



Guidelines for Successful Competency and Training Management

Simon Burtonshaw-Gunn and Mel Davies

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These guidelines provide a general overview of the concept of Competency and Training Management and illustrates how introducing this concept can be used pragmatically in organisations to deliver real business benefit. The guidelines are designed for business executives, managers or anyone else who is serious about implementing a Competency Management initiative. Starting from some basic definitions, the guide provides a modern-day perspective on a subject that is often surrounded by mystery, hype and spin.

Risktec Solutions has been at the leading edge of developing practical tools for industry to support the growing interest in Competency Management Frameworks, tailored to suit individual business needs. Based on this experience, these guidelines provide an overview of Competency and Training Management and how it can contribute to increased organisational performance. The contents are based upon both theory and practice with the intention of offering the reader some 'food for thought'. Whilst Competency and Training Management has become very topical in larger companies, especially those operating in the safety regulated industries; it nevertheless also provides information which is still applicable to smaller organisations and those operating in the less regulated arenas. Reading these guidelines will provide an overview of the topic and equip the reader with key information before engaging a management consultancy to develop or re-design its organisation; its Competency Management approach or its Training processes.

OUR CONTACT DETAILS

For further information visit our website at www.risktec.co.uk or contact us at enquiries@risktec.co.uk

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Professor Simon Burtonshaw-Gunn and Mel Davies
Management Systems Group,
Risktec Solutions Ltd
Telephone +44 (0)1925 438010

GUIDELINES FOR SUCCESSFUL COMPETENCY AND TRAINING MANAGEMENT

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The Business Need for Competency and Training Management

These guidelines describe the management arrangements for the control of recruitment, qualification and training of personnel required to deliver a suitably qualified and experienced workforce that are competent to undertake their roles. Whilst this is written in general terms for all organisations it is likely to be of greater benefit to those in the major hazard industries where Competency Management is generally encouraged by various external safety regulators.

Understanding Competency Management

1. To set the scene it is perhaps useful to have a clear understanding of Competency and Competency Management . . . **Competencies** are demonstrable knowledge, skills, behaviours and attitudes that are required to perform a particular job at a certain performance standard. If employee competence is not maintained then accidents, injuries or near misses may result due to sub-standard performance, or the product may not satisfy customer requirements. **Competency Management** is a systematic approach that an organisation takes to ensure its collective competence covering the assessment and training of current employees as well as in recruitment and succession planning.
2. Competency management was an idea that was first developed in the private sector and then introduced in the public sector during the 1990s. It has continued to grow and is now widely regarded as a 21st century management tool. In a recent CIPD survey 60% of organisations reported that they had a system of Competency Management in place, in many cases covering the majority of their employee's roles. With such a high level of interest in this topic other organisations are expected to also follow this lead.
3. The design and development of a Competency Management system should consider all the organisation's requirements. These include not just licensing or regulatory requirements but also those relating to the wider business environment. To support regulatory requirements it is important to maintain and demonstrate a competent organisation which is able to operate in a safe manner. However, from a business perspective the organisation should also maintain a competent workforce to ensure that:
 - the quality of its product or service meets both its standards and that of its customers; and,
 - the operation and management of the business is such that it meets its financial objectives.
4. For those organisations which operate in a highly regulated, safety-focused industry then one of the main factors which determines the safe operation of its facilities is the competence of the people that use, maintain and manage them. Historically there have been several major incidents, which have revealed that staff lacked important safety knowledge and skills despite having received training. It is therefore important that competence can be demonstrated and assessed rather than just assumed based on past training and experience.
5. As an example, organisations operating nuclear licensed sites in the UK are required to demonstrate that they are competent to operate and are required to obtain regulatory approval for major organisational changes. Traditionally paper-based systems have been maintained and changes have been infrequent. More recently however, the scale and pace of change has increased due to restructuring within the industry. As a result, this area of licensing has come under increased scrutiny by the industry's regulator.
6. The primary purpose of training is to help personnel acquire, and maintain, the skills and knowledge needed to perform a job to defined standards. In other words, training should be instrumental in developing and sustaining competence. Factors contributing to a person's competence include their prior experience, attitudes, skills and qualifications.

