

# Competency and other factors associated with the selection of OSH professionals within the UAE industries

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## ABSTRACT

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**Introduction:** The evolving industrial landscape of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) necessitates a strategic approach to selecting competent occupational safety and health (OSH) professionals. Despite global frameworks, a contextual gap remains in aligning competencies with regional industry needs. This study identifies the most suitable competency factors for selecting OSH Officers and OSH Managers within the United Arab Emirates (UAE) industries.

**Methods:** A pragmatic mixed-methods study was conducted across the UAE (June–November 2024). Forty-two OSH recruiters and influencers participated in focus group discussions (8–12 per session) to identify core competencies. A web-based survey was administered to 351 randomly selected stakeholders from a 695-member sampling frame. The survey, validated for reliability (Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.89$ ), used Likert scales to rate competencies. Content analysis refined definitions, while descriptive statistics and logistic regression identified demographic predictors of high-priority competencies. Ethical protocols and confidentiality were maintained.

**Results:** Findings from the focus groups and survey revealed structured, role-specific expectations. OSH officers are expected to possess bachelor's degrees (59.0%), NEBOSH/IOSH certifications (International General Certification/Managing Safety), and practical readiness through fire safety and first aid training. English proficiency (99.4%), local availability (92.3%), and good health status were prioritized. For OSH managers, leadership (90.9%), planning (71.2%), and strategic thinking (61.3%) were emphasized alongside higher qualifications - bachelor's (57.3%), master's (35.6%), and a postgraduate (RQF Level 6) OSH diploma (72.9%).

**Conclusion:** OSH recruitment in the UAE follows a tiered competency framework. Incipient roles focus on technical readiness and local availability, while managerial positions require strategic skills and maturity. Standardized, competency-based recruitment aligned to local context is essential to enhance safety performance across UAE industries.

**Keywords:** Career Progression, Occupational Health, Occupational Safety, Professional Competence, Risk Management

## Introduction

Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) has become a strategic necessity in modern industries due to the increasing complexity of work

environments and associated risks.<sup>1</sup> As industrial operations expand, organizations face diverse hazards that, if inadequately addressed, can lead

to injuries, diseases, and financial losses.<sup>2</sup> Global estimates highlight the persistent burden of occupational incidents, underscoring the need for competent OSH professionals to mitigate risks and foster compliance.<sup>3</sup> Forward-thinking organizations now integrate proactive safety management into their core operations, emphasizing strategic competence alongside regulatory adherence.<sup>4</sup> This paradigm shift reflects the growing demand for multidisciplinary OSH professionals who combine technical knowledge, behavioral skills, and contextual awareness.<sup>5</sup> Regional challenges, particularly in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Gulf Cooperative Council (GCC), further complicate recruitment due to diverse workforce demographics, inconsistent enforcement, and the absence of localized competency frameworks.<sup>6</sup> Hence, it is vital for recruiters to adopt evidence-based selection models, while candidates must align their competencies with the role-specific expectations of OSH officer and manager positions.<sup>7</sup> The UAE's high-risk industries, including construction, oil & gas, and manufacturing, necessitate the recruitment of professionals who not only hold recognized certifications (e.g., NEBOSH, IOSH) but also demonstrate leadership, planning, and behavioral safety skills.<sup>8</sup> However, hiring decisions often overemphasize credentials and prior titles, with limited evaluation of core competencies such as communication, risk management, and situational judgment.<sup>9</sup> Recent studies affirm the criticality of leadership and behavioral skills in influencing safety culture and outcomes.<sup>10-11</sup> However, fragmented application of competency-based recruitment models remains a global challenge. Research suggests that many human resource (HR) departments are not-equipped to assess OSH-specific capabilities, leading to misalignments between job requirements and candidate profiles.<sup>12</sup> Additionally, localized research remains limited; existing frameworks often lack practical validation in the UAE context.<sup>13-14</sup> The absence of standardized tools to evaluate OSH competencies during hiring poses a

