

CONSTRUCTION AND UTILITIES

Report: **Future-Ready Leadership** **Mitigating Risk and Developing** **Supervisor Competency**

8 minute read



Construction and Utilities: Mitigating Risk and Developing Supervisor Competency

The construction and utilities sectors are cornerstones of the UK economy, employing millions and shaping the nation's infrastructure. Yet, these industries face significant challenges related to workforce management, particularly when it comes to ensuring the competency of supervisors on-site. Competency gaps among supervisors directly impact safety, operational efficiency and overall project outcomes. To address these pressing issues, Cognisco is introducing a Supervisor Competency Assessment, tailored to the unique needs of these sectors.

This report outlines the key findings from a recent roundtable discussion with senior leaders in the construction and utilities industries. It also provides insights into workforce challenges, the importance of effective supervisor development and **how Cognisco's behavioural and skills diagnostic tool can help organisations mitigate risks and improve site management.**

51 Fatal Accidents

51 workers in the UK construction industry suffered fatal injuries

HSE: UK - 2023/24



The case for Competency: Key challenges in Construction and Utilities

1. Supervisor Competency

Supervisors often ascend to their roles through experience or tenure, rather than formal training. However, the absence of structured frameworks and leadership development can result in:

- Inefficient decision-making
- Poor team management
- Increased safety risks due to a lack of understanding of H&S and regulatory requirements

What's needed:

- ★ **Clear Role Definitions:** Ensure expectations are well-defined
- ★ **Leadership Training:** Equip supervisors with soft skills and technical knowledge
- ★ **Competency Frameworks:** Provide structured paths for development



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2. Psychological and Behavioural Safety

Safety on-site extends beyond physical hazards. Peer pressure, risk acceptance and a lack of accountability can compromise safety practices. A growing focus on **psychological safety** aims to:

- Foster open communication
- Reduce fear of speaking up
- Encourage accountability across teams

Best practices:

- ★ Incorporate behavioural safety into training programmes
- ★ Address workplace culture to minimise risk acceptance
- ★ Build accountability mechanisms

3. Workforce Dynamics

The Construction and Utilities sectors often contend with:

- **High Turnover:** Temporary workers and frequent staff changes disrupt consistency
- **Language Barriers:** Multinational workforces require multilingual safety briefings
- **Operational Gaps:** New and inexperienced workers heighten risks

Solutions to address these issues:

- ★ Regular multilingual briefings for clarity on safety and operations
- ★ Standardised onboarding to align workers quickly
- ★ Competency assessments to identify and address gaps in real time

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4. Training and Competency Management

Competency isn't just about theoretical knowledge; it's about real-world application. Supervisors must demonstrate:

- Skills
- Knowledge
- Experience
- Critical Behaviours

Key Insight:

Performance on-site is the true measure of competency. Traditional training alone isn't enough to prepare supervisors for the complexities of their roles. Supervisors must be equipped with the ability to apply their knowledge effectively in high-pressure, real-world scenarios.

Hands-on experience, supported by continuous assessment and feedback using an effective behavioural diagnostic, is essential to ensuring they make informed decisions and maintain safety and efficiency on-site.



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5. Churn and Retention

Employee turnover remains a persistent challenge. Organisations are turning to:

- **Word-of-mouth Recruitment:** Leveraging worker networks for hiring
- **Graduate Schemes & Apprenticeships:** Building pipelines of skilled workers
- **Diverse Recruitment:** Expanding opportunities to untapped talent pools

Long-term Strategies:

- ★ Foster a culture of development and career progression
- ★ Invest in retention through tailored training programmes
- ★ Develop clear paths to leadership for entry-level workers

How Cognisco can help

To address these challenges, Cognisco has developed a **Supervisor Competency Assessment**, designed specifically for the construction and utilities sectors. This behaviour and skills diagnostic evaluates:

- Health & Safety knowledge
- Regulatory compliance
- Leadership behaviours
- Decision-making skills

Benefits of the Assessment:

- ★ Identify gaps in supervisory competency
- ★ Improve safety and operational efficiency
- ★ Build structured development plans for supervisors
- ★ Mitigate risks through evidence-based performance metrics

Developing Your Supervisors: Steps to Take

1

Conduct Competency Assessments:

Use tools such as Cognisco's behavioural and skills diagnostic to benchmark current capabilities.

2

Create Development Plans:

Tailor training to address identified gaps.

3

Foster Psychological Safety:

Encourage open dialogue and accountability.

4

Standardise Onboarding:

Align workers with clear expectations and operational consistency.

5

Invest in Leadership Training:

Equip supervisors with the skills to lead diverse teams effectively.



Conclusion

Competent supervisors are the backbone of safe, efficient and productive worksites. With the construction and utilities sectors facing growing challenges in workforce management, it's vital to invest in tools and frameworks that enhance supervisory skills and behaviours. **Cognisco's Supervisor Competency Assessment offers a tailored solution to help organisations build stronger, safer teams.**

About Cognisco

Cognisco understands that training alone is not enough to evidence a competent and confident workforce.

We have over 25 years' experience working with organisations to identify what every employee needs to know, do and understand to do their job competently and confidently and to mitigate risk.

We work with some of the world's largest and most complex organisations including **KPMG, The NHS, His Majesty's Civil Service, John Lewis**, and some of the UK's leading utility providers.

Mitigating risk.

Maximising people potential.

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