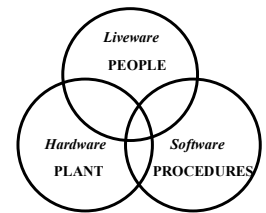


## COMPETENCE AND SAFETY MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS

The 3 main drivers towards "competence assurance" are:

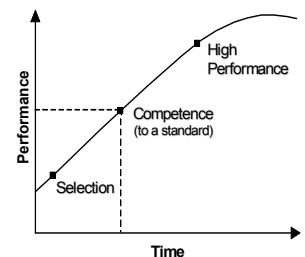
- The Safety Case Regulations 1992, and the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1992, require operating companies to describe how they ensure that all persons working on the installation or in related activities are competent
- HSE audits, initially focused on hardware and procedures, are now more searching on competence, as they work on the basis that 80% of incidents are due to human factors
- Safety Management Systems based on ISO9000 inevitably come to a point where they rely on competent individuals to perform safety-critical roles.



**Competence assurance** is a management control mechanism.

Its purpose is to satisfy management (and third parties) that people in safety-critical jobs are able to carry out their responsibilities to a defined standard - normally a minimum acceptable standard.

- It aims to ensure that people have the skills, knowledge, and attitudes to perform safely at work - a threshold that people must cross before they can work unsupervised.
- It involves defining safety-critical roles, assessing individuals' ability to perform those roles safely and effectively, and recording results of assessment in an accessible way.
- It is a necessary ingredient of an effective SMS, and the definition of safety-critical roles should relate directly to the hazards identified in the installation Safety Case.
- It links to other personnel management activities, some of which contribute to providing a competent workforce, but do not in themselves assure competence.



"NVQ" models of competence are increasingly becoming the norm - most tellingly within the HSE itself. These are daunting to the uninitiated, with lots of scope for bureaucracy, paperwork, and cost. Some companies have rushed into over-detailed schemes without any real overview. Others have sat on the fence, caught in a dilemma between the apparent cost and interventionism of full-blown schemes, and the risk involved in having nothing.

**People** have preconceptions about competence. Formal education leads people to think that knowledge and ability are the same thing - and that assessment means a written test. Some people focus on training, and some on paper exams. Some set great store by experience, others stress personality traits. The attraction of all these is that they appear easy to measure. Specify that someone must have a degree, have been on such-and-such a course, have 5 years "oilfield experience", and interview them to see how confident or ambitious they are. Unfortunately none of this tells you if the person can do the work you want done to the standard you require on the installation.

**Operating companies** achieve their objectives through a mix of people on different terms and conditions - expats, local staff, contract staff reporting directly to operator staff, long-term contractors with management on site, and short-term, ad hoc contractor labour. They may have different resourcing strategies on different assets. Contractors in turn often have to respond to conflicting demands from different clients. Achieving a systematic approach to competence out of this cocktail is not easy. Conventional personnel systems rarely follow quality principles, and usually presume staff status. It is not impossible, however, to cut through the confusion.

**Systematic** approaches to competence themselves need to follow ISO9000 principles. They need to start with clear objectives, and have a design framework that allows company managers to see at a glance where the safety-critical roles within their operation are, so that they can set priorities in a sensible way, based on risk.

A **top-down framework** that gives an overview of all the competences needed to run the business helps to:

- work out which are the most safety-critical competences
- avoid gaps in coverage, or overlap and duplication
- set priorities
- develop a consistent approach to standards and personnel systems
- determine how much effort it will take to implement.

This need not be a major exercise. Simple models already exist that can short-cut the process and provide managers quickly with an effective decision-making tool, *before* committing to significant activity or expense.

**Rowanhill Consultants** have unique experience of working with operating companies, both large and small, to develop strategic competence frameworks to support Safety Cases and Safety Management Systems.