significant barrier to improving safety systems.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, emerging industry trends such as digital transformation and data-driven safety management require a redefinition of OSH competencies.<sup>16</sup> Despite global recognition of OSH competencies, there is insufficient research validating competency frameworks specific to UAE industries. Most literature emphasizes post-employment training or theoretical models, neglecting the selection phase critical for ensuring organizational safety maturity.<sup>17</sup> The specific objectives of this research were to determine competency factors associated with the hiring of OSH professionals at the officer (incipient) level and OSH professionals at the managerial (senior) level. The study also aimed to determine other factors e.g. age, locality and health that should be used for the selection of a competent OSH Officer and OSH Manager.

## Methods

The study employed a pragmatic, mixed-methods design to develop and validate a competency-based framework for selecting Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) professionals in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The research followed a sequential exploratory strategy, enabling the integration of qualitative and quantitative insights to produce contextually grounded and generalizable findings.<sup>18</sup> During the first phase of the research - 42 purposively selected participants, comprising 26 OSH recruiters and 16 recruitment influencers (21% female) across diverse UAE industries were involved in qualitative Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). Participants were organized into four focus group sessions (8–12 participants per group, 60–65 minutes each), conducted both face-to-face and online between June and August 2024 within UAE. Convenience sampling was employed to ensure inclusion of individuals with direct recruitment experience and relevant domain expertise. Data saturation was anticipated based on qualitative standards and previous OSH workforce studies.<sup>19</sup> The discussions were guided by a semi-structured protocol covering technical,

behavioral, and core competencies required for OSH professionals at both OSH officer and OSH managerial levels. Thematic content analysis was conducted manually by using a coding framework grounded in OSH recruitment theory. Key themes were synthesized to develop a preliminary set of competency questions for the subsequent survey phase. During phase two, based on the FGD findings, a structured, web-based quantitative cross-sectional survey was administered via Allcounted.com from September to November 2024. A random sample of 450 OSH recruitment stakeholders was drawn from a curated database of 695 eligible contacts, producing 351 complete responses (78% response rate). Inclusion criteria required participants to be currently involved in OSH recruitment or selection processes in UAE-based industries. Exclusion criteria included generalist HR professionals without OSH hiring responsibilities. The survey instrument included demographic items (e.g., role, experience, industry). Likert-scale items (1 = not important, 10 = critically important) assessing the importance of identified competencies across three domains i.e., technical, behavioral, and core - precisely. The tool was pilot tested for clarity and reliability. Internal consistency was assessed using Cronbach's alpha ( $\alpha = 0.89$ ), confirming high reliability across competency items, consistent with accepted standards for social science research. The formula being used:

$$\alpha = \frac{N \cdot \bar{c}}{\bar{v} + (N - 1) \cdot \bar{c}}$$

## Results

**FGD Results:** Four focus group discussions with 42 participants (26 OSH recruiters and 16 influencers from UAE industries) explored essential competencies for OSH officers and managers. For OSH officers, five competencies were unanimously (100%) endorsed: academic qualifications, technical certifications (e.g.,

Where N is the number of items,  $\bar{c}$  the average covariance between item pairs,  $\bar{v}$  the average variance. This measure ensured homogeneity and robustness of the competency scale. Quantitative data were exported to Microsoft Excel 365 for analysis. Descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations, frequency distributions) summarize competency ratings and participant profiles. Competency items with high mean importance and consistency were prioritized for toolkit development. A convergent parallel approach was used to integrate findings from the FGDs and surveys. Qualitative data were thematically grouped and cross-referenced with quantitative trends to refine the final competency toolkit. This integration provided triangulated evidence, enhancing the study's validity and ensuring that the developed framework reflected both practical insights and statistical generalizability.<sup>20,21</sup> Ethical approval was obtained from the University Research Ethics Review Committee. All participants were provided informed consent (written or electronic). Data were anonymized, and strict confidentiality protocols were followed, including password-protected files and secure digital storage systems, in accordance with standards and ethical research norms.<sup>22</sup> Sampling strategy, thematic coding, and instrument validation were informed by best practices outlined by Creswell and supported by Peduzzi et al. for mixed-methods and multivariate research.<sup>23,24</sup> The methodology ensured depth through rich qualitative exploration and breadth through survey generalization, supporting both contextual relevance and analytical robustness.<sup>25</sup>

