

Developing Workplace Competence Assessor Training with SABIC

Delivering proof of Maintenance Technician competence using standards-based assessment

SABIC is a member of the Science Industry Partnership (SIP) and sits on the SIP's Science Industry Partnership Process Industries Group (SIPPI) which addresses the skills interests of the chemical, petrochemical and petroleum sectors, especially those companies operating high hazard COMAH sites.

As part of its SIP membership, SABIC engaged the SIP's partner, Cogent Skills and Redcar and Cleveland College of FE with the aim of demonstrating and providing proof of competence. This case study is aimed at sharing good practice with other SIP members in the process industries.

Background

SABIC is one of the world's largest petrochemical companies.

SABIC operates several major assets on the Wilton International site including the Olefins 6 "Cracker" plant (pictured below) which makes ethylene and propylene, the basic building blocks of a wide range of everyday items, plus the Low-Density Polyethylene Plant which makes a versatile form of plastic.

Cogent Skills provides Workplace Competence Assessor (WCA) courses to equip front line managers, supervisors and team leaders with the tools, techniques and skills to evaluate, develop and maintain the ongoing competence of their employees.



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Why did SABIC engage on a WCA project?

SABIC were confident that their Maintenance Technicians had the required competence levels, and in recent years there had not been any specific incidents or cause for concern with the competence of their workforce.

However, SABIC like many similar organisations have traditionally placed a reliance on historic qualifications as proof of competence. The company was acutely aware of the need to demonstrate and prove competence to their stakeholders, including the local community and the Health & Safety Executive.

A proactive and transparent approach was needed to ensure they could establish, maintain and verify a consistent level of competence for both the current and future workforce.

What did this project look like, who was involved and how was it delivered?

The project was kick-started by engaging with Cogent Skills and Redcar and Cleveland College, both of whom had experience of competence management and assurance systems.

The initial programme concept included highlighting safety critical activities, which would be assessed using industry qualified workplace assessors. These assessors were selected from the Maintenance Technician community who were recognised as experts in their field but also skilled to be able to make assessments within their peer group. In addition, the programme would have checks and balances that would assure competence and be able to withstand critical auditing.

Subsequent discussions between all parties recognised the need to develop workplace competence assessors and work was carried out to develop a Cogent Skills Training Standard for these assessors. This formed the basis of the Cogent Workplace Competence Assessor programme which is available industry wide for workplace assessment and for apprentice end point assessment.

A key element that drove the success of this project was for the management team to fully support the workplace competence assurance process and the assessors. SABIC ensured the assessment team had the necessary time away from day-to-day activities to enable them to undertake meaningful competence assessment against internal and external standards. The company also supports the process by resourcing external verification and continuous improvement.



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Assessor Support

Assessment support and mentoring helped assessors in dealing with specific issues, which were initially new to them. For example working through situations when assessors were not comfortable signing an employee off as competent. This support was a crucial element to the success of the project; ensuring assessors were capable of making standards based decisions, seeking guidance or backing up their decisions as necessary.

The assessor course and qualification enabled assessors to easily apply what they had learnt within SABIC's competence management system. The quality of their assessments improved following the training and their input into improving the system and process were enhanced. Ongoing support, external quality assurance and regular meeting assist the assessors in their role in the workplace.

What benefits have SABIC established from the project?

Having the development programme for the assessors underpinned by a training standard helped ensure a successful outcome. The Training Standard added credibility to the project and increased buy-in from employees, and this sat well within the engineering trades, for which standards are a bed-rock.

Most employees at SABIC have developed their careers along sets of standards and certifications, therefore the ability to accredit this training with a standard really helped SABIC engage successfully with its assessor workforce.

"We understand good practice and have the backing of credible training standards to support this. We are very much on the journey to further improvements with the future aim to develop best practice competence embedded within the business."

Tim Summerton, Maintenance First Line Manager said:

"The process was purposefully designed to be as painless as possible to implement and develop, whilst there was also a clear understanding of why we were undertaking this project, which was successfully communicated throughout the workforce. The assessment approaches developed for our bespoke delivery were simple to initiate and fitted with our work force day-to-day roles and activities."