Competency Management Systems in Practice

Only when there is a clear understanding of the organisation's people skills can it really understand whether it is capable of delivering goods, services or both to its customer base of the required quality.

7. A Competence Management system should be fully integrated within an organisation if it is to address compliance issues, improve business performance and protect the health and safety of its employees, suppliers, contractors, customers and the general public. It should also protect the Environment.
8. Developing competence will not in itself guarantee safety, but it will help reduce the risks to levels that are as low as reasonably practicable (ALARP).
9. People may currently be competent, but they do not necessarily retain a satisfactory level of competence over time without periodic application of the competence supported by formal training, on-the-job training, or appropriate refresher training especially where such skills cannot be practical routinely tested i.e. in emergency response situations.
10. The risks associated with the implementation of a new or revised Competency Management System should be considered once the components of the system have been designed. For example, there may need to be a balance between the time needed for training and business productivity.
11. Organisations need to define the roles and associated responsibilities of those operating in the Competence Management System and ensure these are understood by the post-holders. It is important that collectively these roles are coherent and meet organisational aims.
12. In managing the competency requirements within an organisation there are a number of software programs available, for example 'SkillsXP', for managing skills, work experience, qualifications and training assessments. Typically such a database will record the competencies of a person matched to the tasks that they are required to perform. Benefits from a database tool include:
 - Facilitation of a gap analysis to identify if further training is required and provides input to establishing a training budget in a more systematic way than simply using the previous year's budget with an increase for inflation.
 - Provision of a clear demonstration of compliance with any legislative requirements.
 - An ability to undertake tactical resourcing decision and consider strategic HR planning such as succession planning, demographic profiling and identification of recruitment requirements.
 - An ability to identify a better match between training needs and their provision.
 - Opportunities to identify cost and time savings through economies of scale and more effective use of staff resources.
 - Ability to draw upon resources flexibility and transferability of skilled staff across different business units.
 - A demonstrable and auditable approach for matching agreed competency levels with assessed actuals and resulting training outcomes.
13. For any database system to work effectively, it will be important to identify the competencies needed for the roles / tasks undertaken and to describe each competency in a usable form that enables an assessment to be performed.

14. Within the highly regulated process industries such as nuclear, oil, gas, chemical processing, healthcare and transportation, all key tasks that contribute to personal or environmental safety are usually subjected to some form of Task Analysis across the organisation with assessed against a set of predetermined performance standards.
15. Good communication is crucial for the effective operation of a Competency Management System. In addition, special communication channels may need to be established for those not directly employed by the organisation such as its subcontractors.
16. Competency Management should be supported by a Competency Framework which typically consists of three levels. The first level usually covers competency categories which lead to a second level of competency groupings within each category. The final tier covers specific competencies and is where the performance criteria are identified. To assist in the management of this process it is suggested that the Competency Framework is supported by an appropriate Skills Assessment and Training Requirements database.
17. An organisation's Competency Framework should reflect both the industry and business objectives. Where the first tier competency categories include Human Factors then the second tier groups are likely to include:
 - Communication skills
 - People management
 - Customer service skills
 - Team skills
 - Leadership / decision making skills
 - Problem solving
 - Performance management
 - Technical skills
18. The reason for listing competencies explicitly in this way is to enable the skills and knowledge needed to perform certain roles and tasks to be identified. These competencies can then be assessed to demonstrate the level of a person's competence for each area that they are required to perform. This should follow a three step process covering:
 - the identification of the competencies needed for a role or task;
 - a performance standard for each competency; and
 - assessment of the role holder.
19. The table below provides some useful guidance in selecting the most appropriate assessment method for those undertaking task assessments.

