



1

AN INTRODUCTION TO JOB ANALYSIS

Identifying the right person to fill a job vacancy has always been difficult. Our aging, culturally diverse, and heterogeneous workforce has increased that difficulty, and our globally competitive economy makes searching for competent workers an even more formidable task. The rise of the Internet and the virtual avalanche of resumes employers receive in response to each job posting make the task of finding suitable candidates yet more laborious.

Still, hiring the wrong people poses serious risks to all businesses—from the smallest to the large, multinational corporation. Indeed, the costs of a hiring mistake are estimated to be from one-half to ten times an individual's yearly salary. The expense of hiring mistakes must be controlled by using a systematic and consistent approach to identifying and hiring competent and suitable people.

Hiring a competent and suitable individual to fill a position is a true win-win proposition—a win for both the new employee and the employer. Recruiting competent people for positions in which they can succeed, feel good about what they are doing, and experience the positive regard of their co-workers is highly reinforcing to everybody. New employees should experience a boost in their sense of self-worth and self-esteem. They should begin to feel secure and bring greater focus and energy to their work, as job satisfaction increases. This growing sense of achievement and capability, in turn, leads to greater increases in motivation, to further achievement, and to a greater sense of competence.

Why Do We Analyze Jobs?

Completing a competent job analysis is ordinarily necessary in order to write the job description, the formal statement of the responsibilities involved, and the qualities necessary for success on this specific job. Without such a job analysis, it is difficult, if not impossible, to prepare a useful job description—and without a job description it would be impossible to fill any job vacancy successfully. A sample job description is included as Appendix A.

But job descriptions have a bad reputation in most organizations. Both employees and managers regard writing job descriptions as a waste of time—until they need to use the information from that job description. Many feel that job descriptions are too confining, that they limit people to a specific set of tasks, and that they limit the behavior of job incumbents. Consequently, writing job analyses is one part of human capital management that everyone loves to hate, arguably even more than performance reviews. People give various reasons for not wanting to do (or even be involved in preparing) job descriptions:

- “It’s too much work, and I have more important things to do.”
- “It’s a waste of time; my people know what their jobs are.”
- “Our jobs change too fast to write descriptions.”
- “A job description is too confining. I want my people to be flexible.”

However, the information obtained from job analyses and which leads to the job description is essential for virtually all of the other human resources (HR) functions. The manager who does not have time to work on job descriptions today certainly doesn’t have time to defend against an EEO suit later. Perhaps the current employees really do know what their jobs are, but what happens when a key employee suddenly leaves, and the information necessary for recruiting a replacement is

not there? And if jobs are changing rapidly, knowing what skills are needed to perform these jobs is even more essential, since training people in the newly necessary skills will be a constant requirement. Finally, while flexibility is good in the abstract, organizations require a functional level of responsibility and accountability, which requires job descriptions, which in turn require competent job analyses. Thus, the job description should include information about the duties the employee performs, the knowledge, skills, and abilities, that is, the competencies, necessary to perform those tasks, and any other job-related information. Nowhere is this more important than in the hiring process.

The Hiring Process

For the employer, hiring such people is equally important. First, it saves money by raising productivity, lowering personnel turnover, and reducing supervisory problems. Further, personnel conflicts and problems decline sharply, as does the turnover of new hires, all of which result in considerable savings in additional hiring costs and downtime. Proper selection processes significantly reduce the risk of litigation for negligent or discriminatory hiring practices. An organization succeeds when its hiring process places people in jobs that allow them to utilize their abilities, capabilities, and skills. Finally, from a societal point of view, good selection also provides genuine equal opportunity to all people and helps our economy grow by increasing productivity and reducing job dissatisfaction.

Despite the many benefits of hiring the right candidate to fill a job vacancy, doing so is rarely easy for most organizations. In our experience, one of the most important reasons for this difficulty is that all too many supervisors and managers do not have a clear understanding of the competencies necessary for success in that job and how to assess those competencies. If you do not know what you are looking for, it is difficult to find it!

Prior to an in-depth analysis of job analysis, it is important to place job analysis in a proper context, one that illuminates its importance in the management of an organization's most important asset, its human capital.

