

# CMS at risk

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## Risk-based competence management systems

### Why manage competence?

Employers have a legal 'duty of care' to provide safe systems of work. Hazardous industries face much tighter controls. 'Safety Case' regimes now apply in many sectors, e.g. offshore, the railways, and chemical sites (COMAH).

Duty holders are required to identify key human factors risks, and set out how the risk has been reduced to 'as low as reasonably practicable'. Regulators now look very closely at competence management systems to check how they affect risk.

But it's not just about 'insurance'. A systematic, risk-based approach to competence can also improve organisational effectiveness.

### What is a CMS?

A competence management system is a framework by which an employer manages all the competencies needed in the business. Its core purpose is to ensure that controls are in place to satisfy stakeholders that personnel are competent to carry out their jobs and to prevent loss or injury.

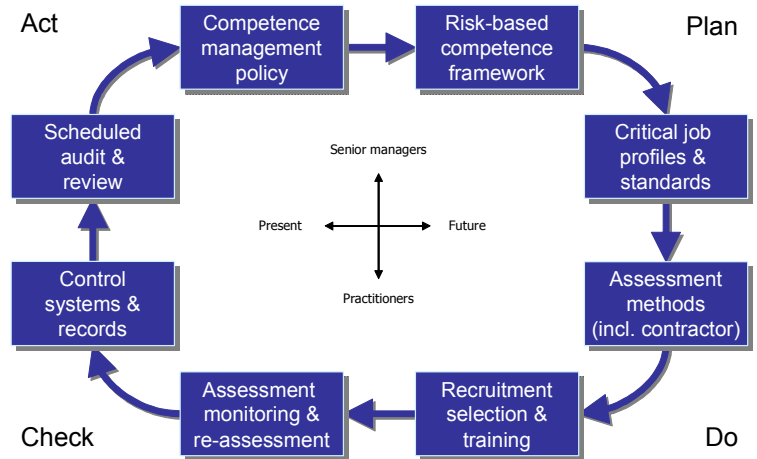
It includes:

- definition of critical competencies
- job profiles and standards
- assessment methods
- recruitment selection and training
- assessment and re-assessment
- control systems
- audit and review

It focuses on critical competencies - where incompetent actions could lead to major hazard effects such as multiple fatalities, extensive damage to assets, uncontrolled emissions to the environment, commercial loss, or loss of reputation.

### How does a CMS work?

There are no fixed rules. A good competence management system will reflect the needs and priorities of each individual business.



The Humberside CMS Model

### Why risk-based?

Many old-style competence systems ignore long-term impact. Some may have missed critical roles altogether. Little thought may have been given to the realities of regular re-assessment. They are often seen as bureaucratic.

Along with Humber Chemical Focus, we developed a robust 8-stage model to summarise key elements and help employers check gaps in systems.

It avoids the usual pitfalls by focusing on the risk of competence failure, prioritising ruthlessly, and building layered assessment strategies.

### Business risks/benefits?

At its most basic, competence management is insurance - a way to satisfy regulators that action has been taken to minimise the risk of major accidents from incompetence. A CMS will not prevent people making genuine mistakes, but it can at least provide 'ALARP' evidence.

Beyond that, research shows that employers with mature systems can quantify real improvements in safety incidents, process shutdowns, equipment failures, production uptime, productivity, and significant reduction in training costs.

### Who is responsible?

Only senior management can drive a successful CMS. Many companies can point to best practice in the lower part of the model. Few have had enough senior management attention to ensure focus on risk.

Hold a high-level review of your competence processes. Use the model to assess where your gaps are.

Use **RoleTrak** to map critical roles, analyse the risk of competence failure, and set priorities.

Develop a project plan with clear objectives and a tight scope. Allocate resources and give them the authorities they need to get things done. Check progress regularly.

### Find out more

Rowanhill Consultants Ltd are specialists in risk-based competence management strategies and in organisational performance in hazardous industries.

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