Method	Strengths	Weaknesses	Key Issues
Observing someone carrying out their job by on-the job training and assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides high quality evidence. Assessment can be undertaken as part of line manager's job. Individuals become familiar with ongoing assessment. Provides continuous assessment basis. Evidence is produced regardless of whether it is used for assessment. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Opportunities to demonstrate competence across full range of activities may be limited. Assessors may be too overloaded to carry out assessments. Assessor/ trainee relationship. Needs to be managed to reduce any disruption to the workforce. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Need for trained assessors. Advantages in using multiple assessors. Need for clear lines of communication & QA measures. Need to have a checklist of what to observe.
Specially set tasks: skills, tests, simulations, projects, assignments.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> When normal work activity observation is not possible, special tasks or assignments can be set to generate the required evidence. A useful tool for generating evidence. Can be off-site and therefore avoid noisy or disruptive environments. Test conditions can be standardised for skill tests. Time for testing can be effectively allocated. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Removed from realistic working conditions. Individuals may act differently in test situations. Structure of projects or assignments is loose. Difficult to predict the exact type of evidence that will be generated Need to recognise that this evidence may not be of high quality. Can be expensive and time consuming. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Need for good planning and clear structure. Need to ensure a valid and appropriate simulation.
Oral questioning to supplement evidence of performance by asking questions to find out about performance in a different context or in other circumstances	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Valuable tool for collecting evidence across full range of activities. Useful to investigate underpinning knowledge. Can be rigorous and standardised. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assessors often answer their own questions. Not sufficient in itself to demonstrate competence. Least likely to reflect or represent real working conditions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Need assessors trained in questioning techniques. Requires inferential jump.
Written examination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Valuable for knowledge based activities. Can be well 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Also assesses ability to write and construct written material. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Danger that 'knowing' is confused with being able to do it.

Method	Strengths	Weaknesses	Key Issues
	structured to elicit key areas of knowledge and understanding.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Needs skilled assessors to judge. Lacks validity. Time burden for all involved. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Often unstructured or unplanned. Supplies supplementary evidence of actual performance
Multiple choice papers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Well designed questions can be standardised. Elicits key knowledge/ understanding in short timescale. Easy to mark / assess. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Always a probability of the correct answer being chosen randomly. Needs careful design Time away from work required. Difficult to provide feedback if test is re-used with same trainee. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Time and skills needed for design, delivery and marking. Supplementary evidence only – not direct evidence of actual performance.
Aptitude Tests. Typically include verbal reasoning, numerical reasoning, logic etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Quick and easy to apply. Well designed questions can be standardised. Useful to determine whether people have the underlying competency to carry out a job. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Always a certain probability of the correct answer being chosen at random. Needs careful design. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does not provide evidence of actual job performance. Mixed levels of predictive ability.
Psychometric tests Tests designed to consider the psychological characteristics of individuals and match these to a particular post	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Quick and easy to apply. Particularly useful for certain tasks where they are well established and the required characteristics are well established. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Need certain levels of expertise to ensure appropriate tests are selected for the post. Needs careful design. Danger that people labelled. Measures characteristics that influence behaviour but not how a person behaves when using these characteristics. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does not provide evidence of actual job performance – not direct measure of competence. Mixed levels of predictive ability.
Assessment Development Centres	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> High quality end result. Provides an opportunity for many of the methods to be used such as role play, exercises, assessed interviews etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can be costly and have high time demands for trainees and assessors. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The efficacy depends on the quality of the assessment methods used.

Understanding Training Management

Many leading companies are looking at ways to link skills development to strategic objectives as well as to demonstrate compliance with industry regulations. Typically the greatest cost of learning is the time people are not working in their normal formal jobs. Whilst the solution is to minimise the time spent in training and focus people specifically on the skills they need, it is important to identify the skill gaps of employees in terms of the organisation's specific business goals and strategies. Competency Management is now recognised as a key process to ensure that the individual and organisation training plans are in line with the business goals. Skills and Competency Management systems can help organisations improve the effectiveness of their training.

