

EUROPEAN CROSS-BORDER COMPETENCY: DEFINING A KEY CONCEPT FOR COLLABORATION BETWEEN NEIGHBOURS

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Résumé

Cross-border cooperation is a priority for the European Union which invests heavily in the development of border regions. Within this context, the notion of cross-border collaboration competency is a key concept but one that is not currently well-defined. This paper proposes a conceptualisation of cross-border competency and suggestions as to how the concept can be operationalized in the field, based on an analysis of eleven existing competency frameworks. Carried out within an Erasmus+ Strategic Partnership project, this research contributes design recommendations for a cross-border skills framework and derives theoretical and empirical implications for cross-border collaboration and international competency modeling.

Mots clef : cross-border cooperation (CBC); Knowledge / Skills / Abilities / Other Characteristics (KSAO); competency modeling; Europe

Introduction

Since the advent of modern nation states, the concept of borders has been closely tied to the idea of sovereignty and the notion of state itself. In this context, borders have represented the insurmountable limits of a sovereign state. Respecting borders has meant respecting the will of the people, and borders are important tools used to safeguard internal interests such as security, progress and wealth of a nation. Consequently, reinforcing borders has been perceived as essential to the strength of the state itself.

The creation of the European Union has profoundly changed this framework. In order to improve a single market, European institutions strive to surpass the concept of national borders, considering them inconsistent with European policies and their basic goals. While the development of the EU has not implied the need to replace the idea of nation-state with other concepts, the question of cooperation across internal borders—the national administrative boundaries between Member states—remains a significant priority and challenge.

In the perspective of increasingly deeper integration of the several nation-states that take part in the Union, borders are no longer essential for protecting national interests. Rather, they may even be viewed as inconsistent with the promotion of national interests insofar they can represent a limit for those who want develop their business or enlarge the area of their professional activity beyond the national context.

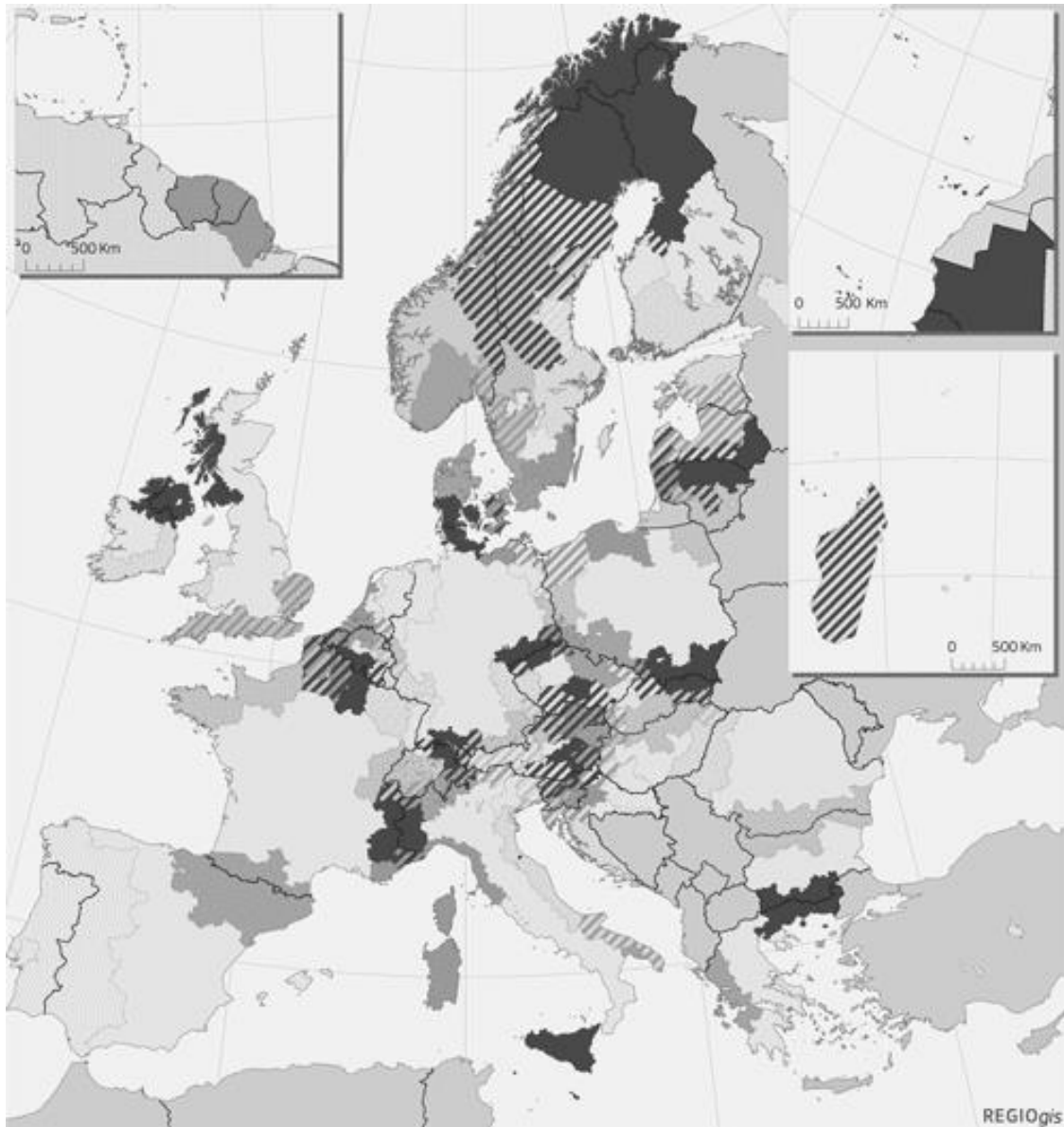
This is particularly true for people who live or work in border regions. As the EU Commission recently stated, “over the past decades, the European integration process helped internal border regions to transform from mainly peripheral areas into areas of growth and opportunities”¹. Approximately 30% of EU’s GDP has been produced in border regions and additional growth could be reached with a more interconnected economy and osmotic integration of people living there.

