

USING COMPETENCY BASED METHODS TO DEVELOP YOUR NEXT TRAINING COURSE

Introduction

Training courses often provide attendees with the information that the trainer wants them to know, rather than the information they need to know to competently carry out their duties. This is a subtle, but extremely important difference.

Courses provided by Registered Training Organisations that are recognised nationally, must comply with the Assessment and Workplace Competency Standard. The Standard provides a framework for assessing courses based on the knowledge and skills attendees must achieve and be able to display in order to competently carry out certain duties in the workplace. The methodology used to develop competency based assessments is a very useful tool that can be used by anyone endeavouring to develop a new training course.

Identifying Competencies

The first step in developing a set of competencies is to identify the various jobs, tasks or core areas of knowledge the attendees must be able to carry out in their workplace. These are referred to in the Standard as “Units of Competence”. Each Unit of Competence can be further broken down into “Elements”, which are the individual steps that need to be complete in order to perform the task or job. Finally, elements can be broken down into “Performance Criteria”, or the knowledge and skills the attendee must have in order to competently perform each task or step in the process.

Lets have a look at a simple example that demonstrates this process. Suppose we were designing a course called “The Competent Motorist”. One activity our competent motorist may need to perform is the ability to change a tyre. A breakdown of the competencies may look something like the table shown below.

Unit of Competency (job, task, knowledge area) : Changing a Tyre

Elements (individual steps in the task)	Performance Criteria (skills & knowledge to perform each step)
Securing the car	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Parked in safe location away from traffic – Parked car on level and solid ground – Know to apply handbrake before commencing – Ability to identify which wheel to chock – Able to securely chock the wheel
Jacking up the car	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Know where the jack is stored – Know where the jack points are – Ability to set up and operate the jack – Ability to raise the car safely
Removing the wheel nuts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Know where tools are located – Loosen wheel nuts prior to jacking up the car – Store wheel nuts in safe location
Replacing the tyre	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Ability to get spare tyre out of boot – Ability to remove old tyre and place into boot – Ability to place spare tyre onto car
Doing up the wheel nuts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Ability to thread wheel nuts – Know to tighten nuts hand tight first and then finish tightening after lowering car – Know the order to tighten nuts – Know how tight the nuts need to be tightened
Lowering the car	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Ability to lower car safely
Packing up and leave	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Collect all items used – Ability to put items back where they came from – Ability to safely enter back into traffic stream

Once the analysis has been completed, the Elements and Performance Criteria list all the knowledge and skills required by the attendees to perform the task. This information can then be used to develop the structure and content of the training package. The process ensures that the training material contains all the information necessary to carry out the task competently. Even though the above analysis is simplistic, the process can be applied to any task, no matter how complex.

An example more familiar to most people working in the environmental management industry are the various types of training and awareness packages that may be developed. One form of awareness is the General Environment Awareness course that all people in organisations should attend. A competency analysis for operational personnel in a typical company may look like the one shown below.

Unit of Competency (job, task, knowledge area) : General Environmental Awareness (operators)

Elements (individual steps in the task)	Performance Criteria (skills & knowledge to perform each step)
Company Environmental Policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Know the major points in the Policy (legal compliance, continual improvement, minimise pollution and impact) - Know where the Policy is located in the workplace - Know the use made of the Policy is setting the company's environmental agenda
Basics of the company EMS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Know and can explain the major steps used in the EMS (Planning, Implementation, Checking & Correcting) - Know who maintains the EMS - Know their role in the EMS - Can access EMS documents relevant to their duties
Environmental risks (or aspects)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Know the major risks faced by the company - Know the risks specific to their own workplace - Know about the effect of pollutants emitted from the company on the environment, particularly in an emergency or following an accident
Common Operating and Emergency Procedures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Know and can implement basic spill response procedure - Aware of safety requirements relevant to chemicals used in their work area, particularly in an emergency and can use personal protective equipment - Know and can implement operating procedures specific to the risks in their work area - Aware of waste segregation and recycling procedures
Basic Environmental Legislation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Know about the EPA, their role and powers - Know about the company licence, the general licence requirements and requirements specific to their operations - know about company and personal responsibilities under the legislation - Know about company fines - Know about personal fines and jail terms - Know who to talk to for further information

Again, the Elements and Performance Criteria provide a comprehensive guide when developing the training package.

The training developer's next task is to determine the best method of presenting the material. This may take the form of classroom sessions, practical exercises, regular short single topic sessions, or some combination of the above. More detail concerning presentation methods was provided by the author in the Training section of last years AIG Environmental Management Implementation Handbook and should be referenced.

Following presentation of the training material, the course providers may wish to carry out a competency assessment to determine if each attendee understood the material and is competent to perform the tasks. Competency assessments may be carried out by many means, including written questions and exams, verbal examinations or observation of the attendee implementing the skills learnt in exercises or on-the-job. Workplace competency assessments is in itself a broad subject that is worthy of a more detailed review, which unfortunately cannot occur in this paper. For those wishing to gain more skills in competency assessments and use of competency tools, most TAFEs and many other training institutions provide 2 to 3 day courses on how to Plan, Conduct and Review Workplace Assessments, as part of the Certificate IV in Workplace Training.

Conclusion

A competency analysis is a relatively simple, but powerful tool that can be used by anyone developing a training course. The tool provides a means of developing a comprehensive training program tailored specifically for the workplace and one that ensures personnel have the necessary knowledge and skills to carry out their assigned duties.

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