

VERIFICATION OF COMPETENCE: WHY, WHAT, WHO, HOW, WHERE AND WHEN DISCUSSIONS WITH THE OIL AND GAS SECTOR

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This project aimed to explore the practice of verifying workers as competent in the oil and gas sector. It examined the determinants of the verification of competence (VOC) process and opportunities to significantly refine and improve activities to maximise quality and efficiency, reduce cost and grow industry confidence in current VOC outcomes across the sector.

ACTIVITY

The project comprised desktop research into national and global cross-sector VOC processes and consultation with operators and contractors in the oil and gas sector, industry bodies and the offshore regulator, NOPSEMA. Discussions explored the stance of the industry and the regulator around VOC, examined the effectiveness of current practices and the challenges faced by operating companies, and assessed industry appetite for a unified, improved approach to VOC in the sector.

PROJECT FINDINGS

NOPSEMA deferred queries about operator requirements to the *Safety Case* which, although contains criteria setting out expectations relating to operator responsibilities to ensure competence of their workforce, makes no reference to specific VOC activities in the sector. Under *Safety Case*, the offshore oil and gas sector must take sufficient and reliable action to ensure the workers on a facility have the required capabilities to

undertake their job roles in the contexts that are present across all possible scenarios.

Although significant efforts and resources are poured into these activities, the breadth of approaches currently used by companies and contractors means these do not necessarily provide the sector with consistent, purposeful and credible information about worker capabilities. A lack of industry confidence in current VOC outcomes often result in costly, repetitive cycles of VOC being conducted by operating companies to assure worker site and plant based competency, particularly in relation to contractor mobilisation.

Why Verify Competencies

Competency assurance processes are a regulatory requirement and practiced by organisations as a risk management strategy to ensure workers are able to undertake the work required of them in the context of their workplace, site or plant and to ensure both personal safety and process integrity. Verification of

competence, although not mandated, provides an avenue to ensure potential workforce risks are mitigated, required skills are demonstrated and industry relevant role outcomes achieved.

What to Verify

In many instances, the focus of current practices is a reassessment process rather than a verification risk based approach in the context of the workplace. Mapping job roles and tasks against risk identification should determine which competencies to verify, and include verification of technical and critical thinking capabilities of individuals. Verification should be based on identified major hazards, safety critical tasks and safety critical job roles.

RESOURCES

INDUSTRY

TRAINING

COUNCIL

KEY ISSUES AND PRIORITY ACTIONS



Who Should Verify Competence

Verification should be carried out in the workplace by a person responsible for the performance outcomes of the workers, someone with significant technical or vocational expertise who understands the skills and knowledge required to carry out the designated roles. This person needs to be able to monitor performance, assess competency against skills required, identify any deficiencies and determine the best actions to address these.

How

This can be a sequenced approach. Paper based verification can confirm attainment and authenticate qualifications, experience and training mapped against clear job role profiles and requirements, and used to determine whether mobilisation should occur. Once the essential requirements have been verified, on-site supervisors can then apply practice based verification of worker performance. Much of the evidence used to judge worker competence can be drawn by observing worker performance.

Where

To minimise resourcing and mobilisation time, a twofold process could be used to verify

competence. Paper based verification could occur pre-mobilisation and be carried out by recruiters or human resources departments. Practice based verification needs to occur on-site where the mobilised person's performance would be monitored to determine role and environment specific competency and ensure appropriate supervision and specific training occurs to address skills gaps or performance monitoring.

When

Literature points to verification of competence being applied in situations which are new, changing, high risk, problematic or those in need of quality assurance. The majority of the time the practice of verification could occur is when a new person joins a new workplace. For existing workers, the most effective way to maintain currency of skills, knowledge and performance is applying these capabilities to real work situations, receiving supervision, feedback and coaching to refine and improve performance.

GOING FORWARD

Industry sees a need for a more unified, robust, systematic approach to VOC. Such an approach would deliver industry

relevant outcomes to avoid repetitive practices, increase confidence and trust in the processes applied across operating companies, achieve cost reductions and business efficiencies, and quicker pathways to mobilisation. The approach should be linked to a risk based model, be founded on evidence based practice, underpinned by standards and guidelines and shared understanding and consistent use of tools and processes, allowing for flexibility to accommodate differences in the sector. There is also agreement a centrally governed, common records management system would provide transparency across industry, further benefit mobilisation and cost reduction. Benefits must encompass consolidation, transferability, transparency, consistency and portability.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Establish an industry reference group to explore and guide a unified approach to the practice of VOC and determine industry capacity to contribute to any ongoing activity.

Develop a set of guidelines for gaining some immediate consistency in relation to VOC activity.

Examine industry appetite for a set of guidelines to establish consistent content for inclusion in the *Safety Case* submission around the requirements of competency assurance.

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