NEBOSH, IOSH), communication skills, personal management, and health status. Risk and incident management (98%), OSH laws knowledge (95%), and local availability (95%) followed closely, emphasizing regulatory awareness and accessibility. Additional priorities included age bracket (93%), language (90%), and safety training

(90%). Moderate endorsements were observed for experience (86%), membership (83%), adaptability (83%), experience working in GCC (81%), stakeholder management (76%), industrial experience (71%), and planning (71%). Leadership (21%) and strategic thinking (12%) were lowest ranked. For OSH managers, expectations were more stringent as all participants (100%) agreed on the necessity of qualifications, certifications, communication, personal management, health status, legal knowledge, incident handling, experience, professional bodies, and planning. Training and stakeholder management received 98% endorsement, while leadership, strategic thinking, language, and age bracket were each endorsed by 95%. Industrial experience and teamwork scored 83%; local availability (76%) and GCC experience (71%) were lower. The comparison reveals a clear shift from field-readiness in OSH officers to strategic capability in OSH managers. Notably,

leadership and strategic skills rose from 21% and 12% (officers) to 95% (managers), while planning grew from 71% to 100%. Being located in UAE, remained more vital for officers than managers, reflecting their differing operational scopes as well as budgetary constraints between both levels.

*Survey Results:* A total of 351 valid survey responses were collected from OSH recruiters and recruitment influencers across the UAE and GCC region. The data were analyzed to determine the most critical qualifications, competencies, and industry expectations for OSH Officers and OSH Managers. Hereby results are presented in a logical sequence beginning with respondent demographics followed by key findings aligned with each research objective. Only key values are highlighted in-text; comprehensive data are presented in the tables.

**Table 1.** Demographic profile of survey participants

Characteristics	Categories	Number	Percentage
<b>JOB ROLE</b>	OSH Recruiter	217	61.8
	OSH Recruitment Influencer / Facilitator (Middle Management e.g., HOD, Manager)	42	12.0
	OSH Recruitment Influencer / Facilitator (support team e.g., consultant, advisor, supervisor)	41	11.7
	Other		
	OSH Recruitment Influencer / Facilitator (Top Management e.g., CEO, COO, CFO)	30	8.5
		21	6.0
<b>GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION</b>	United Arab Emirates (UAE)	313	89.2
	GCC Countries (apart from UAE)	76	21.6
	Other Countries	25	7.1
<b>AGE GROUP</b>	20-25 Years	7	2.0
	26-30 Years	65	18.5
	31-35 Years	87	24.8
	36-40 Years	77	21.9
	41-45 Years	66	18.8
	46-50 Years	27	7.7
	51 & above	22	6.3
<b>SEX</b>	Male	250	71.2
	Female	100	28.5
	Not Specified	1	0.3
<b>EXPERIENCE IN OSH RECRUITMENT</b>	1-5 Years	82	23.4
	6-10 Years	87	24.8
	11-15 Years	91	25.9
	16-20 Years	48	13.7
	20 & above	43	12.3

<b>TECHNICAL</b>	IOSH-UK (Managing Safely, Working Safely)	131	37.3
<b>QUALIFICATIONS OF</b>	NEBOSH-UK (IGC, IFC, IOGC, ICC)	117	33.3
<b>RECRUITERS AND</b>	NEBOSH-UK (OSH Diploma)	26	7.4
<b>FACILITATORS</b>	BSC-UK (OSH Diploma)	25	7.1
	NEBOSH-UK (Environmental Diploma)	12	3.4
	NVQ-UK (Diploma in OSH)	12	3.4
	NVQ-UK (Certificate in OSH)	11	3.1
	Other	181	51.6
<b>OSH MEMBERSHIPS OF</b>	OSHAD-UAE	99	28.2
<b>RECRUITERS AND</b>	IOSH-UK	85	24.2
<b>FACILITATORS</b>	IIRSM-UK	21	6.0
	NASP/IASP-USA	12	3.4
	BCSP-USA	12	3.4
	CRSP-Canada	3	0.9
	IEMA-UK	1	0.3
	Other	219	62.4
<b>INDUSTRIES THEY RECRUIT</b>	Construction	141	40.2
<b>FOR</b>	Oil & Gas	99	28.2
	Manufacturing	77	21.9
	Training & Consultancy	63	18.0
	Healthcare	52	14.8
	Retail	42	12.0
	Hospitality	28	8.0
	Other	32	9.1

