, including organizational studies (Czarniawska, 1998). Stories and storytelling can be considered as credible sources of knowledge for scholars (Elliott, 2005; Rhodes & Brown, 2005). In narrative research, transparency is highlighted because of the co-construction of the research process and the embedded role of the researcher (Czarniawska, 2004; Reissman, 1993). Transparency is noted in the research environmental process and arrangement, described in Figure 1.

The study took place in a social-sector development company in southeast Finland. The workshop was held in January 2016 and all 16 staff members – the CEO, five project managers and 10 specialists – participated. The company examined in this case study is one of 11 similar social-sector companies in Finland. The activities of these companies are governed by laws and decrees concerning social services. The company's business is highly specialized, and requires specialists with higher education and professional skills. The company focuses on establishing viable and permanent cooperation between practical work in the social field, research and education, municipalities and other service providers. The mission of the company is to ensure the regional development and transmission of the expertise needed in the social field, development of the provision of services, and transmission of special services requiring specialized knowledge.

At the beginning of the workshop, the company's board introduced an updated set of strategic goals, following the board of directors' wish for the

Table 1   The Updated Strategic Goals of the case Company

Developing customer-oriented services and service modes, regional structures for structural change in the social and healthcare sectors, service needs for changes in legislation and cooperation and cooperative models.
Examining data management and technology development of social and health care sector's service processes.
Strengthening research, practical interaction, and evaluation.

the staff to participate in strategy work, by evaluating their future competencies and possible competency needs and requirements through reflection in a workshop before final board approval. Table 1 presents the company's updated strategic goals.

After the presentation of the company's updated strategic goals, the researcher introduced the participants to a holistic view competency, including behavioral and invisible meta-competencies (Cheetham & Chivers, 1998). Additionally, the researcher projected a holistic competency map on the wall and distributed paper versions to the participants, who could then become familiar with all competency categories and their details, as well as understand and assimilate the scale of competencies. The target of the clay workshop was to help participants determine and evaluate their own competencies (Rychen & Salganic, 2003; LeDeist & Winterton, 2005).

After the presentations of strategic goals and competencies, the workshop focused on data production and narrative data collection. First, the clay was shaped and then storytelling using metaphorical narratives was employed to describe the output. The researcher gave all participants a piece of clay of the same size, and asked them to shape items by hand describing critical, explicit and tacit knowledge. The researcher then asked the participants to address not only competencies currently used at work, but also competencies unused at work but that are meaningful, critical and important in terms of goals set by the board. After shaping the clay for 20 minutes, all participants orally described to their co-workers and the researcher the clay object they had created. The research session lasted two hours in total.

Data Analysis

The workshop and resulting clay objects were filmed, and the participants' narrations were also recorded and transcribed by the researcher. The transcribed narratives were approached inductively (Pratt, 2009) using a data-driven approach, without any guiding theoretical structure or a pre-selected rating (Silverman, 1989). The collected data was analyzed using an interpretive, qualitative content-analysis method (Elo et al., 2014) to produce a rich and broad picture of future competency needs and requirements.

Secondary data of the company was also utilized together with the primary collected data.

The amount of data was reduced by compressing each narrative, and then gathering together the main items related to the research question. The content-analysis method allowed for designing a format to explore the phenomena of descriptive categories, concepts, concept models, concept maps, and systems (Morgan, 1993). The data were then organized by using categorizations while classifying the data units. Text diagnoses were encoded based on the themes of the metaphors. The themes of sculptures were also categorized according to found similarities and differentials. The findings are presented in the following section.

Findings

The findings of this study are divided into two sections. First, the metaphors for the individuals' clay works are presented in relation to the first research question about the staff members' reflections and evaluations on their own future competency needs and requirements. Table 2 illustrates the titles of the metaphors identified, the descriptions of the transcribed quotes, and the final themes derived from an interpretive, qualitative content analysis. Qualitative data analysis is by nature fairly eclectic, as there is no single correct way to make categorizations, and the classification system developed for one set of data does not necessarily fit another type of data. In this study, each metaphor generated by the study is unique, and within each metaphor is classified as similar references. The second section of this study's findings presents the themes related to the second research question, specifically how the staff's own identification of their competencies is relevant to the firm's overall strategy. Figure 2 presents the research progress related to the research questions (RQs).