20. A training requirement is typically triggered by one of the following events:

- The recruitment of new personnel who may have to be trained in areas going beyond their current academic or vocational qualifications or experience.
- The introduction of new workplace regulations.
- A change in role by personnel, particularly where this change relates to safety, health or environmental responsibilities.
- A change to an existing process or piece of equipment.
- A change to, or the development of, a training course.
- A weakness identified by monitoring, review or audit.
- The need for re-training following people or organisational changes.
- The continuous training of existing staff that are required to maintain or upgrade their skills and knowledge.

21. In all cases employee development needs to be aligned to the needs of the business whether this is driven by compliance with legislation or by a desire to improve business efficiency and productivity.

22. In establishing a training function a Training Manager in large organisations is usually responsible for the following training activities:

- Co-ordinating training, including that provided by any in-house trainers or external bodies
- Leading the development and implementation of all training across the organisation.
- Providing a programme for training and qualification for all personnel responsible for instructing or training others. ("Training the Trainer")
- Providing quality assurance of training from internal and external sources.
- Leading the overall training evaluation and feedback process with support from line departments.
- Providing a periodic report to the business with feedback on the results of the evaluation of training programmes and training process improvements.
- Ensuring adequate training records are maintained by regular audit.
- Ensuring adequate training records for employees and contract staff employed by the organisation.
- Defining job, role or task specific training needs.
- Monitoring the effectiveness of training programmes being run across the organisation.

In smaller organisations these activities may be undertaken by line management.

23. Organisations should implement refresher training for infrequent and/ or operationally critical safety tasks.
24. Within the safety critical industries a Training Management System is used to address defined requirements. In many cases this draws heavily on the Systematic Approach to Training (SAT) which is internationally recognised as best practice and offers significant advantages over more conventional training processes through a quality assurance process that ensures the competence of staff. The SAT process also promotes a safety culture and assists management to more effectively monitor and improve training policies and practices. The SAT process encompasses the following steps:
- Analysis of training needs and the competencies required to perform a given job though Task Assessment.
 - The design of training to meet these needs, which involves converting the competence requirements into training objectives including identification of appropriate training tools and settings.
 - The development of training materials and tools such that all objectives can be met, as well as the training of trainers.
 - The implementation of training according to the procedures and materials developed e.g. training can be implemented in the classroom, workshop, simulator, by self-study or on-the-job training.
 - The evaluation of training effectiveness during and at the conclusion of training;
 - Feedback of evaluation results into the relevant phases and parts of the training process and programme.
25. The choice of training method will be influenced by the analysis of competence needs an evaluation of training effectiveness may also inform decisions about the adequacy of different aspects of the training system. The UK HSE advises that on-the-job training should be structured and supported by other forms of training.
26. The Training Management System should be reviewed on an annual basis and should cover the whole approach to training. In some businesses this may be a regulatory requirement. In general, this should cover:
- Review of course feedback from attendees.
 - Incidents in which a lack of, or inadequate, training was attributed as the route cause.
 - Failure rates of the training undertaken (i.e. proportion of trainees not successfully trained).
 - Refresher training programme and adherence to refresher requirements.
 - How well the training programme is being kept to.
 - The staff development process.
27. Training delivery should have clearly defined aims and objectives so that it is clear what the overall intent of the programme or course is and what specific performance-based learning will emerge from the training. Consideration should also be given to the appropriateness of the training delivery methods, which may include:
- Internal (company run) formal courses aimed to perform a job or task.
 - External (formal) courses. These often lead to a qualification following successful completion of an examination or other form of assessment to demonstrate that he/she is qualified to perform a job or task. Formal courses may also be run internally by external training providers.