With nearly 40% of the European Union (EU) population living in border regions along 38 internal national borders, developing cross-border cooperation is a political priority for the EU, a priority that is supported by allocations totaling EUR 6 billion from 2007-2013 and EUR 6.6 billion over the period of 2014-2020 in the form of Interreg A projects. The expressed objective of European cross-border cooperation is to “tackle common challenges identified jointly in the border regions and to exploit the untapped growth potential in border areas, while enhancing the cooperation process for the purpose of the overall harmonious development of the Union.”². Figure 1 below shows a map of the EU cross-border regions involved in Interreg projects.

¹ *Boosting growth and cohesion in EU border regions*, p. 2, COM (2017) 534 final.

² Interreg A – Cross-Border Collaboration: http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/fr/policy/cooperation/european-territorial/cross-border/#1

Figure 1: EU Cross-Border Regions involved in Interreg projects³



Beyond the notion of barriers as obstacles, borders are increasingly considered to be sources of potential collaboration benefiting the two populations, as highlighted by resolution 363 of the Governance Commission of the European Union (October, 2013). This kind of cooperation, which can be related to areas such as security, transport, education, energy, health care, training, business, and job creation, assumes a targeted collaboration between individuals and institutions of different jurisdictions situated in the same cross-border region. The goal is to resolve problems and develop synergies based on the social, economic and natural characteristics of the territory.

Given the stakes of cross-border collaboration in the EU, the question of how to facilitate effective collaboration is particularly significant. Collaboration at the international level involves boundary spanning, or “a set of communication and coordination activities performed by individuals within an organization and between organizations to integrate

³ http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/fr/policy/cooperation/european-territorial/cross-border/#4

activities across multiple cultural, institutional and organizational contexts” (Schotter et al., 2017). Cross-border collaboration is a specific boundary spanning activity that involves a proximity which can result in a certain familiarity with neighboring countries as well as a perhaps a false sense of familiarity in which actual differences are underestimated.

In this paper, we are interested in better understanding what makes cross-border collaborations work, specifically the contribution of competency which we refer to here as “cross-border competency,” and propose as a new concept. A conceptualisation of cross-border collaboration competency is valuable as it can provide a bridge and common terminology among the educational, public and private sectors and can serve as a facilitator in the endeavor to develop collaboration and activity in border regions. At the crossroads of research on European policy and international management, this research draws on both.

