

Why are Safety and Competence intertwined?

20th August 2026



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One of the most underestimated risks within high-hazard industries is the level of unmitigated risk that can exist due to deficiencies in competence.

Many organisations invest heavily in:

- Engineering controls
- Safety systems
- Procedures
- Technology
- Compliance processes
- Physical safeguards

Yet these controls ultimately depend upon people being competent to:

- ✓ Understand them
- ✓ Apply them correctly
- ✓ Maintain them
- ✓ Supervise them
- ✓ Respond appropriately when conditions change

When competence is where it should be, the effectiveness of multiple safety barriers can degrade simultaneously.

This creates the potential for significant hidden risk.

At high-hazard sites, competence deficiencies may affect:

- Control room operations
- Permit to Work implementation
- Isolation management
- Maintenance activities
- Emergency response

For further information, go to www.competence-management.consulting or email office@competence-management.consulting

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- Process monitoring
- Alarm management
- Shift handover
- Contractor control
- Management decision-making
- Incident escalation

In many major accidents, investigations identify that personnel:

- ✗ Did not fully understand the hazard
- ✗ Misinterpreted abnormal conditions
- ✗ Failed to recognise deteriorating situations
- ✗ Applied procedures incorrectly
- ✗ Were inadequately supervised
- ✗ Lacked sufficient practical experience
- ✗ Were placed into roles beyond their capability

The concerning reality is that these risks can remain latent for years without obvious indicators.

An organisation may believe it is operating safely because:

- Audits are completed
- Procedures exist
- Training records are current
- Production targets are achieved

However, underlying competence weaknesses may still exist within critical roles and tasks.

This is particularly significant because competence deficiencies can undermine multiple layers of protection at the same time — increasing the potential likelihood of incidents considerably.

For major hazard industries, competence should therefore be treated as a safety-critical risk control, not simply a training or compliance activity.

The question organisations should continually ask is not: “Have people attended training?”

But rather: “Can people consistently perform safely and effectively under real operational conditions — especially during abnormal situations?” and “What assurance is in place to demonstrating that?”

#Competence #ProcessSafety #CompetenceManagement #OperationalRisk
#HumanFactors #SafetyCritical #SafetyCulture #HighHazardIndustries
#MajorHazard #OperationalExcellence