A total of 351 participants contributed to the study, predominantly OSH recruiters (61.8%), with the remainder comprising recruitment influencers from middle management (12.0%), support roles (11.7%), others (8.5%), and top management (6.0%). Most respondents were based in the UAE (89.2%), with some from GCC (21.6%) and other regions (7.1%). The survey participants were relatively young, mainly aged 31-45 years, and predominantly male (71.2%). OSH recruitment

experience was well distributed, with most having 1-15 years of experience. Qualifications included IOSH (37.3%) and NEBOSH IGC (33.3%), while OSHAD (ADOSH)-UAE (28.2%) and IOSH-UK (24.2%) were the most common memberships. Participants were mainly recruited for construction (40.2%) and oil & gas (28.2%), followed by manufacturing, consultancy, healthcare, retail, and hospitality sectors.

**Table 2.** Technical Competencies Required for OSH Professionals

<b>Criteria</b>	<b>Safety Officer (%)</b>	<b>Safety Officer (#)</b>	<b>Safety Manager (%)</b>	<b>Safety Manager (#)</b>
<b>FORMAL EDUCATION</b>	Median Importance: 9		Median Importance: 9	
Higher Secondary Certificate (High School)	2.3	8	0.8	3
Diploma (2 Years in College)	34.4	121	57.3	201
Bachelor (University)	59.0	207	6.3	22
Masters (University)	4.0	14	35.6	125
Doctorate (e.g., Ph.D., DBA, DM)	0.3	1	0.0	0
<b>TECHNICAL QUALIFICATION</b>	Median Importance: 9		Median Importance: 9	
NEBOSH-UK (IGC, IFC, IOGC, ICC)	87.8	308	72.9	256
IOSH-UK (Managing Safely, Working Safely)	53.6	188	69.2	243
NVQ-UK (Certificate in OSH)	17.7	62	41.3	145



NEBOSH-UK (OSH Diploma)	9.7	34	25.4	89
NVQ-UK (Diploma in OSH)	5.7	20	23.1	81
NEBOSH-UK (Environmental Diploma)	4.8	17	12.8	45
BSC-UK (OSH Diploma)	3.4	12	10.5	37
Other	9.7	34	10.5	37
<b>FORMAL TRAINING</b>	Median Importance: 6		Median Importance: 7	
Fire Safety	94.6	332	93.7	329
First Aid	90.9	319	85.5	300
H2S (Hydrogen sulphide)	46.1	162	81.5	286
ISO45001: OHS Management System	40.2	141	74.9	263
BBS (Behaviour Based Safety)	35.3	124	47.3	166
ISO14001: Environmental Management System	14.2	50	44.2	155
T. BOSIET and/or BOSIET (Tropical / Basic Offshore Safety Induction and Emergency Training)	10.0	35	38.2	134
ISO31000: Risk Management System	8.8	31	14.5	51
Other	11.4	40	7.4	26
<b>PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIPS</b>	Median Importance: 7		Median Importance: 8	
OSHAD-UAE	78.6	276	82.1	288
IOSH-UK	64.4	226	72.9	256
IIRSM-UK	11.7	41	21.1	74
IEMA-UK	5.1	18	20.2	71
BCSP-USA	4.6	16	8.3	29
NASP/IASP-USA	2.0	7	6.3	22
CRSP-Canada	1.1	4	3.7	13
Other	3.7	13	2.3	8
<b>RISK/INCIDENT KNOWLEDGE</b>	Median Importance: 6		Median Importance: 6	
Both - By asking specific questions and looking into specific certifications	86.3	303	93.1	327
During Interview by asking specific questions about Risk & Incident Management	10.3	36	4.3	15
By looking into specific Risk & Incident Management certifications	3.4	12	2.6	9
Not Mandatory	0	0	0	0