The question driving this research is two-part: 1) What does cross-border competency consist of and 2) how can it be modeled and operationalized in ways that are relevant to educational and professional contexts in Europe?

The remainder of the paper is structured as follows. We will first present the theoretical background of the investigation related to the competency modeling, specifically international competencies, and investigate what is specific about the cross-border context. Then we describe the methodology employed for the empirical analysis of selected extant competency frameworks. The results of the analysis are presented and discussed in relation to the literature, leading to recommendations for the design of a framework for cross-border competency as well as for further research.

Theoretical Background

Conceptualising a competency and developing a corresponding skill framework to be utilized by people in educational and professional institutions can be a deceptively straightforward endeavor, one that is tinged with siren calls of rational management and one which is fraught with assumptions that are more or less examined and challenged by actors involved in the design process and end-users.

Skills frameworks are part of what has been referred to as the “invisible technology” in management and engaging in their development implies participating in the development of management tools that, if utilized, can influence the evolution of human systems (Berry, 1993). These tools have a multitude of implications for human activity including: reducing complexity, automating decision-making processes, dividing attention, regulating social relations and maintaining consistency (Berry, 1993).

In this section, we discuss three streams of literature: competency modeling and Knowledge, Skills, Abilities and Other Characteristics (KSAOs), competencies related to international and intercultural contexts, and the specificities of proximity in international collaboration.

Competency Modeling

Competency frameworks are tools that allow for articulating, listing, describing and explaining various kinds of capacities, and can be used by individuals in articulating their skills on a CV, by educators in the design of courses and training programmes, by institutions for evaluating achievement for diplomas and certificates, and by employers with their employees.. The number of frameworks had grown since the 1990s. The methods used to develop them vary widely and a critical approach is helpful in both developing and using

these tools which are not always utilized as intended or used at all. Indeed, the connection between the framework and the actual activity it is meant to refer to is problematic (Prot, 2014; Cadet, 2011).

“The word ‘competencies’ today is a term that has no meaning apart from the particular definition with whom one is speaking” (Zemke, 1982). As confirmed in a study comprised of interviews with 37 experts in the field of competency modeling, there is little consensus as to the definition of the term, and this polysemy is due to the development of research in various fields as summarized by Schippmann and colleagues (2000). In management scholarship, there is, however a certain degree of consensus surrounding the KSAO construct as a basis for studying various kinds of competency. KSAOs “are induced from primarily intrapsychological (as opposed to situational) origins and are relatively stable across a meaningful time frame.” (Ployhart et al., 2013).

KSAOs have been defined as follows (Noe et al., 2006; Schmitt & Chan, 1998):

- **Knowledge:** is the declarative or procedural information necessary for performing a task and the foundation on which skills are developed (knowledge may apply to many jobs or only a single job)
- **Skills:** the individual’s level of proficiency and capabilities to perform specific tasks and can be improved with experience.
- **Ability:** is a more enduring capability that is applicable to a range of job-related tasks.
- **Other characteristics:** personality traits and related dispositional attributes that affect the individual’s performance across a broad range of tasks.

This conceptualisation is echoed in the one described in “Skills Pillar” used in the European Commission work on competency modeling (ESCO Handbook, 18):

- **Competence:** The proven ability to use knowledge, skills and personal, social and/or methodological abilities, in work or study situations, and in professional and personal development.
- **Knowledge:** The body of facts, principles, theories and practices that is related to a field of work or study. Knowledge is described as theoretical and/or factual, and is the outcome of the assimilation of information through learning.
- **Skill:** The ability to apply knowledge and use know-how to complete tasks and to solve problems. Skills are described as cognitive (involving the use of logical, intuitive and creative thinking) or practical (involving manual dexterity and the use of methods, materials, tools and instruments).

With this background on competency modeling in mind, the next step is to look more specifically at competency constructs specific to international contexts, which take into consideration the complexity of cultural and linguistic diversity.

Cross-cultural competencies, global mindset and cultural intelligence

A logical starting point for an investigating cross-border competency is the rich literature that already exists concerning international competencies more generally. The literature on competencies related to people’s ability to collaborate in international and multicultural environments is well-developed and at a point where scholars are review and specifying the constructs related to these conceptualisations.