- Workshop/mock-up training.
 - Simulator training.
 - Computer-based training, e.g. CD-ROM-based awareness training.
 - On-the-job training e.g. Supervised operation of activities and processes.
 - Continuing education e.g. University degree course, short course, or post-graduate qualification.
 - Study in own time.
28. One of the most important things to consider when developing the training objectives is the criteria by which the trainee can be considered competent following the training. It is suggested that all criteria be SMARTT (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Repeatable, Traceable and Time-based) wherever possible.
29. Once the training objectives are established they can be structured into a Training Plan that defines how to meet the objectives. For example, the type and subject of training, where the training will be conducted, the success criteria, the estimated resources requirements etc.
30. The information gathered during the identification of tasks and training needs stage can be formulated into a Training Module Plan and supporting Lesson Plans. As a guide, the Training Module Plan should contain the following:
- The training objectives covered by the module.
 - The entry level requirements for the training module. For example, the pre-requisite skills, knowledge and qualifications.
 - A timetable for the training module.
 - The requirements for implementation – resources equipment etc.
 - The applicable set of assessment criteria.
31. Job and task analysis can be a resource-intensive activity, and it may not be necessary for detailed analysis to be performed for every job and task. As such it may also be possible to define “job families” in which several related jobs are grouped together so that generic competence needs are identified. Many skills are transferable between jobs and often knowledge gained from one job can be used in another.
32. In looking at the selection and recruitment of new employees to carry out new activities, a suitable selection method should identify the relevant experience, skills and knowledge required for candidates taking on new or similar work. Typical selection tools include questionnaires, application forms, worked test examples, and interviews. A structured interview, with a single set of questions, provides the organisation with the opportunity to easily compare candidates.

Training Management in Practice

Choosing an appropriate training medium does not guarantee that training will be satisfactory. The way in which the training is delivered is of utmost importance.

33. For those companies considering a Competency Management linked to their training provision, a typical five-phase Systematic Approach to Training (SAT) is described below:

Phase 1 involves an **analysis** to develop a detailed understanding of the task that an individual is required to undertake and requires an Assessor to capture information on how the task is performed and the competencies that are required to perform the task. This information is usually gathered from procedures, expert knowledge and regulatory requirements.

34. Phase 2 covers the **design phase** which focuses on the development of a suite of training aims and objectives that are directly based on the competencies identified during Phase 1. This helps to ensure that the training is subsequently developed to directly support the trainee in achieving the required competencies for their job/role. It should be recognised that staff will have varied backgrounds and as such may attain required competencies via alternative routes. The aim of the training is to reconcile the competencies identified for the task with the competencies of the trainee. It is recommended that each training objective clearly specifies:

- Who the objective is aimed at.
- What skill is being trained.
- On what piece of equipment.
- Under which conditions; and
- To which performance standard.

These can be written up as Training Plans.

35. Phase 3 takes the Training Plan and **develops** this into the necessary training material required to deliver the training. Typically, the material required will include training aids, handouts, assessment methodologies and their associated competence assessment criteria.

36. Phase 4 **delivers** the training to meet the identified requirement. If effort is put into the previous development phases then the training should be delivered consistently and reliably to all attendees.

37. Phase 5 covers the **Review** of the process and the management of training records. In order to control expenditure and resources all training programmes should have local management approval prior to the start of the training programme as local management is often responsible for controlling a regular evaluation review of training, typically on an annual basis. In some industries long-term retention requirements apply to covering the training records which will necessitate their storage and archiving.

38. It should be the responsibility of local supervision, e.g. team leader, local manager or project manager, to identify the assessment and the roles, tasks and training needs in conjunction with the individual. This will require the following information to be gathered as part of the training management process:

- Identify the role of an individual or group of co-workers.
- Identify the tasks where skilled, qualified and experienced staff are needed.
- For each task, identify the specific performance competencies required, including experience requirements in line with required performance standards.

- Identify which individuals are required to undertake key tasks.
- Identify any training needs by comparing the existing identified competencies and experience of the trainees with the competencies and experience identified above.

The above information can be used to produce a simple matrix of individuals assessed against the required competencies and the training identified.