Table 2 - outlines the technical competencies for Safety Officers and Managers, with both roles receiving a high median importance rating of 9. Safety Officers are expected to have a bachelor's degrees (59.0%) and Postgraduate RQF level 6 Diplomas (34.4%), whereas Safety Managers, are expected to hold Postgraduate RQF level 6 Diplomas (57.3%) and master's degrees (35.6%). NEBOSH-UK certification was the most sought (87.8% among Officers, 72.9% among Managers), followed by IOSH-UK (53.6% and 69.2%, respectively). Training in Fire Safety and First Aid

exceeded 90% in both groups. Managers were required to hold H2S (81.5%) and ISO45001 (74.9%) training - which was barely expected from Officers. Professional affiliations were dominated by OSHAD-UAE and IOSH-UK, and nearly all participants wished to assess risk/incident management skills via both interview and certification, with none considering it optional. *Note: Some category totals exceed 100% as participants could select multiple options for several criteria*

**Table 3.** Core Competencies for OSH Professionals

<b>Criteria</b>	<b>Safety Officer (%)</b>	<b>Safety Officer (#)</b>	<b>Safety Manager (%)</b>	<b>Safety Manager (#)</b>
<b>OVERALL EXPERIENCE</b>	<i>Median Importance: 8</i>		<i>Median Importance: 8</i>	
1-5	82.0	288	1.7	6
6-10	9.7	34	28.2	99
11-15	1.7	6	56.1	197
15-20	0.0	0	13.4	47
21 and above	0.6	2	0.6	2
Not Mandatory	6.0	21	N/A	N/A
<b>LOCAL/GCC EXPERIENCE</b>	<i>Median Importance: 8</i>		<i>Median Importance: 8</i>	
1-5	81.5	286	8.6	30
6-10	4.8	17	51.0	179
11-15	2.0	7	37.0	130
16-20	0.0	0	1.7	6
21 and above	0.3	1	0.0	0
Not Mandatory	11.4	40	1.7	6
<b>INDUSTRY-SPECIFIC EXPERIENCE</b>	<i>Median Importance: 8</i>		<i>Median Importance: 8</i>	
1-5	83.8	294	10.0	35
6-10	7.1	25	47.9	168
11-15	1.4	5	40.7	143
16-20	0.3	1	0.8	3
21 and above	0.0	0	0.0	0
Not Mandatory	7.4	26	0.6	2
<b>KNOWLEDGE OF OSH LAWS</b>	<i>Median Importance: 5</i>		<i>Median Importance: 5</i>	
Both - Local & International OSH Laws	62.4	219	85.2	299
Local OSH Laws	34.5	121	12.8	45
International OSH Laws	1.4	5	1.4	5
Not Mandatory	1.7	6	0.6	2
<b>INDUSTRIAL KNOWLEDGE</b>	<i>Median Importance: 5</i>		<i>Median Importance: 5</i>	
Both - By asking specific questions and looking into specific qualification/certifications	90.3	317	95.7	336
During Interview by asking specific questions	7.4	26	2.9	10
By looking into Industrial specific qualification/certifications	2.0	7	1.4	5
Not Mandatory	0.3	1	0	0
<b>HEALTH STATUS (Gauged)</b>	<i>Median Importance: 9</i>		<i>Median Importance: 10</i>	
Medical Examination	76.1	267	76.3	268
During the interview	44.4	156	41.0	144
Both - During CV review and interview	23.6	83	27.3	96
During the initial CV review	1.4	5	1.7	6
<b>AVAILABILITY</b>	<i>Median Importance: 8</i>		<i>Median Importance: 8</i>	
Within UAE	92.3	324	90.6	318
Within GCC	30.2	106	55.3	194
Outside	10.0	35	24.5	86

