Embedding a Competency System Guidance

Version 1.0

SUMMARY

Whether you are building a new competency system for your organisation from the wealth of framework options available, or looking to improve on the sustainability of your existing approach this guide will help you design, embed and sustain.

While no single competency framework exists for the environmental services industry, it is relatively easy to build the detailed competencies from a range of existing frameworks which relate to the industry. The challenge however is to create a supporting system which is simply structured and packaged in such away that it is engaging, relevant and fully embedded.

INTRODUCTION

This guidance has been produced by ESA's H&S Strategic Group with the approval and endorsement of ESA's Board. It represents a sensible, reasonable and proportionate approach for embedding a competency system.

This guidance forms part of a suite of resources produced by the Environmental Services Association (ESA) which aim to address the priority risk areas identified within our H&S Strategy. Collectively, this suite of guidance represents ESA's commitment to continued improvement in our sector's health and safety performance and to raise health and safety standards for the betterment of all those who work in the industry or are associated with its activities.

The principles contained within this guidance are equally relevant to decision makers across the full spectrum of organisations that make up the waste management sector. We would therefore actively encourage its dissemination and uptake beyond the ESA Membership.

This guide provides structure to allow you to ensure your system has a logical flow, and presents a package of process and tools, based upon implementation best practices, which guides you through its implementation, roll out and long term sustainability.

MAIN BODY OF GUIDANCE
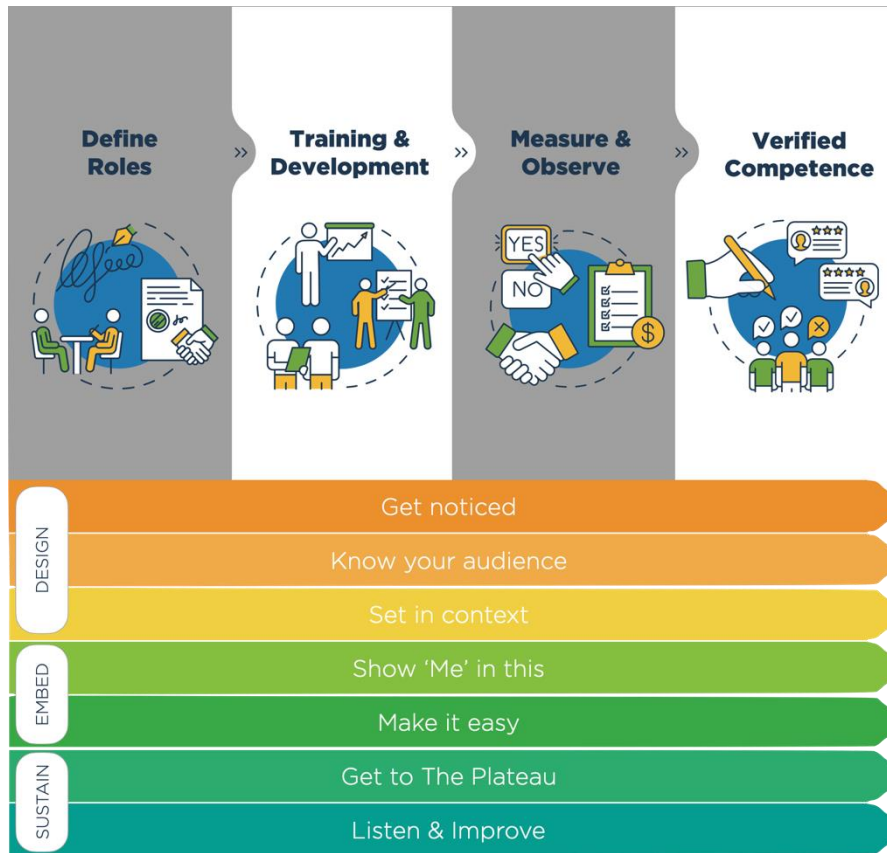
1 | Key components

A simple four component flow to ensure you focus on building the essential parts of your competency system. This flow moves from defining the training competency required for different roles, through providing that required training & development, to measuring and observing the outcomes, and finally verifying the competency.

2 | Embedding principles

A set of seven principles which give guidance on the design, embedding and sustaining of the entire competency management system, so that it is fit for purpose, simple, engaging and ultimately successful in delivering value.

