

## Learning at Workplace: Competences and Contexts in Sensory Evaluation

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**Abstract :** The development of workplace as a learning environment has been emphasized in research field of workplace learning. The prior literature on sensory performance emphasized the individual's competences as assessor, while the competences in the collaborative interactional and knowledge creation practices as workplace learning method are not often mentioned. In the present study aims to find out what kinds of competences and contexts are central when assessor conducts food sensory evaluation in authentic professional context. The aim was to answer the following questions: first, what kinds of competences does sensory evaluation require according to assessors? And second, what kinds of contexts for sensory evaluation do assessors report? Altogether thirteen assessors from three Finnish food companies were interviewed by using semi-structural thematic interviews to map practices and development intentions as well as to explicate already established practices. The qualitative data were analyzed by following the principles of abductive and inductive content analysis. Analysis phases were combined and their results were considered together as a cross-analysis. When evaluated independently required competences were perception, knowledge of specific domains and methods and cognitive skills e.g. memory. Altogether, 42% of analysis units described individual evaluation contexts, 53% of analysis units described collaborative interactional contexts, and 5% of analysis units described collaborative knowledge creation contexts. Related to collaboration, analysis reviewed learning, sharing and reviewing both external and in-house consumer feedback, developing methods to moderate small-panel evaluation and developing product vocabulary collectively between the assessors. Knowledge creation contexts individualized from daily practices especially in cases product defects were sought and discussed. The study findings contribute to the explanation that sensory assessors learn extensively from one another in the collaborative interactional and knowledge creation context. Assessors learning and abilities to work collaboratively in the interactional and knowledge creation contexts need to be ensured in the development of the expertise.

**Keywords :** assessor, collaboration, competences, contexts, learning and practices, sensory evaluation

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