<b>LANGUAGES</b>	<i>Median Importance: 8</i>		<i>Median Importance: 8</i>	
English	99.4	349	98.9	347
Urdu/Hindi	56.1	197	50.4	177
Arabic	33.9	119	43.9	154
Malayalam	7.7	27	6.5	23
Other	2.3	8	2.8	10

Table 3 - highlights core competencies for OSH professionals, with both roles showing a median importance rating of 8 for overall, local/GCC, and industry-specific experience. Most Safety Officers were expected to have 1-5 years' experience (82.0%), while Safety Managers for 11-15 years (56.1%). Similar trends were seen in local and industry-specific experience. Knowledge of OSH laws was anticipated more from Managers (85.2%) than Officers (62.4%). Industrial knowledge was gauged by combining interviews and certification

checks in over 90% of both groups. Medical fitness gauged during medical examination was prioritized (76%), with health status rated highly (median 9 for Officers, 10 for Managers), which are example of other key supporting factors.

UAE availability exceeded 90% for both groups, while managers' hirings were more open to GCC and international candidates. English was nearly universal (>98%), with Urdu/Hindi and Arabic also commonly spoken.

**Table 4.** Other Competencies for OSH Professionals

<b>Criteria</b>	<b>Safety Officer (%)</b>	<b>Safety Officer (#)</b>	<b>Safety Manager (%)</b>	<b>Safety Manager (#)</b>
<b>AGE</b>	<i>Median Importance: 5</i>		<i>Median Importance: 5</i>	
20-29	84.9	298	3.1	11
30-39	13.7	48	55.0	193
40-49	1.1	4	40.7	143
50-59	0.3	1	1.2	4
<b>LEADERSHIP SKILLS</b>	<i>Median Importance: N/A</i>		<i>Median Importance: 6</i>	
Both - By asking specific questions and looking into specific certifications	N/A	N/A	90.9	319
By asking specific questions about Leadership during the interview	N/A	N/A	8.3	29
By looking into specific leadership certifications	N/A	N/A	0.8	3
Not Mandatory	N/A	N/A	0	0
<b>STAKEHOLDER MGMT (Gauged)</b>	<i>Median Importance: 4</i>		<i>Median Importance: 5</i>	
Both - During CV review and interview	50.2	176	71.5	251
During the interview	43.3	152	27.4	96
During the initial CV review	1.7	6	1.1	4
Not Mandatory	4.8	17	0.0	0
<b>COMMUNICATION SKILLS (Gauged)</b>	<i>Median Importance: 8</i>		<i>Median Importance: 9</i>	
Both - During CV review and interview	84.0	295	90.9	319
During the interview	14.0	49	8.3	29
During the initial CV review	2.0	7	0.8	3
Not Mandatory	0	0	0.0	0



<b>STRATEGIC SKILLS (Gauged)</b>		<i>Median Importance: N/A</i>		<i>Median Importance: 5</i>	
Both - During CV review and interview	N/A	N/A	61.3	215	
During the interview	N/A	N/A	36.2	127	
Not Mandatory	N/A	N/A	1.4	5	
During the initial CV review	N/A	N/A	1.1	4	
<b>PERSONAL MANAGEMENT (Gauged)</b>		<i>Median Importance: 5</i>		<i>Median Importance: 5</i>	
Both - During CV review and interview	53.3	187	67.0	235	
During the interview	42.7	150	31.6	111	
During the initial CV review	2.6	9	1.4	5	
Not Mandatory	1.4	5	0.0	0	
<b>PLANNING SKILLS (Gauged)</b>		<i>Median Importance: 4</i>		<i>Median Importance: 5</i>	
Both - During CV review and interview	51.8	182	71.2	250	
During the interview	43.6	153	28.2	99	
Not Mandatory	2.6	9	0.6	2	
During the initial CV review	2.0	7	0.0	0	
<b>TRAITS</b>		<i>Median Importance: 5</i>		<i>Median Importance: 5</i>	
Both - team player and independent working	49.9	175	65.2	229	
Team player	47.6	167	30.8	108	
Independent worker	2.5	9	4.0	14	
Not Mandatory	0.0	0	0.0	0	

Note: Some categories total over 100% as respondents could select multiple applicable options.