Discussions in the literature focus on two key constructs: global mindset and cultural intelligence. Literature reviews on these constructs can be found in two recent articles. One examines the distinction between two different definitions and streams of literature concerning cultural intelligence or “an individual’s capability to function and manage effectively in culturally diverse situations and settings” (Ott & Michailova, 2018). A second clarifies the difference between cultural intelligence and “global mindset” (Andresen & Bergdolt, 2017). These researchers group definitions and conceptualisations according to four dimensions of cross-cultural competencies: personal attributes, cognitive knowledge and skills, motivation, and resources for adapting behavior. They go on to distinguish between the levels of business management (normative, strategic, and operative) in which these competencies are deployed.

These contributions focus on international collaboration generally without particularly focusing on the various kind of distance (geographic, cultural, psychic, etc.) that may be involved. The focus of the present article is not to contribute to the debate on the constructs of cultural intelligence and global mindset but to extend it to the question of cross-border collaboration. We aim to examine the extent to which the competency involved in cross-border collaboration is specific and distinct from international competency more generally.

Proximity and the specificities of cross-border competency

Having looked at the concepts of competency and international competency, we come to the first part of our research question: what does cross-border competency consist of? A cross-border project is characterized by a substantial, organizational and financial involvement in the enterprise of partners on both sides of the border (Prussak & Wyrwicka, 1997). By the term “border” we are referring primarily to the administrative border between countries since the research started from the analysis of the EU political agenda on economic growth of border regions. (That said, we acknowledge that the notion of border also connotes other kinds of borders which may align or misalign with, reinforce or contradict administrative borders. These may include aspects such as linguistic and cultural borders, specific geographical features such as mountains and bodies of water, or the historical influence of former administrative borders.)

Cross-border collaboration, then, involves a myriad of skills including language skills, intercultural and behavioral skills, and socio-professional skills. But what is specific about cross-border competency with respect to the international competency constructs already developed in the literature? Are the competencies required to participate in cross-border collaboration any different than the ones required for any international collaboration?

The difference lies in the notion of proximity which may serve to either facilitate or complicate relations through shared history or shared language or culture. The proximity can also lead to a false presumption of familiarity, referred to as “paradox of cultural proximity” (O’Grady et al., 1996) or the tendency to disregard actual cultural differences in the context of assumed cultural proximity. This can explain the experiences that sometimes cultural differences between close cultures are more problematic than those between distant cultures as in the former case the differences easily remain unrecognized. Examples of this have been documented in business relations between Finnish and Swedish cultures (Vaara, 2000) and as the French and the Swiss (Davoine et al., 2014).

As a result, we can include in our conceptualisation of cross-border competency the knowledge and skills acquired through the proximity with border regions as well as the general awareness that proximity does not necessarily mean familiarity and similarity.

Based on the concepts reviewed above, we can put forward a preliminary definition of cross-border competency as “the collection of knowledge, skills, abilities and other characteristics that contribute to a person’s capacity to participate effectively in collaborations spanning the boundaries existing in regions where two or more countries are juxtaposed.”

Similar to the distinction made between cultural competence and multicultural competence (Bartel-Radic, 2009), we consider cross-border competency to be to some extent specific to a particular cross-border context and others to be transferable from one cross-border context to another. For example, experience working on a project between France and Italy might allow a person to develop language skills and specific legal knowledge of the Franco-Italian context that might not be particularly applicable to collaboration between France and Spain. However, other skills acquired such as general cross-cultural awareness and skills related to managing language diversity might prove to be useful.

Methodology

Based on the literature review, we aim to test and further develop the concept of cross-border competency and to respond to the second research question as to how can the concept can be modeled and operationalized in ways that are relevant to educational and professional contexts in Europe. This study was carried out in the context of the European Cross-Border Skills project (referred to hereafter as ECBS). The goal of the initiative is to highlight and recognize the capacity to participate effectively in cross-border collaborations as a valuable asset and to support institutions in helping people develop this capacity.