Findings from Clay Workshop

The participants expressed an overall appreciation for the working method and for clay as a material. The participants' narratives suggested that the firm's updated strategic goals may be embedded in the staff's minds, likely in part because there were familiar elements from past strategic lines of thinking. Participation in strategic work itself was seen as a rewarding subject, and, in fact, the workshop participants highlighted the value of the development process.

Working clay by hand in silence enabled narrative thought, imagery, and the development of symbolism in each participant's mind. When participants began to deliberately dissolve their ideas through the forming of the clay, metaphors emerged. The reflection and evaluation of the staff's thoughts, ideas and performance seemed to bring about positive outcomes

Table 2   Results of Content Analysis

Metaphors*	Main story/combining entities from content	Final themes**
Rafting	'It feels like we are moving all the time like rafting in *a huge data stream.* On the way, there are traps and storms. The helmet needs to be *at the front,* so the security should be fine.' 'Good *ICT tools and skills* to use them need to be in order to prepare for big trips. I must ensure that I *understand the customers* and their needs. We have to have the *same practical language.*'	• a huge data stream; good ICT tools and skills → ICT skills • same practical language → communication skills • at the front → innovation • understand customers → customers
Swiss roll baker	'My know-how is like a *Swiss roll* that contains a lot of ingredients. Each slice has a relevant and meaningful competency and the filling of the roll has other required skills. For example, *cultural know-how* could be one slice from the competency roll and its fillings could be *flexibility* and *interaction.*'	• cultural know-how → cultural knowledge • Swiss roll, flexibility → resilience • interaction → communication skills
Tree	'I am a tree. It is growing continually. Growth is at times slow and at times fast. The branches have different competencies. Sometimes the branches are *cut off;* that means *change.* It's probably because of the *learning.* The tree trunk will produce *new* shoots, meaning new competencies or the development of old skills. The tree is *flexible,* as also we need to be. The tree is in *symbiosis with* the surrounding nature; that is, the *network.*'	• cut off, change, learning, something new, flexibility → resilience • symbiosis with, network → networking
Roe deer	'Work today needs to be *flexible* and fast, to merge with *change* and to go into different things. This animal has antlers that feel things. It means vigilance.'	• flexible, chance → resilience
Question mark	'I do not think anyone knows what will happen in the *future,* how this industry will *develop,* what we should be *prepared for.* How will the industry *change?* There are a lot of *weak signals,* but I still want to describe this situation, and future skills need *a big question mark.*'	• future, develop, prepared for, change, weak signals, a big question mark → resilience

and effects on daily work and the organization's culture. On the other hand, strategy work and the strategy concept were not mentioned at all during the clay shaping, or in the metaphors offered by participants afterwards. Broad and inclusive strategy work did not appear to be an absolute value in any of the collected narratives.

The metaphors, which are summarized in Table 2, were not related to the industry itself. Most were in some way related to nature, with examples

Table 2 *Continued from the previous page*

Metaphors*	Main story/combining entities from content	Final themes**
Rolling stone	'We must all be like *rolling stones*. We must roll according to what's going on. We also have to know how to roll, so we do not experience uncertainty or discomfort all of the time. Rolling is the *future,* we have to know *how to move forward,* know *how to take on different tasks* and shape them to respond to our operations.'	· rolling stone, future, how to move forward, how to take on a different task → resilience
Thicket	'My clay represents a thicket that refers to a *network and networking*. Networking competency is important in this work, and in particular, it is a matter of working in *complex and multifaceted networks*. Therefore, *technical know-how* will be further emphasized in the future. You also have to know *how to choose the right channels, learn how to* extract information in networks - I mean *data mining,* how to analyze the data and find meanings.'	· complex and multifaceted networks → networking · technical know-how, how to choose the right channels, learn how to extract information → learning · data mining → ICT skills · network, networking → customers
Coral reef	'Our job is like a coral reef: The nature of our organization is such that we are expected to have coral reef operations, creating square, unnatural beams, and structuring the expectations of customers and stakeholders. Our work requires *great sensitivity* and *emotional intelligence* that is manifested in *communication and interaction with others.*'	· great sensitivity, emotional intelligence, communication and interaction with others. → communication skills, resilience, customers
Sea cucumber	'I have a sausage like this, like a sea cucumber in the ocean and the ocean is our industry. I think that our expertise is already excellent and we are managing the future perspective. I believe that we will be able to play our cards right in [dealing with] the coming industry *changes*. It is important now to strengthen and clarify *customer-oriented thinking. Research activities* may also get off to a better start.'	· customer oriented thinking → customers · research activities → researcher skills · changes → resilience

including a coral reef, tree, soil, rolling stone, thicket, sea cucumber, spider web and roe deer, as illustrated by the following quotations:

> This organization and our competencies are the soil. Everything does not always grow; that is, what is not needed remains underground and what is needed grows and is exploited. Old soil can be mixed with new soil, in this case new knowledge, and fertilized for growth. [Participant 4, project manager]

The other metaphors – Swiss roll baker, wire, chain, mouth, question

Table 2 *Continued from the previous page*

Metaphors*	Main story/combining entities from content	Final themes**
Wire	'My metaphor is a wire, meaning that all information is in electronic form and that *we use electronic systems as work tools.* That's why their management and know-how are really important. I really have to work on my IT skills because they are needed in the *network.*'	· we use electronic systems as work tools, network → ICT skills
Chain	'This chain also partly reflects *networks,* but above all that our organization and know-how are one of the chain's loops. What if the loop breaks? Our expertise will then be measured based on how quickly we react. This chain is constantly expanding and supports additional links. Our future competencies are also like these additional links. And through *interaction,* the chain grows.'	· networks → networking · interaction → communication skills
Soil	'This organization and our competencies are the soil. Everything does not always grow; that is, what is not needed remains underground and what is needed grows and is exploited. *Old soil can be mixed with new soil,* in this case new knowledge, and fertilized for growth.'	· Old soil can be mixed with new soil → resilience
Mouth	'I have here a *mouth.* It refers to *social skills* and their significance in this work. You need to know how to move things forward, to talk, to listen, and to be present in *different situations.* This is something I need to improve, as well as media skills and information.'	· mouth, social skills , to talk, to listen → communication skills · different situations → resilience
Spider web	'Our work is done in *networks* with our *stakeholders.* The industry is changing all the time and there will be new environments and customer groups. Through *network expertise,* we are able to *communicate* properly with various stakeholders.'	· networks, network expertise → networking · communicate → communication skills · stakeholders → customers

mark, common platform, and basket full of skills – did not have a clearly identifiable link. The stories nonetheless played a meaningful role, because some clay items did not visually depict what they were meant to represent, such as a mouth that looked like a circular tire, or an electric wire that looked like yarn, as illustrated by the following quotations:

> Our work is done in networks with our stakeholders. The industry is changing all the time and there will be new environments and customer groups. Through network expertise, we are able to communicate properly with various stakeholders. [Participant 8, CEO]

Table 2   *Continued from the previous page*

Metaphors*	Main story/combining entities from content	Final themes**
Common Platform	'Our industry requires the ability to act as a so-called "common operation sector," which combines different sectors of the industry, such as social and health services. From the point of view of competencies, we need to think about what more is needed than we already can and know, and how to *communicate and interact* well enough with the *various sectors.* The starting point is always the *customer and his or her needs.* We have to ask and observe the right things.'	· communicate and interact → communication skills · various sectors, customer and his or her needs → customers
Basket full of skills	'I have my expertise in this basket. I gather all my skills in it and thus the basket fills up little by little. I develop my *interaction skills* and put them at the bottom. They are the foundation of client work. In addition, there is a *great deal of tolerance.* It keeps the contents of the basket fresh.'	· a great deal of tolerance → resilience · interaction skills → communication skills

Notes   * Derived from adjacent quotations. ** After content analysis.
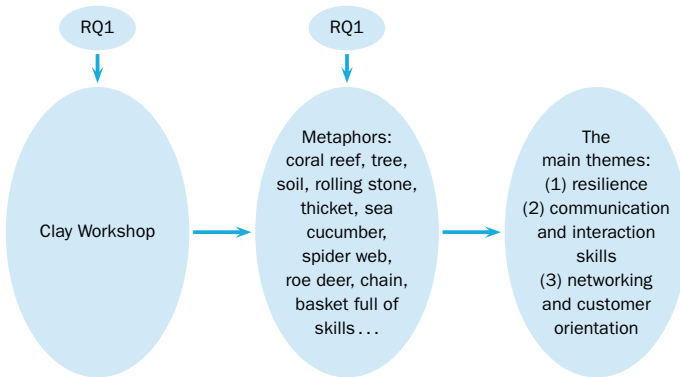

Figure 2   Research Progress Related to Research Questions (RQs)

This overview of competency needs in terms of a company's updated strategic goals was both holistic and descriptive. Something should be done with regard to competencies, but no one is quite sure what competencies are needed in the future. Because the future is unclear, the workshop participants attempted to outline which competencies would be worthwhile to the company.

