

Risk Management

by David Arber

Breaking down the language and culture barriers to the introduction of a competence framework



David Arber of Redkite Systems talks about system application, and provides feedback from some of the company's customers



SEVERAL YEARS AGO, WHEN ADOPTING the Redkite System for use as an electronic NVQ Credit Accumulation and Transfer Scheme system with the University of Central England, a marketing 'guru' suggested that the difference between the vocational and academic application of the Redkite System came down to 'language and culture'. This term has affected my approach to system application ever since.

For example, most people understand the concept of a 'job description'. Such descriptions are inherent to most business cultures, whereas the language and concepts of a competence framework are less familiar, and it is often the transition from the former to the latter that impacts on the ease of implementation of a competence-based system. For this reason Redkite Systems has ensured that there is sufficient flexibility in their system to accommodate this transition by providing tools that facilitate the entering of role-related or individual 'job requirements' that can be cross-mapped to the relevant standards in a competence framework. This effectively means that an assessment using the language of a job description is equivalent to an assessment against the standards of a competence framework.

Not So Easy

Mapping the requirements of a job description to a competence framework is not necessarily easy. It requires an initial understanding of both the job and the standards to which it relates. However, once undertaken, it can greatly aid the implementation of a competence-based learning, development and maintenance scheme. This was (and still is) the approach broadly adopted by many airport rescue and firefighting services as a means of implementing requirements for maintenance of competence as outlined in CAP 699.

In the airport sector, an approach has been to define firefighter 'key functions' that are mapped to the National Standards. Assessing an individual undertaking a search and rescue activity, performing first aid, driving and positioning a fire appliance, operating

firefighting equipment or carrying out an action to improve self or others, etc was (and is) more readily understood by staff and therefore has aided the initial implementation of CAP 699. This has allowed many airports to benefit from a maintenance of competence regime without initially having to introduce all staff to the language of the competence framework. Whilst mapping in this way can be done on paper, it only really becomes practical and viable when using an electronic recording system. And this is where the Redkite System excels.

This is what a few of our users say about the Redkite System:

Northumberland Fire and Rescue Service

"Northumberland Fire and Rescue Service chose the Redkite PDS as our personal development and competence recording system in 2003, having had experience of paper-based and other electronic systems. Redkite was chosen for ease of use, flexibility, the support available and the attitude of the company that its users are partners and friends.

"We have seen the company grow with us. Additions and improvements have been continuous, have always been in conjunction with the user group needs and have always been delivered within the agreed timeframe and at no additional cost.

"The system now forms an integral part of our performance management and is assisting in identifying organisational as well as personal competence. The latest website-hosted version of the system is now offering us a truly electronic PDR and NVQ portfolio, with efficient access for assessors and verifiers from any Internet-connected computer. In addition, our retained duty systems managers can now carry out part of their role from home, saving them having to go into the station to do the administrative work attached to the identification and recording of competence. The addition of the Questionnaire Master multiple choice questionnaire system means we can also

clearly link understanding, including technical and procedural knowledge, to an individual's portfolio.

"Also, our annual workforce development planning process has been simplified by using the system to report on courses, or competence, expiry dates and individual development needs. Not only has this made the process of planning more time-efficient, it has also saved on course costs directly as we are now able to more readily identify who is due what training and when. This allows us to run courses to directly match requirements."

South Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service

"South Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service have utilised the Redkite System for over two years to facilitate the recording of competence for operational staff. The facility to customise the system to accommodate local needs alongside National Occupational Standards has enabled SYFRS to develop comprehensive role and location specific standards which meet the requirements of our organisation.

"Working in conjunction with Redkite Systems we are currently adapting the system to enable it to be used as an electronic portfolio for NVQ candidates at firefighter and supervisory manager level, as well as allowing recording of competence for non-operational staff.

"After successful management of training and assessment recording within our Rescue and Firefighting Service at Tag Farnborough Airport, the decision was taken to expand competence-based training across other airport departments. It was extremely easy to adapt the Redkite System to manage other departments/agencies' training and assessment records, which also included familiarising new members of staff regarding how to input and interrogate data. We have received praise from independent health and safety consultants on how robust the system is and we are confident that the capabilities of the Redkite System will easily support all future plans to manage our company's competence based training initiatives."

For further information and a full customer contact list, please call Redkite Systems Ltd on tel: 01926 814846; or email: david@redkitesystems.com; or visit our web site: www.redkitesystems.com