Financed by the European Commission under the Erasmus+ strategic partnership program, the ECBS project brings together four European cross-border academic networks: a Franco-Spanish group (Université de Pau et des Pays de l’Adour, Universidad de Zaragoza, Universidad del País Vasco/Euskal Herriko Unibertsitatea), a Franco-Italian group (Université Savoie Mont-Blanc, Università della Valle d’Aosta), a Franco-German-Swiss group (EUCOR-The European Campus) and a Franco-German-Luxembourg-Belgian group (Université de la Grande Région, Universität des Saarlandes). The project aims to develop a common framework for cross-border competency, a catalogue of programs and tools which facilitate its development, a European certificate, and an online platform to make these tools available to the public (ECBS, 2017).

There are many ways to build, test and extend the definition of a new concept of a new construct, and several other options will be discussed later in the paper. For this first effort, we have chosen to investigate existing skill frameworks concerning competencies and types of collaboration related to cross-border competency and collaboration. This approach has the advantage of focusing on tools that span the boundaries between theoretical and empirical spheres; they represent both theoretical and conceptual constructs that more or less anchored in the state of the art in various disciplines and tools that exist and are more or less utilized in professional and educational spheres.

To do this, we identified and analysed eleven existing frameworks that we consider to be particularly relevant to the investigation of cross-border competency. We have used “selective” or “criterion” sampling (Sandelowski, 1995), concentrating on selecting case that meet a set of predetermined criteria important to the study. Namely, the frameworks chosen meet one or more of the following criteria. They are transnational European frameworks, related to international education and skills, related to language, and/or related to transversal skills. The sampling is representative and does not intend to be exhaustive.

The eleven tools and frameworks are presented in Table 1 below, including the title, the publishing institution, a general description, and the criteria for which it was selected for inclusion in the study.

Table 1: Presentation of selected frameworks

	Title	Institution	Description	Basis for inclusion in the study
1	European Skills/Competences, Qualifications and Occupations (ESCO)	European Commission https://ec.europa.eu/esco/portal/home	ESCO identifies and categorises skills, competences, qualifications and occupations relevant to the European labour market, education and training across 26 languages. It is a meta-framework that includes or is connected to other frameworks developed in the EU, such as the European Qualification Framework (EQF), the European e-Competence Framework, and EURES the European job mobility portal.	-Transnational European framework
2	European Qualifications Framework (EQF)	European Center for the Development of Vocational Training (CEDEFOP) European Commission http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/fr/events-and-projects/projects/european-qualifications-framework-eqf	EQF is a common European reference framework whose purpose is to make qualifications more readable and understandable across different countries and systems. Overview of qualifications in the 39 European countries involved in EQF implementation.	-Transnational European framework
3	Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR)	Council of Europe https://www.coe.int/en/web/portfolio/the-common-european-framework-of-reference-for-languages-learning-teaching-	CEFR describes language learning outcomes in terms of language use, including three principal dimensions: language activities, the domains in which they occur, and the competences used to engage in those activities.	- Transnational European framework - Focus on language skills

		assessment-cefr-		
4	A Framework of Reference for Pluralistic Approaches to Languages and Cultures (CARAP/FREPA)	European Centre for Modern Languages Council of Europe http://carap.ecml.at	CARAP / FREPA describes the knowledge and skills that can be developed in plurilingual and pluricultural context, positioned as a complement and in contrast to the “compartmentalised” view of an individual’s linguistic and cultural competence(s), as developed by the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages.	- European framework - Focus on language skills
5	Gaining an Employment Edge: The Impact of Study Abroad on 21st Century Skills & Career Prospects in the United States	Institute of International Education (IIE) https://www.iie.org/Research-and-Insights/Publications/Gaining-an-employment-edge---The-Impact-of-Study-Abroad (2017)	This study investigates the connection between study abroad programs and the development of skills that contribute to employment and career development in today’s workforce. Based on interviews with students and self-reported results.	-Focus on international education and skills
6	Guide AEFA : Evaluer les compétences transversales (Evaluation of Transversal Skills)	Agence Erasmus+ France Agenda Européen pour la formation des adultes https://www.agence-erasmus.fr/docs/2496_aefa-guide-competences-juin-2017.pdf (2017)	Framework developed specifically concerning adults and which aims to more precisely evaluate partially developed skills.	-European framework -Focus on transversal skills
7	A Framework Of	Karel de Grote-	Framework for intercultural competence for business	-Focus on

