

**Part I**  
**Grasping the concepts**



Companies must rely on leverage such as knowledge to maintain their competitive edge, which distinguishes them from their competitors and using experts, key figures involved in developing emerging strategies. Employing knowledge as a distinguishing factor forces companies to identify those elements that are critical to their future. Indeed, in professional literature, expertise is often defined as a “*process used to formulate opinions, interpretations or recommendations...*”<sup>1</sup>.

Devising management procedures based on expertise, is opting to define expertise, not as an analytical approach, or way of reasoning, but as a differentiated knowledge as such. By exploiting this knowledge companies are able to assess their strengths and weaknesses, monitor the progress of their businesses and anticipate market demands. This is why we speak of managing multiple expertise and not just *expertise management*.

Implicitly, this essential accumulated knowledge, also known as expertise, is distinguished from a form of knowledge that is no less important for its daily activity: skills.

Inserting expertise into the heart of professions requires a consensus on a shared definition of what knowledge actually means, and to question what distinguishes it from skill.

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1 *Quality in expertise activities - General requirements of competence for an expertise activity*, NF X 50-110, AFNOR, may 2003.



# 1

## Why speak of expertise rather than skill?

### 1.1 What is meant by the notion of skill

Every organization relies on a skill set of knowledge and know-how relevant to its activities and accessible to everyone throughout its industry: competency. The later can be broken down into two main categories:

- ▶ Generic knowledge.
- ▶ Specialized knowledge.

Generic knowledge consists of capabilities, interpersonal skills and a behavioral state that evolves as experience is acquired.

The various company activities: marketing, sales, legal... in turn generate knowledge and know-how on their own that can be shared within the relevant professional community.

This specialized knowledge enriches the firm's portfolio of skills (see Figure 1.1).

In the Projected Management of Jobs and Skills procedures, they are associated with job descriptions or references and are binding on those who hold them.

By their very nature, skills help manage individuals within an organization, by responding to the question "Who does what?"<sup>2</sup>

- ▶ Who holds the position of accountant?
- ▶ Who is an engineer?
- ▶ Who is a corporate attorney?

## 1.2 How do we distinguish between skill and expertise and by what criteria?

If we refer to the standard reference **NF X 50-110, *Quality in expertise activities - General requirements of competence for an expertise activity***, expertise is defined as "extensive knowledge, declared or recognized in a professional field, on a given subject or a given object."

The reference implicitly defines expertise not only as a process of analysis, but also as the sum total of knowledge and know-how.

Describing knowledge as "extensive", is to recognize:

- ▶ a total mastery of concepts: principles and practices (conceptual and instrumental use) on a given subject or in a given field,

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2 J.-Y. Prax, *Le guide du knowledge management*.

- ▶ the ability to adapt or transform this knowledge to develop new approaches, often at the intersection between several fields,
- ▶ the contribution of a critical and analytical thought to anticipate the evolution of knowledge.

Describing this knowledge as “declared” or “recognized” is to admit the necessity of formally recognizing the essential nature, indeed the rare qualities of expertise.

This leads to a definition of expertise as the sum total of knowledge and know-how (see Figure 1.1):

- ▶ extensive, declared or recognized on a given subject, topic or field...,
- ▶ a key factor in the company’s strategic development,
- ▶ limited to a few individuals: the experts.

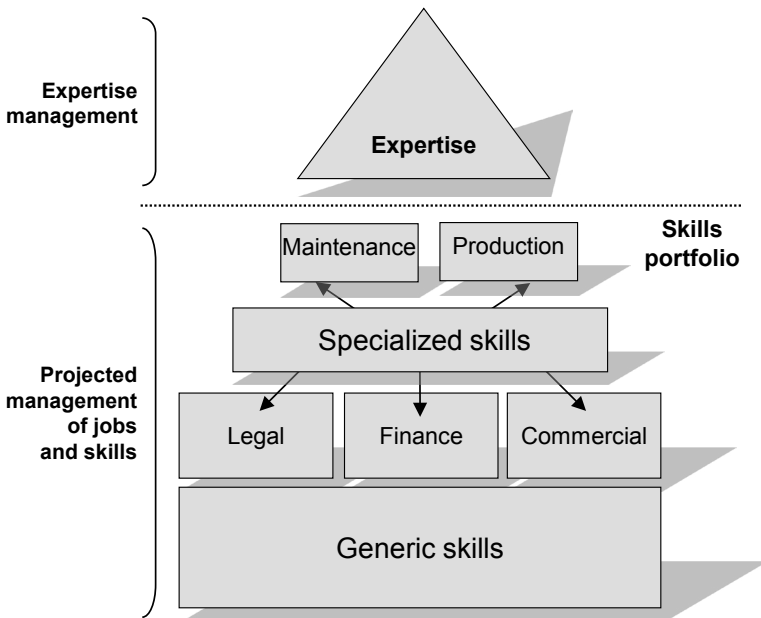


Figure 1.1 From skill to expertise

Management processes (steering), implementation (operational) and support (assistance and resources) putting into practice a series of phases or procedures that demand expertise.

### **An example of a process**

The procedure for stabilizing sludge in waste water treatment plants involves reducing the volume of organic substances and eliminating odors.

To accomplish this, biological, chemical, thermal or composting treatments will be implemented.

Each of these treatments requires a specific expertise, such as:

- > mesophilic anaerobic digestion, to dry dewatered sludge at a temperature of 33°C to 35°C or above 50°C,
- > composting, to obtain quality soil.

### **Another example of process**

As part of a proposal, a consulting firm coordinates an effort requiring multiple expertise to:

- > execute drawings for network infrastructure or transport,
- > conduct feasibility studies and studies of the project's scale...,
- > calculate levels of production...

Though relatively few in number, individuals with multiple expertise address the question: «Who knows what?»

- ▶ Who is the expert on using ultraviolet disinfection for eliminating micro-organisms and parasites found in water?
- ▶ Who is the expert on waste incineration?
- ▶ ...

If skill addresses the question «Who *does* what?» Expertise addresses the question “Who *knows* what?”



*Why speak of expertise rather than skill?*

As part of essential knowledge, having multiple expertise is a source of innovation and a factor in maintaining a competitive advantage.

Therefore it should be handled as a strategic resource, which is the purpose of expertise management.