39. It is recommended that the frequency of training is based on two critical factors: firstly, the likelihood of skills decay and secondly an understanding of how critical the competency is to the business. Actual performance can be used as an indicator for whether the training frequency is adequate. Other triggers for reviews include Health and Safety audits, incidents, reportable accidents, behavioural safety observations, peer reviews, staff recruitment and succession planning.
40. Training materials need to be suitable for the training delivery method and training environment - as do the trainers. For the delivery of training to be effective it must be undertaken by trainers with a comprehensive practical, as well as theoretical, understanding of all aspects of the subjects being taught. Ideally they should hold, or have held, a post relevant to the field of their training responsibility.
41. A Personal Development Review (PDR) process should support the development of staff by matching the business and regulatory requirements with their career development, staff motivation and job satisfaction.
42. When staff transfer departments there should be a handover of training records so that the individual's former department retains training evidence for the individual's previous role. This will allow any future competency audit to be easily undertaken.

Commitment to Continuous Improvement

It is important that a continuous improvement philosophy becomes a natural part of the business. To ensure that the Competency and Training Management system functions correctly various metrics should be developed and used to monitor its effectiveness. This should examine:

- Qualitative performance indicators from the performance standards and the identified roles.
 - Quantitative measures with respect to compliance of assessed competency against company set targets.
 - Competency database outputs of information on the trainees.
 - Data from incidents and audits to identify training related problems.
43. Monitoring performance against agreed key assessment criteria lies at the heart of maintaining and developing standards of competence. Planned re-assessments of competency and consistent performance can be checked by a supervisor or manager. The frequency and sophistication of the monitoring should relate to the risks involved in the tasks being undertaken.
 44. To ensure that the required 'in-house' training needs are maintained, internal training providers who are responsible for the delivery of training should interface with the training management function to ensure that standards are consistent across the organisation.
 45. A regular review of an organisation's approach to Competency and Training Management should also identify if the recruitment, qualification and training system is functioning effectively and allow any remedial steps to be taken if necessary.
 46. The review should consider the effect of significant changes of technology, procedures and working practices. The competencies required should be identified when new technology, procedures or working practices are introduced. Ideally a review should be carried out as part of the procurement process for any new equipment.
 47. There will be some training requirements that cannot be provided by the company's internal resources. If external providers are used, it is recommended that these too are assessed annually to provide confidence of the standard of training being procured by the organisation.
 48. It is recommended that training programmes should be validated (by asking "what it was supposed to do?"), and evaluated ("Is this the right kind of training for our needs?") and finally that assessment of the training effectiveness is recorded.
 49. The nature of the training and development for each individual should be structured to provide the required range and depth of experience in line with the task assessment results against the required performance standards and the subsequent identified training needs. It is suggested that the process should initially develop and assess competence in normal activities and maintenance operations before progressing on to assessing emergency operations.
 50. Employees and their line managers (and subcontractors and their organisations) should be made aware of the importance of only carrying out those activities for which they have been assessed as competent, and their personal responsibility to assure their own competence.

Final thoughts

It is usually people that deliver business success through their actions – rarely the product by itself. As such, a robust Competency Management system that is fully aligned to the business needs and its objectives can provide appropriately skilled and more motivated personnel, reduce waste, increase shareholder value, demonstrate compliance with regulatory requirements and thus contribute to business success. It is acknowledged that in the main the topic is more likely to be of interest to larger organisations. However, this is not to say that smaller companies cannot use the concepts in an appropriately scaled-down way.

It is recommended that you seek expert help in areas you are unfamiliar with or have little implementation experience as a small amount of money spent up-front can help identify and mitigate many of the downstream problems often encountered.

Key to the introduction and implementation of a Competency Management Systems will be good communication and facilitation skills.



*Risktec Solutions Ltd
Wilderspool Park
Greenall's Avenue
Warrington
WA4 6HL*

*Website: www.risktec.co.uk
E-mail: enquiries@risktec.co.uk
Tel: +44 (0)1925 438010
Fax: +44 (0)1925 438011*