

INTERNATIONAL STANDARDS FOR RESPONDERS¹

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ABSTRACT: *Effective spill response requires trained and competent people, but how do we assess the competence of staff involved in the operation? Within the oil spill response industry there are few systems which assess the competence of staff to undertake their roles. Suitability is often left to the discretion of the response contractor, based on the provision of training but training does not guarantee competence. Therefore as an industry, when using response contractors, does the organisation using the services of the clean-up contractor really know that the team is competent to accomplish the job and are they getting value for money? The terminology used to describe the roles of members in a response team is not common, having a different interpretation in each country. In many cases it is better to describe the competency for the job rather than the use a post title. These are the questions that the OSRL / EARL Alliance have been answering over the past year. A solution has been achieved by developing a Competency Matrix / Database. Through the use of this database we have been able to gain many useful outputs such as personnel development plans, training needs and most importantly a measure of staff competence. By having the ability to measure staff competence, we are now able to demonstrate the level of competence that our response staff require to complete the different tasks required in a spill response. It is important that the industry has confidence the response to the spill is being conducted in the most effective manner and that safety, quality and efficiency are not being compromised at any time. This paper will describe how a system of competency management can ensure that competence is assessed and measured and thus benchmarks and standards can be set for the whole industry.*

Discussion

Introduction. The need for a competency matrix of some description became apparent when addressing the fundamental requirements of manning and operating a Tier Three Centre.

- How many individuals are required to staff such a centre and what skills do they need to fulfil the job functions?
- How does management assess the skills that are currently available within the organisation?

These very selfish and internally focused questions led OSRL on a path of developing a competency model for its staff. As the thought process developed it became apparent that there were many other benefits, both internal and external, which could be derived from such work.

What is a competency matrix, how can it help an organisation manage its staff and what are the benefits with regard to the management of a response organisation? This paper will attempt to address these questions.

The difference between training and competence is significant. It is possible to train an individual in a particular area, however there is no guarantee of the level of competence as a result of that training. Moreover, the individual may require further training in order to gain expertise in a specific facet of the task. The Competency Matrix sets out to define all of these training and experience requirements to allow proficiency in a range of response tasks that measure the level of expertise of the individual. The deviations or variance from these standards provides a gap analysis that can be explored and filled through recruitment or training at both organisational and personal levels thus allowing focused use of resources at every level.

What's in a name? One of the key benefits of the Competency Matrix is the standardisation of the skills reflected in the names given to various levels of responder throughout the world. Names range from Technicians to Senior Technicians, from Responder to Master Responder, but what do they all mean? More importantly what do you get when you request their assistance? The Competency Matrix provides a benchmark for the skills required for each of the tasks which need to be undertaken which makes comparisons much simpler. It also permits an external organisation to see which skills and competencies are present in the response organisation which allows a better appreciation of the value and expertise that they bring.

The basic framework. In order to develop a Competency Matrix a basic framework must be established. This framework consists of a number of fundamental relationships which, when combined, will give all the data required to support the matrix.

In this data set, the management of the Centre can assess the number of individuals required to undertake the range of tasks related to oil spills. Examples include, duty managers, beachmasters and dispersant specialists. The number of response staff in the organisation can then be assessed to meet the operational requirement.

Response team / Competency. Once the tasks have been identified it is necessary to specify the competency skills and training which are required to fulfil the tasks. These may be a mixture of statutory training programmes such as Hazwoper, offshore survival or vocational training within the organisation. By itemising each of these skills, the training regime can be accurately developed.

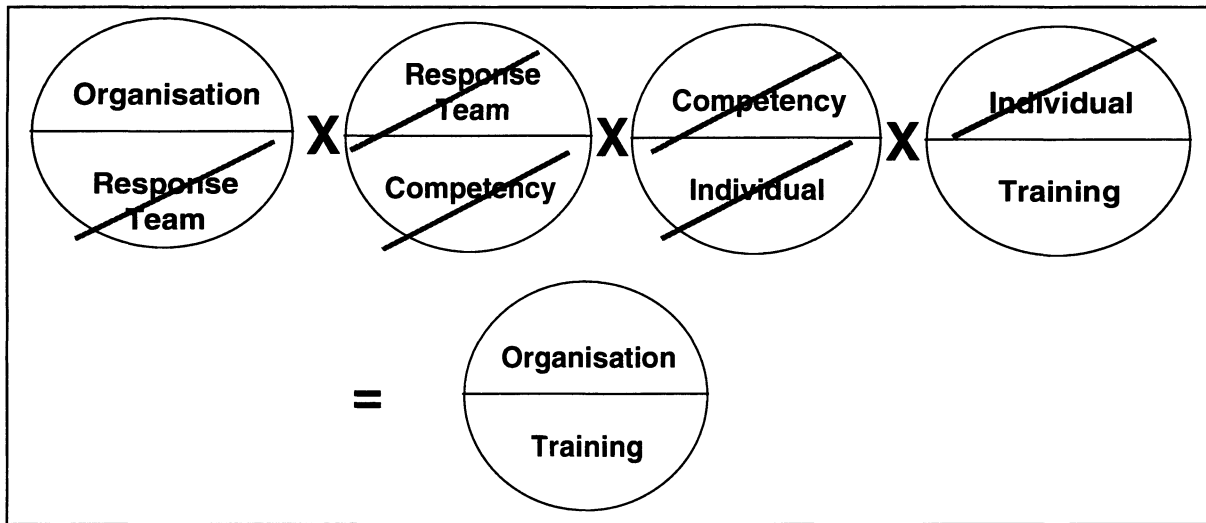


Figure 1. Organisation /Response Team

Competency / Individual. Having defined the competencies required within the organisation they must then be matched to the competency of the individual. These are normally self-assessed by the individual and validated by the relevant linemanager. Simple measures are used to mark the competence of an individual in a particular task. These are:

Level	Competence
1	Able to conduct the task with Supervision
2	Able to conduct the task without Supervision
3	Able to train others

These competence levels are then entered into the matrix enabling the management to assess the level of competence within the organisation. It also allows the individual to record their particular skill level in any specific area, identifying training needs and personal development.

Focused training. The use of such a model provides a very focused training programme, ensuring that the effect is targeted, thus achieving maximum benefit for both the organisation and the individual. Gaps in particular skills and competencies are clearly identified and can be corrected in a structured manner. Refresher dates for periodic training are highlighted and can be planned into the overall programme. Such an approach means that the training budget used is both optimised and seen to directly affect the response capability based on individual staff development.

Why assess the assessor? The competency matrix could be used as an internal or an external system of assessing competency. From an internal perspective, management within the organisation can assign the prescribed standards and target proficiency levels.

There is currently no standard ‘qualification’ for an oil spill technician. Should one be devised in the future, the competencies required could be derived from such a training programme. Lastly the matrix provides an audit capability that could be used to assess the proficiency levels of those providing oil spill response services to the industry.

Personnel qualifications database. The qualifications database was developed using a common off the shelf program thus ensuring that the matrix would be suitable to share with other

organisations. The outputs and concept were solely developed by OSRL and a database programmer was contracted to produce the matrix with the following key output considerations:

1. To be able to clearly identify the number of personnel and their level of competence for each discreet task. This will also highlight the shortfall and the training needs.
2. To be able to review the overall level of preparedness for the Company. This is a measure that must be capable of being interrogated as and when required.
3. To be able to do searches and produce reports on staff i.e. who has or has not a first aid qualification. Also be able to bring up the next “level” of available staff who do not meet the exact requirement, but come within, for example an 80% match of the standard.
4. To have links to the job description of each task so this can be passed to the customer when required.
5. To have the option to store general training records.

How the software works. The software works by the use of multiple tables storing the various data such as personnel, tasks, skills, competencies and training records. The matrix then enables the user to achieve three main outputs:

1. **Task Competencies**
The Task Competencies display the minimum level of skill required to qualify for competence in each task. This is where the skill level is set.
2. **Employees Competence**
The Employees Competence displays the level of skill achieved by each individual member of staff. This is where the skill level is set for the employee.
3. **Training Course Management**
The Training Course Management will display training courses that staff have attended or will be attending and their refresher date if relevant.

What are the outputs that can be achieved. The data output reports are the whole purpose of the process of the package OSRL has developed. These reports have been designed with the customer, management and employee in mind to give useful and clear information as part of a decision making management and training tool.

Some main reports are as follows:

- To show job descriptions, the number of qualified people we require at each job as a company to respond, and the actual amount of qualified people we have for that job.
- Individuals can run reports for courses / training that he or she needs to undertake in order to gain a certain job role status.
- The user can report the data for refresher training required for that year / month for the company as a whole, by department or for each employee.
- Report on the closest match of people suitable for the job role, even if not fully qualified, which can be an aid to individual development.

Conclusion

Within the oil spill response industry, there are few systems which assess the competence of staff to undertake their roles. A solution has been achieved by developing a competency Matrix / database.

The Competency Matrix ensure that staff development becomes an integral and extremely visible part of the Company operation. The inclusion of well-structured targeted training programmes encourage a high standard of training across departments and sites. Line Managers take greater responsibility for staff development and secure their training objectives through

the proactive use of the reporting system. Most importantly, this allows the customer of the spill contracting company to appreciate the competence of the staff that they are contracting and ensure that they are getting value for money.

The emphasis on a more structured approach to training, combined with the routine reassessment of staff competency, will result in the retention of skilled and experienced staff which will further develop the quality of the Company's services.

Biography

Stuart joined OSRL as a Technician in 1995 after serving as a Mechanical Fitter with ESSO Petroleum Company at their Fawley refinery in Southampton England

In his time with OSRL, he has responded to several major incidents including the Sea Empress and the Nakhodka in Japan 1997. He also served as Manager of a Rapid Response Team in Georgia (Former Soviet Union) during a pipeline refurbishment project.

Stuart has spent a significant time in the training department, during which he has presented and directed training courses and exercises world-wide.

In May 2000 Stuart was promoted to one of the Operations departments Team Leaders, in this role Stuart is responsible for the day – day running of a response Team.

¹ *DISCLAIMER: The opinions and views expressed in this paper are solely those of the author and do not necessarily represent the views of any other party.*