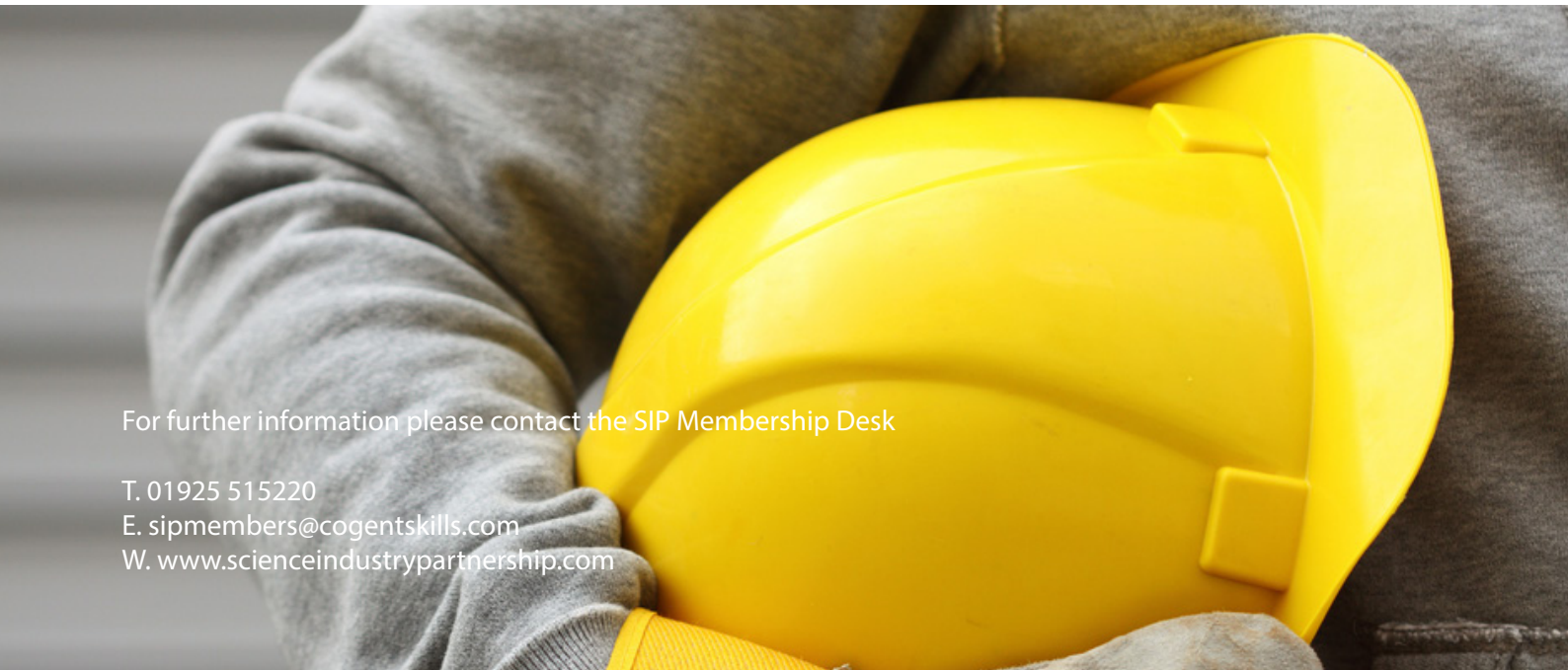
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Craig Hargreaves, Senior Analyst Workforce Development said:

“Whilst the project has delivered great results in relation to SABIC’s ability to clearly demonstrate competence within the organisation and to regulatory authorities it has also changed the way in which SABIC, the technicians and assessors view competence and training. Having the assessment processes underpinned by a nationally recognised standard contributed to employees understanding both the regulatory and business drivers for demonstrating transparency around workforce competence.”

“Importantly, assessors are regularly monitored and assessed, supporting them to maintain good assessment practice, and with continued investment from the business ensuring that the assessments are not a snapshot of competence, but instead are a journey of continuous improvement in workforce competence.”

“It was also good to see the progression within the workforce, both the development of those identified as an assessor and the wider increase in competence across the organisation. The assessment team have developed a useful skill and added to their experiences whilst working for SABIC, whilst the next generation of workforce entering our business now have an excellent opportunity to develop and demonstrate competence successfully.”



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