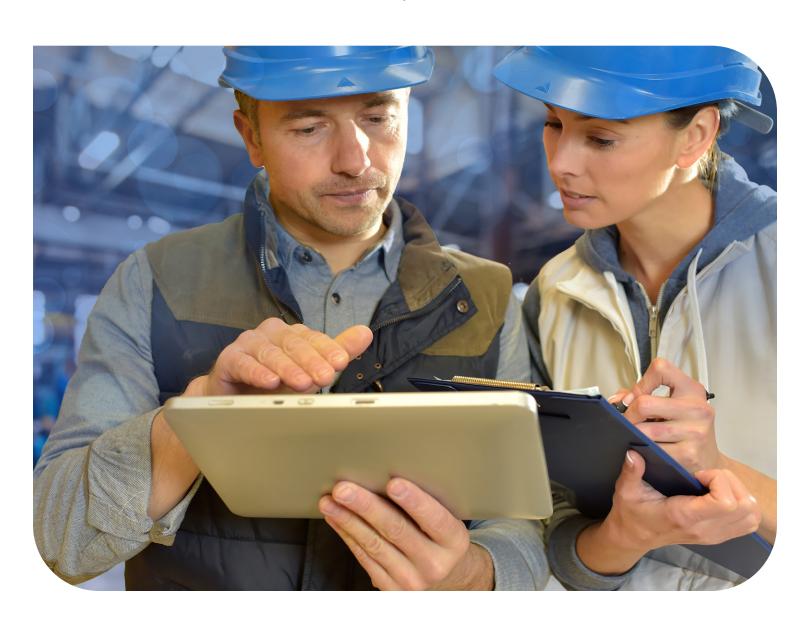# Ensuring employees are prepared.
Establishing Job Performance Competency

HSI Industrial Skills — Reliability Matters

DESIGN A TRAINING PROGRAM TO
Emphasize Fundamental Skills

The emergency room is the last place you want to be at 3:00 am. The ER doctor recommends surgery for your condition. You ask him if he's done it before, and he replies, *"No, but I've seen it done a thousand times."* This situation is not how you want to find out if your doctor is competent. Unfortunately, it's difficult to create extreme situations in training. In a utility control room emergencies are rare, but when they happen, you want the most skilled individual in control – just like you do in the ER.

How can you create effective training for worst-case scenarios and allow employees to learn from mistakes without compromising safety? You can address these concerns by **designing a training program that emphasizes fundamental skills, or job competencies**, needed for your employees. Your program should **include rigorous training that closely simulates real-world situations**, ensuring your team is well-prepared to make the best decisions, regardless of their experience level.

A	Analysis
D	Design
D	Development
I	Implement
E	Evaluate

As part of the implementation piece of the ADDIE process, job performance competency requires realistic training and accurate assessments for managers to evaluate their team's skills and readiness. Training managers can use tools like job aids, scenarios, refreshers, and simulators to identify strengths and improve weak areas in their employees.

Why is job performance competency important?

If your employees don't use their skills, they'll forget them. Eventually, they might not even recognize a challenge. To continue performing a skill well, your training needs to simulate real situations and test responses effectively. Testing usually involves

recalling facts from memory. But, if your employees don't use the facts, they'll quickly forget them. Long-lasting memory is formed through repeated routines until they become second nature or reflex actions.

Employees need these instinctive reactions to make the best decisions in any situation. Training and evaluations must be integrated to assess these reflexes and ensure competence beyond reciting memorized tasks. This skill set involves shifting from thinking to acting. When faced with a challenge, a well-trained employee grasps the problem and knows how to solve it, thanks to routines that simulate such situations.

To attain this skill level, training programs must incorporate consistent practice for your team. Evaluations should replicate real-world scenarios, letting employees demonstrate their abilities. Likewise, the training routine should mirror the evaluation. As with any training, your proficiency will reflect what you practice. If your team practices answering questions, they'll be prepared for that. If they practice making the best decisions in various situations, they'll be ready when faced with real-life situations.

Job Performance Competency Applications

In 2003, the Northeast Blackout affected 55 million people. It happened because of a lack of situational awareness and emergency preparedness.

The 2003 Northeast Blackout led to new regulations in the energy industry and emphasized the need for training to manage unexpected situations.

Before the blackout, many organizations used training programs that relied on simple assessments like multiple-choice or oral exams. These assessments didn't show practical skills or the ability to handle real-life situations, which left employees unprepared for tough conditions.

With the advancement of computer-based simulations in training, blackouts have become less frequent and smaller in scale. To maintain this trend, training should equip employees to make the best decisions in any situation and regularly assess their skills to prevent even minor outages.
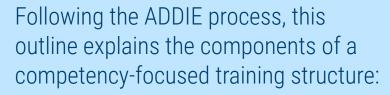
Job Performance Competency Steps

Creating an effective training program is time-consuming. It's important to break down skills into developmental steps so individuals can acquire them faster and maintain them throughout their careers. Job descriptions are often turned into tests and on-the-job tasks. Unfortunately, this process, which relies on random experience, doesn't necessarily build the skills employees need to effectively manage challenges they face over time.

Job performance competency replaces random experience with tough, scenario-based evaluations. These assessments require training for employees to recognize situations and respond correctly. This structure guides new trainees through increasingly challenging situations, helping them achieve and sustain a high skill level.

Following the ADDIE process, this outline explains the components of a competency-focused training structure:

- **Job Description**
  - Complete list of all tasks a position is responsible to know and do, not just requirements from HR
  - Identify relationships between the employee's job, the jobs around them, and their reporting structure
  - Determine external factors that impact the job, such as other organizations and the environment

- **Learning Objectives**
  - Establish learning steps that start with basic knowledge and gradually progress to include complex concepts required for advanced competency
  - Develop standards that define competency for each level of skill development

- **Contingency Simulation**
  - Address all known circumstances an employee could encounter
  - Identify the most effective way to recreate these scenarios
  - Develop hands-on training to give your team the most realistic exercises in dealing with challenging situations

- **Examination Components**
  - Apply testing that realistically reflects the training received by the employees
  - Focus on key areas to find opportunities for additional or corrective training

- **Learning Progression**
  - Use a long-term roadmap for steadily enhancing skills toward the next level of promotion
  - Establish specific milestones for performing competently and being able to train others

- **Routine Reinforcement**
  - Perform regularly planned exercises to encourage the best performance
  - Implement realistic evaluations to reinforce training and support promotions

To develop highly skilled employees, it's crucial to support job performance competency. Managers and trainers need to effectively prepare their teams by including comprehensive tests and practical exercises in their training program. These assessments help supervisors see the skills in action and guide trainees to improve their skills.

Assessing activities as well as knowledge allows for realistic simulation in the training program. Unlike a simple written test, these **simulations help employees progress from beginner to master** while practicing and training on the same equipment and scenarios they'll work with.

No matter how big or small an organization is, investing time in establishing and maintaining job performance competency ensures employees are genuinely ready for any situation.

Implementing this comprehensive training approach requires the support of the whole organization to invest the necessary time and attention to detail for skill mastery. Whether you're starting a new program or modifying an existing one, **everyone in an operations or control environment must prioritize the time needed for proper training, testing, and skill reinforcement**. Management also needs to fully support the emphasis on job performance competency. While it may seem challenging and repetitive at first, in the long-term, employees will build experience faster and you will have the assurance your team isn't just confident, but also competent.

About HSI

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