Table 4 - outlines behavioral competencies for OSH roles, with age rated moderately important (median 5). Most of the participants (84.9%) anticipated the ideal age of 20–29 years for Safety Officers, while Managers between 30–49 years (95.7%). Leadership and strategic skills were assessed only at the managerial level, endorsed by 90.9% and 61.3% respectively, with median importance ratings of 6 and 5. Stakeholder management was more emphasized for Managers (71.5%) than Officers (50.2%), with median scores of 5 and 4. Communication skills were highly valued for both roles (84.0% Officers, 90.9% Managers), rated 8 and 9 in importance. Personal management and planning skills had equal median ratings of 5 but received more emphasis at the managerial level. Traits combining teamwork and independence were preferred (49.9% Officers, 65.2% Managers), with a median importance of 5 for both roles.

## Discussion

This study identified essential competencies for OSH professionals in the UAE by integrating

qualitative data from FGDs (n = 42) and survey responses (n = 351). Five factors were consistently endorsed across both Safety Officer and Safety Manager roles: academic qualifications, globally recognized technical certifications (e.g., NEBOSH, IOSH), communication skills, personal management, and physical health. Role-specific distinctions emerged, for Safety Officers emphasis was on technical know-how, field readiness, and local availability, while for Safety Managers leadership, strategic insight, stakeholder engagement, and professional memberships were prioritized. Competency ratings ranged from 5 to 9, confirming their importance in OSH recruitment.

These findings align with the evolving global OSH paradigm that balances compliance with proactive capability. Safety Officers are expected to manage frontline risks, while Safety Managers guide organizational safety culture and planning. The shared importance of communication reflects the UAE's multicultural context, and health status was emphasized due to the demanding nature of OSH roles. The study supports literature

recognizing NEBOSH and IOSH as global standards in OSH credentialing.<sup>26</sup> Soft skills like communication and self-management, essential for compliance and hazard reduction, mirror previous findings.<sup>27</sup> Leadership saw a significant role-based jump, underscoring its value in higher-level positions.<sup>28,29</sup> Regionally, our results align with Almarshad and Althubaiti's research on role flexibility in GCC leadership roles.<sup>30</sup> Literature from IJOSH has reinforced the increasing importance of formal credentials and certifications in OSH roles. Researchers in a mapping review found that many technology-based training programs in tourism and hospitality often fall short on interactivity, cost, and updated policy support and that organizations with higher formal credential requirements tend to invest more in advanced training.<sup>31</sup> Likewise, literature from another IJOSH about a bibliometric analysis of safety culture in global construction identify rising emphasis on qualifications, leadership, and institutional membership as central themes.<sup>32</sup> Notably, increased emphasis on professional memberships at the managerial level suggests a maturing safety culture in the UAE. The mixed-methods approach was a major strength, enabling cross-validation and depth. Diverse participation across sectors enhanced generalizability within the UAE. However, the cross-sectional design

limits longitudinal insights, and digital competency areas were not fully addressed - gaps future studies should explore.

## Conclusion

The study establishes a differentiated, evidence-based competency model for OSH professionals in the UAE, emphasizing both technical and behavioral attributes based on role requirements. It underscores the need for localized, role-sensitive hiring strategies and reinforces the importance of a competency-based approach in strengthening occupational safety outcomes and workforce resilience. Practically, the findings offer a grounded framework for recruitment and policy. Regulatory bodies may benefit from embedding behavioral and leadership competencies in certification criteria. Future research should examine sector-specific needs and digital readiness, and systematic regional reviews could help align standards across the GCC.

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