No detailed competency needs were identified, but the descriptions were more metaphorical and extensive in areas such as attitudes towards change, network competency, and communication and interaction skills.

Overall, competency needs were discussed from various perspectives: the benefits of each competency area, how best to use foresight information, and customer orientation. The perspectives on individual competency views were broader than those on traditional knowledge/cognitive or functional competency – so-called 'substance competency' or 'hard competency' – and professional competency, including conceptual and operational classifications.

In summary, the following themes related to future competencies emerged from the metaphor-based interpretive content analysis: resilience, networking, customer orientation, stakeholder views and communication skills.

Updated Strategic Goals Meet the Staff's Reflection

Research question 1 (RQ1) examined how the arts-based clay workshop method fit the company's strategy process. Comparing the updated strategic objectives and the staff's reflections, some of the objectives were included in the knowledge needs identified in the stories, including customer orientation, new service models, new forms of cooperation, development of technological know-how and the effective utilization of networks. The development of interaction and communication skills was also highlighted. In this case, context plays a significant role, because the firm's field of operation is turbulent due to the reform of the Finnish social and health care system. However, the goals of furthering the development of regional structures, identifying new service needs related to changes in legislation, and increasing research know-how did not emerge in the reflection and evaluation. One reason may be a lack of experience and a lack of familiarity with the issues. An individual's reflection builds on a combination of previous knowledge and new knowledge, and if new issues are unclear, they may be difficult to imagine:

> Everything seems to be a big question mark. We are living in the middle of great historical changes. [Participant 7, project manager]

Resilience as a Way to Address Changes

The main observation related to research question 2 (RQ 2) is that workshop participants repeatedly mentioned resilience. The participants identified resilience – namely, the ability to accept both needed changes and continuous changes in general – as well as flexibility, adapting to new situations, and being broad-minded and liberal. Resilience was described as coping, and as the ability to live well in spite of adversity. Several participants felt that their own actions supported the strengthening of the group's resilience:

> [...] in my work, I am able to make independent decisions and to

manage changing situations, remembering that I am a part of the organization and its activities and values. [Participant 9, project manager]

The participants' stories revealed that tolerance of changing situations demanded certain competencies, such as the ability to flexibly adapt one's thinking and methods, as well as having an open mind. Change was a positive outcome, and appeared to be a driver of flexibility. High tolerance of change may strengthen tolerance towards uncertainty and complexity.

The stories indicated individual ways to tolerate changes in the future. They suggested the purpose of reflection was to face and understand changes and setbacks, recover, self-motivate, be flexible, think positively, communicate, be determined and self-confident, manage stress, and create a relevant vision. In general, the reflections related to self-image, ways of thinking and feeling, choices, and how to embrace and manage external factors. Sensitivity and emotional intelligence appeared to be valuable features based strongly on customer orientation and understanding customer needs. Compassion was evaluated as a key factor not only for understanding customers, but also for understanding colleagues and other interest groups. Without self-compassion, phobias could easily develop. They are the backdrop to many power struggles, heavily controlling management and strong resistance to change, as can be seen in the following quotations:

We need to be rolling stones, [to] roll forward, always go according to what you want to receive and be able to transform in order not to feel constant uncertainty or discomfort. Continuous motion is the future, and we must be able to receive a variety of tasks and continuously transform them. And [we need to] be willing to change because if you get stuck in one place, you can say goodbye to everything. [Participant 3, project manager]

According to the workshop participants, anticipation and flexibility in the workplace ensure that the delivery of services, safety and well-being are at a high level, and that work is effective and profitable. Furthermore, they noted that the so-called 'technical resilience' involves mental resilience. For the work to flow smoothly, devices and systems need to be compatible and operate seamlessly, and technological interruptions cause frustration and delays. Additionally, there is also an increasing need to know how to evaluate the sufficient and different arsenals of techniques and appropriateness.