1 | Key components

Define Roles

Embarking upon a competency programme requires full leadership commitment from the outset, to ensure resources and time are made available.

The first stage requires creating concise job descriptions & specifications. Against which training and development plans can be built.

Do not underestimate the time and resource required to build and roll out a full competency programme. Create a realistic plan for each stage.

Using your chosen competency framework, you can build the competencies you require for each of the roles.


competently supervise...	
TECHNICALLY	1 Communication
YOURSELF	2 Development
SAFELY	3 Problem Solving
LEGALLY	4 Coaching
THE BIG PICTURE	5 Managing Time
OTHERS	6 Maintaining a Standard
	7 Behaviours & Relationships

Training & Development

In the second stage you capture the opportunities to train & develop employees, providing the skills, tools & knowledge from which competency can be attained.

Programme overviews can be supported by detailed standards and learning outcomes that establish expectations for both the employee and the organisation.

Consideration needs to be given to the learning styles and preferences of individuals, so that the most effective format is aligned with the learner.

Also be cognisant of learner technology competence in using any defined learning approach.
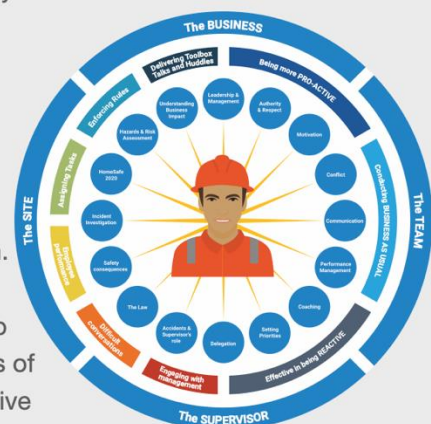
1 | Key components

Measure & Observe »

In the third stage you define a mechanism by which you will observe and measure the training and development being applied in practical situations.

Observers and assessors need to be appropriately trained in carrying out this task.

By recording these observations and measurements you will build up an evidenced based that assesses application in configurable real-life situations.

effective application

proven understanding
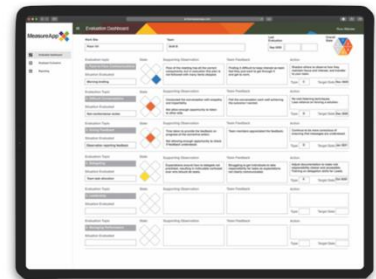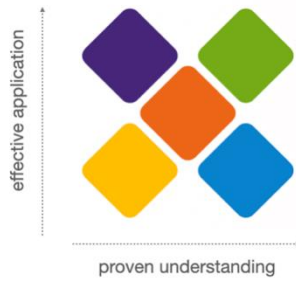
Verified Competence

In the final stage, the measurement & observation process feeds into a concise set of competencies that can be reliably scored based upon development achievements and evidence of sustained application in real situations.
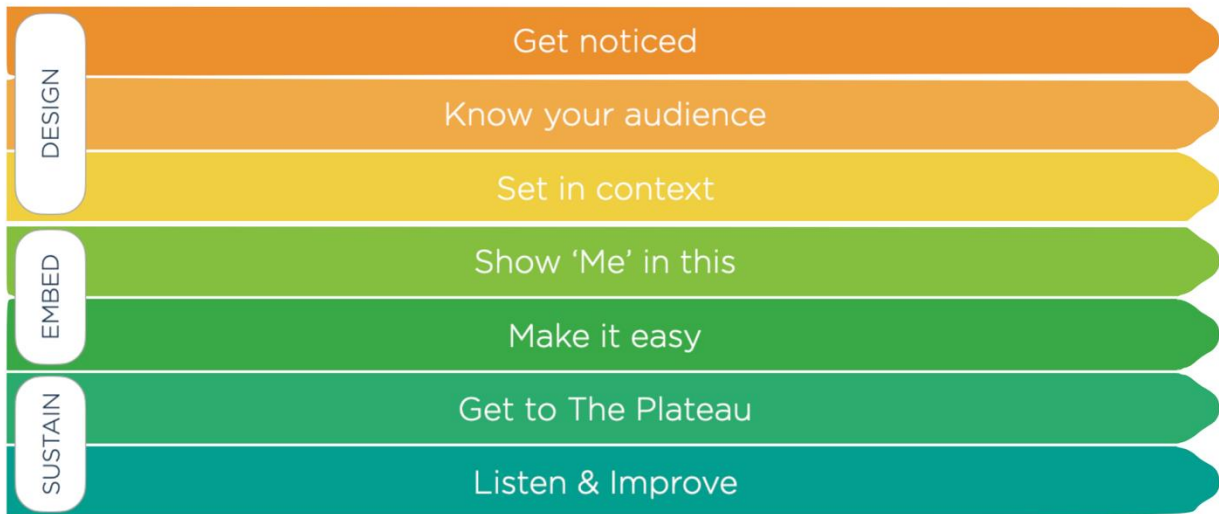

