

KAREN BELLU



HEAD OF COMPLIANCE & CONSULTANCY

Karen Bellu holds the role of Head of Compliance and Consultancy and is an SQA qualified Assessor, Internal Verifier and ISO Quality Management System Lead Auditor.

PROFESSIONAL BACKGROUND

Karen has 28 years of experience operating in the oil and gas industry, in a dedicated Competence Management role. At the time of Piper Alpha she was working for a major service company as a training coordinator. The tragedy had far-reaching implications for the industry and the concept of Competence was introduced as part of the Offshore Safety Case regulations.

Karen was asked if she would move into the role of Competence focal point and recalls that when asking what was involved in this, the response was 'we don't know'. This instantly appealed as Karen enjoys a challenge, and soon recognised that competence offered a viable long term career opportunity.

For nearly 3 decades, Karen has supported companies across the globe to develop, implement, manage, review and prepare for accreditation of competence management systems. Her experience includes developing competence frameworks including; developing competence profiles, writing competence procedures and strategy documents, training Assessors and Internal Verifiers, carrying out compliance checks through auditing of competence systems, acting as Project Manager to successfully implement competence systems in the operational environment, and acting as the point of contact to gain industry accreditation through IADC and OPITO.

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MEMORABLE/CHALLENGING PROJECT

When a major drilling contractor reviewed their current Competence Assurance system and concluded that it was not performing as they needed it to, Karen and her team were tasked with its enhancement.

As it developed, the project evolved into a full Competence Management System revision with the added challenge of development and implementation taking place during the global COVID-19 pandemic.

An integrated solution was developed which included, enhancing and integrating existing HR processes, updating the existing competence framework, delivering bespoke Assessor training and OPITO Internal Verifier training (delivered via our virtual learning platform due to COVID-19 social distance and travel restrictions) and working with the client on their implementation 'pilot' providing support and assistance during the initial phase to ensure a smooth roll-out.

The work scope will also involve facilitation of periodic reviews to ensure that the processes remain effective for managing workforce competence and that the quality of output is being maintained.

Our client competence system has IADC accreditation and they are fully compliant with their regulatory and customer requirements. As a result of the enhancement project the company now has a fully integrated competence management system, aligning their internal HR processes with the competence assurance process throughout all stages of the employee lifecycle. Not only has this increased transparency of competence levels across their workforce, but is also a great example of industry recognised best practice.



PERSONAL INSIGHTS

Karen believes that the energy industry on the whole, remains quite reactive and whilst companies do comply with competence requirements, there is no common approach and all-too-often, companies do not invest sufficient resources to adequately address the issue of assuring workforce competence as part of an ongoing requirement due to competence generally being seen as both a standalone process and a means to an end.

Karen maintains her ethos is to 'make a difference' as she works to help companies recognise the value that an integrated approach to competence brings to their business and the workforce, moving away from the all too common belief, that managing competence and specifically competence assessment, is complicated and a necessary evil. As she points out, competence can be perceived as a bolt-on rather than an integral business process and is often shelved when cutbacks are required, when in fact it is during these times when managing competence is critical to the business and to working safely.

She hopes that some of the existing culture of latent intent can continue to be replaced by one that acknowledges that when approached properly, in a logical and straightforward manner, recognising the value of already existing internal processes combined with the introduction of a quality and fit for purpose assessment process, competence management can in fact result in longer term cost savings and bring real benefit and measurable value to an organisation.