Although we think that we have good basic technical skills, nowadays more and more special competency is needed even though there is data mining. We should take advantage of technology a lot better. [Participant 4, project manager]

In summary, resilience was repeatedly mentioned by workshop participants, along with context-sensitive solutions. During the workshop, all participants stopped to analyze the problems together and to offer solutions.

Networking Competencies and Stakeholder Cooperation Using BusinessUnderstanding

There appeared to be a particular need to develop competencies related to the identification and selection of networks revolving around the key issues. Participants considered that relevant information moves through networks and, therefore, they largely felt that finding the right network was the decisive factor for finding solutions and new potential business opportunities.

Rapid changes in the business environment and in customer groups demand new competencies, such as the ability to build diverging networks and to become familiar with new groups in society and their needs. However, participants felt that existing competencies were enough at the moment, and that additional education will be the solution when the situation demands it. The problem appeared to be how to identify customers from networks, meet their needs, and solve their problems. In summary, many participants were mostly concerned about how to find the right methods and best tools to identify the right customers from the best and most valuable networks:

> The environment changes all the time and I know that there are several customer groups that need my competencies and knowledge. But how can I find them? Data mining and more knowledge perhaps. And that absolutely needs more competency. [Participant 4, project manager]

The participants' IT skills were quite advanced, but one future need was presented in every participant's story: how to best utilize knowledge in information systems. That competency emerged as a critical factor, because a vast amount of information about society is increasingly stored in a variety of data-storage repositories, and data mining is the key to understanding that information.

Interaction and Shared Common Sense: How to Speak, Listen and Understand

The importance of quality interaction with other individuals is clear, but the competency of quality interaction outside the social environment of one's own organization extends to customers, stakeholders and network partners. Interaction and relationships are important when creating and maintaining customer relationships, as well as in delivering quality customer service.

Although interaction increasingly takes place electronically, the need for human interaction will never entirely disappear. Social and personal contact between people is the only way to succeed in creating networks between people and organizations, and will remain one of the most significant competency demands.

> Social competencies resolve a lot. If you have them, you can always push things forward, find the right answers, catch the signals, communicate sensitively, listen, and be present. [Participant 8, CEO]

It is possible to learn social interaction and listening skills, but first one's self-awareness has to be at a proper level. The participants suggested that their backgrounds in the social sector create good conditions for reflection and self-awareness, and force them continuously to analyze themselves.

Strategic goals as the basis of business enable people to develop customer-oriented services and service models and to create and operate in networks. In addition, the ability to develop regional structures for structural changes in the social and health care sectors is a fundamental competency demand. The findings of this study show that participants involved in the social and health care sector reflected on the goals in a similar way. Examining the data management and technology development of social and health care service processes and strengthening the research, practical interaction, and evaluation link to the customer-oriented approach, all of them exist but need further education and a new kind of attitude. The goal to develop service needs for changes in legislation went unheeded. It seems plausible that the area needs more specialized knowledge than the organization has at the moment.

Discussion and Conclusions

The aim of this study was to understand how staff members' self-evaluation fits a company's strategy process. The research focused on determining how an arts-based clay workshop suited a company's strategy process, as well as on how staff members reflected on and evaluated their own future competency needs and requirements.

The results of this study indicate that a clay workshop is a critical research method, because it incorporates multiple disciplines into the same research. As posited by Leavy (2009), the holistic nature of method exists in content, or when reflection, description, problem layout and solution are bounded in the same method and context. Staff members shaped and depicted their divergent knowledge and multi-professionality. Participants shaped the clay creatively, and did not require a structured environment to depict divergent competencies. They were asked to focus on knowledge and core competencies, such as how they use different types of knowledge and

multiple competencies. After shaping the clay, staff members told stories of knowledge that were not typical to their work or were not the assumed norm (Darsø, 2004; Rantala, 2012). Henley (2002) argues that emotions, even suppressed or blocked, often find expression through clay, and that working with clay helps to reach the deepest dimensions of the human psyche. The items that the participants shaped inspired conversations about knowledge and competency. The workshop featured a hands-on approach to reflecting on challenges and finding solutions. In this respect, it is not only a way to produce knowledge; the human aspect is also present (Darsø, 2004). The metaphors that the participants produced arose from their visions of tacit knowledge and competency. The metaphors are rhetorical descriptions of the participants' different perspectives. Individuals are creative when they have an opportunity to let themselves experience creative flow (Silverman, 1989).