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Always Often Occasionally Never

acquiring
"proactive in using learning opportunities, e.g. lunch-and-learns, technical lectures, vendor presentations."

disseminating
"seen as a technical resource, and transfers the most current knowledge and skills to others."

using
"application of new technical knowledge / skills."

2 | Embedding principles

DESIGN	Get noticed
	Know your audience
	Set in context
EMBED	Show 'Me' in this
	Make it easy
SUSTAIN	Get to The Plateau
	Listen & Improve

Just having a competency framework and associated system is just the start. This set of seven principles gives guidance on the design, embedding and sustaining of the entire competency management system, so that it is fit for purpose, simple, engaging and ultimately successful in delivering value.

These should be considered in parallel to the functional components of the system, and are split into three main stages: 'design' of the system; 'embedding' the system, and 'sustaining the use of the system.

DESIGN — Get noticed

Giving an identity to your Competency System means "we are serious about this". An overarching identity allows you to ensure there is consistent recognition across the business, and can help to re-enforce leadership commitment to the programme.

The identity can also be used to communicate a key message about the goal of the system.

It gives the entire system gravitas - the identity may be linked to corporate branding and those give the confidence that the company fully supports it.

Applying some creative thinking to an identity allows you to deliver something which is eye-catching and engaging - people notice it and talk about and take an interest in what is going on.

SUPERVISION **READY.**

EXPLORER

2 | Embedding principles

Know your audience

If you are to expect someone to use your system, you need to appreciate the circumstances under which they will use it, their capabilities and the challenges they face.

Start out by consulting them as stakeholders. Find about what would make it easy for them; differing circumstances in different parts of the organisation.

No-one immediately likes change or increases to their work activities - so explore the reasons and the 'excuses' as to why implementing a competency system would meet resistance. Design the system to incorporate genuine issues; design the roll out to address excuses.
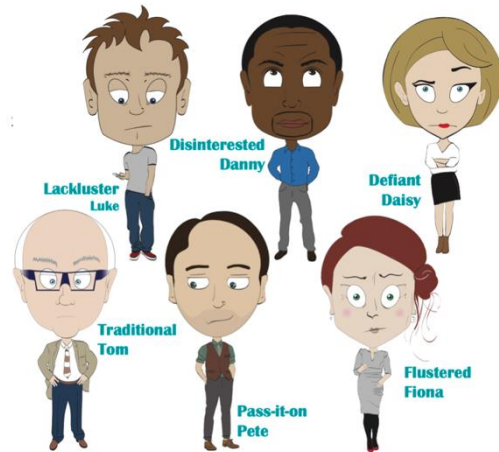
Meet the
EXCUSES

DESIGN

Set in context

A competency system needs to reflect reality. The problem with adopting more generic frameworks is that they may not entirely fit your organisation.

Engage with those who undertake roles to walk through your system looking for elements which are missing or irrelevant.

Define the contextual situations in which observation and measurement can be made. Guide observers and assessors to the opportunities to assess in everyday situations.

And link the communication about the system to other programmes and initiatives in the organisation, e.g. safety campaigns, to show how the system delivers visible value to the organisation.

2 | Embedding principles

Show 'Me' in this

Without clear visibility of who is expected to do what in relation to a competency system, users will naturally resist adopting and view with scepticism. This leads to confusion, inconsistency and frustration.

Therefore the design of the process, materials, IT systems, etc., needs to be structured in a 'user-centric' manner.