	Reference for Intercultural Competence: A 21st century Flemish Experiment in Capacity Building in Formal Education	Hogeschool4 Antwerp Paul Catteeuw https://faro.be/sites/default/files/bijlagen/e-documenten/a_framework_of_reference_for_intercultural_competence_totaal.pdf (2012)	purposes tested with 700 students in the course Intercultural Communication and Training, using the portfolio methodology at Karel de Grote-Hogeschool4 Antwerp.	international education and skills
8	P@lmes: Moroccan National Framework for Transversal Skills	Tempus Project: Moroccan Ministry of Higher Education and university partners http://info.uca.ma/ (2012 / 2015)	Descriptions of skills and a certification process to be used in the context of Moroccan higher education institutions.	-Focus on transversal skills
9	Pathways to Practice – Certificate of International Merit	Karin Frydenlund. European Association for International Education https://www.eaie.org/our-resources/library/publication/Pathways-to-practice/pathways-to-practice-certificate-of-international-merits.html (2017)	Certificate developed to find ways for students with limited mobility opportunities to achieve strategic goals of internationalisation. Describes a method for students to develop portfolios of written reflections as well as present their experiences to a student audience.	-Focus on international education and skills

10	Analytical framework on transboundary crisis management in the European Union	Transcrisis European Commission Horizon 2020 project http://www.transcrisis.eu/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/TransCrisis-D2.1-Analytical-Framework.pdf (2015)	Framework developed to describe the political leadership tasks involved in crisis management.	-Focus on cross-border collaboration
11	Toolkits for Cross-Border Project Management	Transfrontier Euro-institute Network (TEIN) Funded by European Commission http://pat-tein.eu/home/launch-of-the-pat-tein-toolkit/ (2014)	Project management toolkits for project management in border regions, including core toolkit and versions for specific borderland regions: -Ireland/Northern Ireland -Austria/Italy/Slovenia -Czech Republic/Poland -France/Spain	-Focus on cross-border collaboration

Once the eleven frameworks were identified, we preceded to gain familiarity with them and investigate and analyse them. Through an abductive process of going back and forth between literature on skill frameworks (notably, Cadet, 2011) and among the frameworks themselves, we developed a list of features to look for in each framework which then became a set of six codes for the qualitative analysis. These are listed below in Table 2.

Table 2: List of features examined

Feature	Description
1) Content	The specific concepts presented and defined in the framework
2) Connections made to activity	The extent and ways in which the theoretical and conceptual content connected to empirical and contextualised professional and/or educational activity
3) Levels of mastery	Whether and how the concepts presented are described in terms of degrees of proficiency
4) Inclusion of use cases	Whether the framework includes examples of how the tool is used or might be used in professional or educational settings
5) Connections make to certification processes	Whether the framework is connected or includes a method for certifying that people have acquired the competencies or skills in question.
6) Level of analysis	Whether the framework addresses individual or collective level competencies (or both)

The results of the analysis are presented in the section below.

Results and discussion

The results of the initial analysis according to six features are displayed below in Table 3 and discussed thereafter.

Table 3: Analysis of selected frameworks

	Title	Content	Levels of mastery	Connection to activity	Use cases	Connection to certification	Level of analysis
1	ESCO - European Skills/Competences, qualifications and Occupations	<p>Three pillars:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Occupations -Knowledge/skills/competences -Qualifications <p>Contains three functional collections: Digital transversal skills (identical to the Digital Competence Framework), Language skills, Transversal skills)</p>	Not addressed	Connection established between skills and occupations	Not found (although the project is very recent – February 2017)	Connected to Europass	Individual
2	EQF – European Qualifications Framework	<p>Descriptions of learning outcomes relevant to any system of qualifications in terms of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Knowledge -Skills -Levels of responsibility 	Eight reference levels (1 to 8)	Connection between skills and qualification programs	Not found	Connected to national qualification systems	Individual