The results of this study also highlighted the daily work connected to individual's competencies, including experience, knowledge and attitude. The results underscored that the ability to apply competencies in daily operations (Le Deist & Winterton, 2005) is professionally decisive. The relationship to technology in particular involves a range of attitudes and experiences. Reflection is easy because technology is now ubiquitous, and every individual has experience with it (Yalabik, Chen, Lawler, & Kim, 2008). Technological competencies require not only updating, but also changes in one's attitude. Strategically, customer orientation will in the future be based mainly on technological tools and a society married to digitalization.

The goals of this research helped participants move away from traditional competency evaluations, which often focus on traditional competency factors such as professional evaluations (Le Deist & Winterton, 2005). On the one hand, without any guidelines, it becomes difficult to perceive all of the competencies that are classified and that affect individual behavior. As Fernandez et al. (2012) noted, embedded invisible competencies may not be familiar concepts, even when all individuals exhibit them.

To reflect on one's own behavior through daily work, an individual needs to have a broader view and not just know-how. The identification of latent knowledge and competencies will enrich one's work, and therefore competencies can be seen as part of one's effective overall performance (Cheetham & Chivers, 1998). In this study, the workshop participants identified competencies that may be unnecessary at the moment but could be important in the future. However, the fact that participants had prior knowledge of which attributes were classified as competencies helped them understand the extent of the phenomenon.

The results of this study additionally indicate that critical reflection is important in relation to trust and transparent function. The clay workshop

appeared in a state where the process of thinking, acting, experiencing and thinking, evaluating and analyzing alone and together produced results (Fernandez et al., 2012; see also Seibert, 1996). The ability to reflect and own mental activity showed that staff members are able to observe their own thoughts and feelings, are able to express them, and know how to deal with them as a part of their own competencies (Moon, 2002; Ruohotie, 2005).

The findings of this study offer several theoretical insights into reflection as an engagement tool and how it can be applied in practice in a firm's strategic processes (Seibert, 1996). In addition, utilizing the holistic competency view, the staff members' knowledge of all the discreet factors was related to their working status, producing a greater understanding of their own professional possibilities, behaviors and actions. Even the sense of empathy and the ability to control one's own emotions achieved new relevance. However, the organization studied here is a special type of organization staffed by specialists with higher education. Therefore, the results obtained might have been quite different had a manufacturing firm, for example, been chosen for the case study. This is a limitation of this study, and therefore the research results cannot be fully generalized.

In summary, the staff studied here had a unique opportunity to take part in their firm's strategic processes and let their own voices speak through reflection. Several positive outcomes were achieved, but for going forward the organization and its staff have a responsibility to confirm that all future competency needs and company goals come across clearly and precisely. This requires continuous development and monitoring of the enterprise, a common vision, and a willingness to continue with further reflection.

This research contributes to the existing body of scholarship by underscoring the value of reflection in the overall development process. For example, the clay workshop method is useful in processes where the role of individual competencies and personal and behavioral aspects are appreciated most. Overall, arts-based research methods are less frequently used in business and common development processes. From a managerial point of view, reflection offers a way to better understand staff, and that effect may extend to the atmosphere in the workplace and the organization's performance. In addition, this research underscores the value of the learning perspective, and offers valuable information on how to choose new methods and utilize and exploit them.

Limitations and Future Research

The main limitation of this research is that it examined only one case organization. However, valuable experiences were gathered from 16 participants using two methods: the clay workshop indirectly expressing participants'

metaphors of their competencies, and storytelling to open the workshop's metaphors. Further studies are needed to validate the findings and to explore additional points of view.

This case study identified a context in which reflection is a significant tool to develop and realize each individual's views as they relate to a firm's strategic goals and future approach. Further lines of inquiry could examine the impact of reflection as a development tool, the invocation of a holistic competency approach, and the engagement of staff in a firm's strategic processes. This study, despite the stated limitations, provides a solid departure point for future research into these areas of scholarship.

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