We need to make it easy for people to rapidly identify where they fit AND what the expectation is upon them.
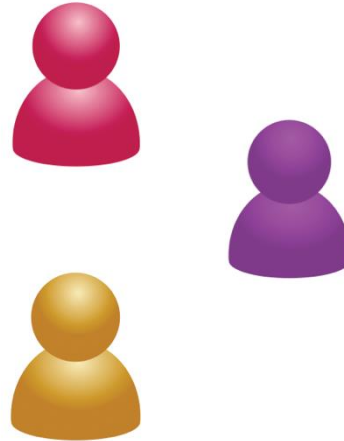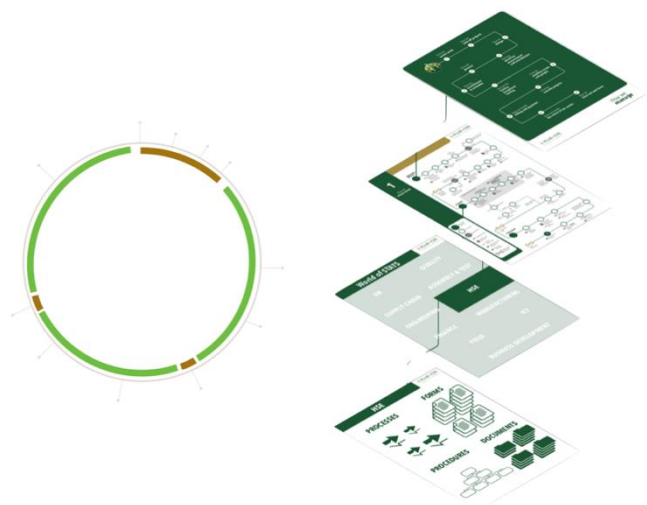
EMBED

Make it easy

Any process/system needs a clear structure so that it is obvious how to use it, and easy to navigate through it. This becomes even more of an issue when combining processes to create an overarching system.

A well designed structure allows people to abstract it - creating process in layers such that users are only dealing with a 'single field of view' at any one time makes it more likely that a process will be used, and used correctly.
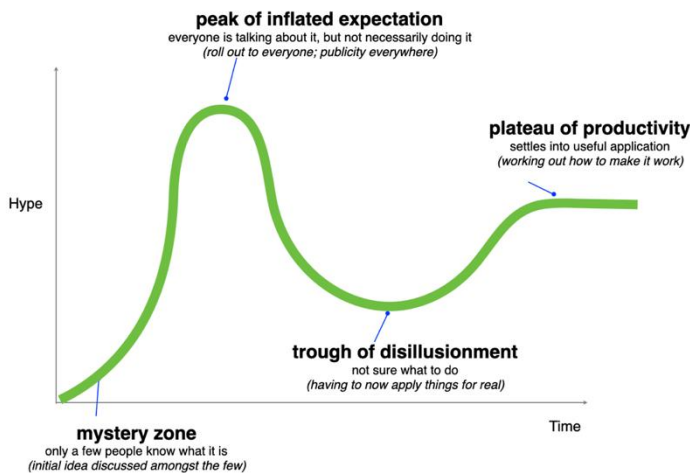
The more visual and less 'page turning', the easier it is to engage.

2 | Embedding principles

Get to The Plateau

peak of inflated expectation
everyone is talking about it, but not necessarily doing it
(roll out to everyone; publicity everywhere)

plateau of productivity
settles into useful application
(working out how to make it work)

Hype

trough of disillusionment
not sure what to do
(having to now apply things for real)

mystery zone
only a few people know what it is
(initial idea discussed amongst the few)

Time

Too often organisations invest heavily in systems and processes and expect the workforce to adopt without explicit explanation. The approach taken to embed and sustain the system can make the difference between a wasted investment or fully realised value.

Firstly, roll-out is an integral part of the embedding and sustaining plan. You need to plan for a launch - communication in advance; short punchy information events; supporting quick reference material; immediate training.

But then there can be a natural wane in enthusiasm as individuals get to grip with the change. So to rapidly get to that Plateau of Productivity, you need to put in place: self-service support; one-to-one support; sustained communication; regular updates on success.

The time it takes to reach that plateau can be variable, but will be a minimum of weeks to months.

SUSTAIN

Listen & Improve

Too often systems and processes are rolled out and left to wither on the vine.

From the outset you need to put in place a mechanism to determine the adoption, use, and effectiveness of your competency system. Consider:

- User Groups to share best practices;
- Regular system reviews with a Stakeholder Group;
- Annual benchmarking of both quantitative measure (e.g. usage rates) and qualitative measures (e.g. satisfaction surveys).

DISCLAIMER

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