3	Common European Framework for Languages	<p>Descriptions of language skills in terms of four types of activities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -reception (listening and reading) -production (spoken and written) - interaction (spoken and written) - mediation (translating and interpreting) 	Descriptions of skills according to 6 levels ranging from A1 to C2	Connection between language skills and activities.	Yes ⁴	Utilized as a basis for certification by other organizations	Individual
4	A Framework of Reference for Pluralistic Approaches to Languages and Cultures (CARAP /FREPA)	Detailed descriptions of knowledge, attitudes, and skills related to language and culture.	Not addressed	Related to specific language-based activity and language teaching and learning	Yes ⁵	Not addressed	Individual
5	GAINING AN EMPLOYMENT EDGE: The Impact of Study Abroad on 21st Century Skills	<p>-Cognitive competencies: cognitive processes and strategies, knowledge and creativity</p> <p>-Intrapersonal competencies:</p>	Not addressed	Connection between skills, study abroad and professional	Not found	Not addressed	Individual

⁴ Example: Little, D. (ed.) (2003). "The European Language Portfolio in use: nine examples." <https://rm.coe.int/1680459fa4>.

⁵ See page: <http://carap.ecml.at/SeservirdeCARAP/tabid/3637/language/en-GB/Default.aspx>

	& Career Prospects in the United States	intellectual openness, work ethic and positive self-evaluation -Interpersonal competencies: teamwork and leadership skills		activity.			
6	Guide AEFA : Evaluer les compétences transversales (Evaluation of Transversal Skills)	Twelve specific skills presented: 1. Communicate orally in a professional context 2. Communication in writing in a professional context 3. Utilize mathematic reasoning 4. Use digital and computer tools 5. Manage information 6. Organise one's professional activity 7. Navigate social codes in professional context 8. Work in groups and teams 9. Continue learning throughout one's life 10. Build a career path 11. Practice one's	Descriptors of four levels for each skill.	Examples given of connection between skills and job activity	Yes, examples given in main report	Used by other organisations for basis of certification	Individual

		<p>professional activity within the established reglementary frameworks</p> <p>12. Adapt one's activity when faced with emergency and unexpected situations</p>					
7	A Framework Of Reference for Intercultural Competence: A 21st century Flemish Experiment in Capacity Building in Formal Education	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Critical awareness 2. Openness, right to be different and respect for otherness 3. Flexibility 4. Empathy 5. Cultural knowledge 6. Communicative skills 7. Solution-oriented attitude 	<p>Three levels of mastery:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -basic (knowing), -advanced (understanding), -proficiency (applying) 	Connections between skills and intercultural activities	Describes how the framework is developed from and used in this Flemish higher education setting	Connection to CEFcult assessment of intercultural competence, self- and expert-based assessment.	Individual
8	P@lmes: Moroccan National Framework for Transversal Skills	<p>Four skill areas:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Entrepreneurship 2. Project management 3. Information and communication technologies 4. Communication 	Indicators given for each domain as a basis for evaluating level of mastery.	Connections between skills and the activities in each area	Examples cited of institutions installing and using platform.	Yes, in Moroccan higher education setting.	Individual
9	Pathways to Practice – Certificate of	Provides out the method for developing a certificate based on students' reflection on	Levels of mastery not	Implied but not specifically	Briefly cites examples of universities using this certification method in		Individual

	International Merit	experience rather than a list of skills.	discussed	addressed.	Sweden, Norway and England.		
10	Transcrisis	<p>Describes specific activities related to crisis management:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Detection -Sensemaking -Decision-making -Coordination -Meaning-making -Communication -Accountability 	Mentioned but not delineated	Connection between crisis management activities and specific crises	Real and hypothetical examples given	Framework to be used by other organisations as a basis for evaluation	Individual & Collective
11	Toolkit for Cross-Border Project Management (2014)	<p>Each Toolkit contains six modules for project management:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Defining the cross-border project -Establishing the cross-border partnership -Planning a cross-border project -Implementation -Assessment -Key competencies for cross-border project managers 	Not addressed	Connection to specific cultural contexts for various region-specific toolkits	Test modules mentioned but specific use cases not found	Not addressed	Individual& Collective

First of all, these results confirm a gap concerning cross-border competency. There are frameworks that discuss international skills at the individual level, such the Framework of Reference for Pluralistic Approaches to Languages and Cultures (FREPA/CARAP) and the Framework of Reference for Intercultural Competence, and frameworks that deal with cross-border collaboration at the collective level in terms of project or crisis management, namely the Toolkit for Cross-Border Project Management and the Transcris project. However, none of the frameworks deal with the particular skills necessary for cross-border collaboration at the individual level.

