POOR performance in the safety arena by the construction sector has led to a major industry group to develop a safety program that has caught the eye of many other industry players. The John Holland Group revealed its "no harm" vision to the construction industry some 15 months ago and it has been gaining momentum ever since.

The group's first Harm vision integrates its comprehensive set of the Passport to Safety Excellence Training Program - which focuses on behaviour, attitude and culture.

According to group safety manager Dean Cicilia, for a program to work it must address not just skill competencies, but also behavioural competencies.

Construction companies can teach their employees mechanical skills, but for a person to be effective in their role they must have a certain type of behaviour and approach for the task at hand.

Cicilia likened the concept to Kevin Carver's 1993 film Field of Dreams, quoting a line from the movie: "If you build it, they will come.

"Build the project behaviour, and they will come. Build the person's behaviour, and the mechanical skills are easy," he said.

According to Cicilia, there are no real competency-based safety training programs that are recognised nationally, and by other companies, that can provide workers with behavioural skill and can prove they are compliant in a specific area.

"Our industry is long overdue and the perfect example is project... so a first-time operator needs to prove that they're competent to operate a forklift, yet when the construction industry you have a project manager, a supervisor, or (a) general manager that doesn't prove they are competent and (has) nothing available to those people to prove the competencies that they need to manage safely," he said.

John Holland's performance is not good and we should be moving mountains and we can't get better. We all are in disability, it's about we come together as an industry.

John Holland get the bill rolling with the introduction of its Passport program, which provides all workers - from a building head through to the managing director - with skills, knowledge and behaviours that will build understanding.

"With understanding comes true ownership, instead of just lip-service," Cicilia said.

A key difference in John Holland's Passport program is the encouragement of active participation as opposed to just passive learning.

A component of the program includes hypothetical scenarios where a senior contractor employee on whom they would handle a predictable situation.

The program is not simple reading and PowerPoint presentations, but a mix of adult learning, workshops, situational awareness case studies, and group work.

The introduction of the program gained quite a bit of industry interest, according to Cicilia.

John Holland subcontractors began requesting to participate in the program, other companies questioned how they could get their contractors to work on the program and the program received numerous endorsements from the Federal Safety Commissioner, who has established it as an industry case study for next practice, Leighton Holdings chief Walt King, and the Cooperative Research Centre for Construction Innovation.

This resulted in Cicilia leading a research project, funded by the CRC for Construction Innovation, to develop an industry framework, termed John Holland's Passport program.

The new safety framework was launched in December and by federal minister for infrastructure, Michaelia Cash Andrews.

"In the launch of the framework Cicilia said the total nature of the construction industry had contributed to the high number of deaths and injuries across the industry.

"Many Australian construction sites have a poor safety culture, which has contributed to a fatality rate once was five times higher than the mining industry, and not to mention thousands of avoidable injuries," he said.

John Holland's Passport program and the new industry-specific safety framework are above and beyond just meeting legislative requirements, according to Cicilia.

"It goes well and truly above, John Holland has... a belief that legislative compliance is just a licence to operate. If we just focus on compliance we will never get better. This program is focused on workplace practice and a no harm philosophy," he said.

"When John Holland has invested well over $15 million in the safety program, Cicilia said the company did not develop the program to impress from.

"We aren't in it to make money out of it, but we certainly want to build our brand," he said.

John Holland is still strictly reserved as to how the new framework will be implemented.

Cicilia said the company was cautious about how the framework would end up in industry because it did not want the key behavioural principles eroded away, returning the program to just another "mechanical process."

John Holland conducted a culture perception survey, which revealed last year, which indicated the program was well received.

According to Cicilia, say indicators have shown steady improvement across the company.

"Just the level of interaction in the workplace, the level of addressing of risks, and the buy-in with which safety is treated now is just a huge difference to what it was three years ago," he said.

John Holland plans to conduct ongoing culture perception surveys every six months to measure the program’s success.

The next step for John Holland's Passport Program is for it to roll out to its 12000 safety critical positions, with Stage 2 following soon after.

Stage 2 will see John Holland's blue collar and subcontractor workforce trained in the program.