Secondly, we can see that the several of the skillsets could be included directly into a framework for cross-border competency. This would be the case for the two frameworks dealing with language, for example, as well as the ESCO - European Skills/Competences, qualifications and Occupations. This gives rise to the question of meta-frameworks and the need to connect them rather than to reinvent tools that already exist.

Thirdly, we can note a significant diversity with respect to how the frameworks are constructed, the extent to which they are connected to activity and how they present use cases to facilitate the adoption of the frameworks as tools. Examining these tools side-by-side gives rise to a myriad of questions about how they are actually utilized in the field and how the various features influence this. Reports on the development and use of the frameworks can inform the methods that we use in developing in testing the cross-border skills framework, such as various ways to seek feedback from stakeholders throughout the process and how best to include case studies of the frameworks in use. Several of the frameworks, notably AEFA the framework for transversal skills in adults, give case studies and specific examples of how the framework can be used. However, to develop a balanced view of how the skills frameworks are used in the field, independently field work interviewing people who design and use them (or mis-use or resist using them) would be helpful.

This involves the recognition that these frameworks are not created and utilized in a vacuum but are embedded in organisations and governmental, professional, and educational networks. It seems important to identify these actors and be in contact with them during the development of any new framework involving cross-border collaboration. These organisations can give input as to what the most important cross-border skills to highlight are and help test the framework and platform. Some key organisations identified are listed below:

- TEIN : <http://www.espaces-transfrontaliers.org/la-mot/partenariats/tein-transfrontier-euro-institut-network/>
- OECD – Organisation for Economic Collaboration and Development
- Cross-Border Cooperation: https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/neighbourhood/cross-border-cooperation_en
- Novatris : http://www.novatris.uha.fr/?page_id=1694

Conclusion

Returning to our research questions, we can now see how effective we have been in responding to the questions posed: 1) What does cross-border competency consist of and 2) how can it be modeled and operationalized in ways that are relevant to educational and professional contexts in Europe?

We proposed that cross-border competency can be defined as “the collection of knowledge, skills, abilities and other characteristics that contribute to a person’s capacity to

participate effectively in collaborations spanning the boundaries existing in regions where two or more countries are juxtaposed.” Following this, we have responded to the second part of the question by analyzing some existing skills frameworks utilized in educational and professional contexts in Europe.

How does this measure up to eight criteria for concepts in social science as presented by Gerring (1999): familiarity, resonance, parsimony, coherence, differentiability, depth, theoretical utility, and field utility? While the term “cross-border competency” appears to be new and therefore somewhat unfamiliar, the terms resonate well with the notions of cross-border collaboration and international competencies which are commonly discussed in the literature. This resonance as well as the allocation of Erasmus funds for the project implies strong possibility of utility of the concept for both theoretical and empirical spheres. The definition given here is coherent and parsimonious and in fact, too simple. It needs to go further in terms of differentiability and depth to provide further insight into what really is involved in dealing with both foreignness and proximity that cross-border collaboration involves.

For this, future research should involve a review of the literature on cross-border collaboration and distance as well as an empirical investigation in connection with organisations such as the TEIN network, the Transcrisis project group, Novartis and other university programmes and initiatives involving cross-border collaboration. A conceptualisation that includes differentiability and depth can also address the notion of individual vs. collective level of analysis (Schippmann et al., 2000).

In summary, this paper contributes to interdisciplinary literature on the development of international skills by proposing a conceptualization of cross-border competency and an overview of several existing skill frameworks. It confirms the lack of attention to cross-border skills as such in existing frameworks and makes recommendations for the development and utilization of a European Cross-Border Skills framework. The primary limitation of this paper is that it does not go so far as to examine how and to what extent existing skill frameworks are actually utilized within organisations and institutions. Despite the significant investment in the development of skill frameworks, few researchers in management sciences seem to have pursued this area of investigation. Case studies and quantitative research and theoretical developments in management and organizational studies could be particularly well-suited for increasing our future understanding of the mechanisms surrounding the use of international skills frameworks in context.

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