The Human Capital Life Cycle

We believe that the ideal human capital life cycle is best understood as involving six more or less discrete steps. All too often employers do not differentiate these steps clearly and thus do not follow them, leading to poor-quality outcomes. The six steps approach employee recruitment, selection, and hiring as the initial aspects of an employee life cycle, one that is concerned with employees throughout their employment careers. The six steps are

- Job analysis
- Recruitment
- Screening
- Final selection
- Job orientation
- Training and development

Additional phases of human capital management appear later in work life as employees move through a career and into retirement, but we will concern ourselves only with these initial six steps, ones that build on the job analysis and universally affect virtually all employees and most jobs. Beginning with job analysis, we will review each of these steps briefly.

Job Analysis

It is not possible to overestimate the importance of a competent job analysis in the human capital process. It is the step on which

the entire employee life cycle hinges and thus should be regarded as one of the most important professional responsibilities of both the human resource staff who must conduct thorough job analyses and of their managers who must initiate and oversee the process.

Simply stated, the purpose of a job analysis is to provide an in-depth understanding of the competencies required for success in order to select appropriate candidates. A job competency is a behavior, or set of behaviors, necessary to accomplish a specific work task or achieve a specific goal. These competencies can range from the most simple, such as filing, operating a punch press, or answering callers politely and warmly, to the most complex, such as neurosurgery or getting along with a difficult supervisor.

The importance of using comprehensive job analyses in selecting among candidates is strongly supported by empirical research. This research (e.g., Campion, Palmer, & Campion, 1997; Campion, Pursell, & Brown, 1988;) clearly shows that, when the hiring process was based on a careful job analysis, the prediction of job success is greatly increased, and that it is possible to identify correctly those candidates most likely to succeed. This line of research also supports the conclusion that much of the early research on the problems in predicting job success was seriously flawed by one critical omission—the lack of job analyses that identified the characteristics necessary for success on that job. While the following chapters of this book are concerned with the nuts and bolts of conducting a competent job analysis, the remainder of this chapter will continue with the importance of using job analyses throughout the employee life cycle.

Recruitment

In job postings for recruiting candidates, the job analysis should be used to clearly specify clearly the knowledge, skills, and abilities (competencies) of successful candidates. Although this

will probably not reduce the flood of resumes that recruiters currently experience with every job posting, it does serve two important purposes: First, it provides a template for screening the mass of resumes. Which of these resumes clearly indicates that the sender possesses the requirements necessary for success? For example, to what extent has the applicant tailored the resume to fit the articulated set of requirements in the job posting? How carefully has the resume been prepared? How often have there been job changes? What is the nature of the self-described accomplishments?

Second, an accurate and sufficiently detailed posting will serve as a template that gives a measure of protection against charges of discriminatory hiring. The degree to which the applicant does not meet the specific requirements set forth in the job posting is critical in any defense against discriminatory hiring practices, providing that it can be shown that these requirements are actually related to on-the-job success, a topic to which we return later.

If the initial recruitment process includes some interviewing, the recruiter needs to remember that this interview has two purposes. One is to sell the job to attractive candidates, those who appear to have the necessary set of requirements. The other is to verify that the applicant does have the requirements. This means that the recruiter must understand both the job and the candidate well enough to probe for the validity of the information contained in the resume. Deciding whether or not the recruiter knows enough about the job to test the requirements should be an important factor in selecting recruiters for specific jobs.

One of the dangers of conducting initial interviews of this type is that the recruiter may view the purpose solely as selling the candidate on the job. Organizations should be careful not to reward recruiters for the number of candidates they promote to the screening process. Rewarding recruiters for the number of candidates who make it through the screening process to the final selection stage is far wiser.

Screening

Most hiring organizations do not make a clear distinction between screening and selection, which means that the organization is putting too much time, effort, and energy into examining too many inappropriate candidates. By screening we mean the identification of those few applicants who appear most likely to possess the requirements for advancement to the selection process. We would argue that the optimal number of such candidates who should be advanced to the final selection process is between three and five.

Final Selection

This final selection among the best three to five candidates will ordinarily involve a series of interviews with different key supervisors and managers in the organization. All too often the final selection process tends to be unplanned, which leads to non-functional redundancy in the topics addressed. We strongly recommend that the persons who will be conducting the interviews meet prior to the first interview and develop an interview plan based on the job analysis; for example, decide who will ask what questions, decide which issues need to be covered by more than one interviewer, and so forth. Such planning greatly increases the database developed by the interview process, and also makes the candidate feel that, if this is a sample of management behavior, the organization is well managed.

In addition, an in-depth follow-up and verification of each candidate's education, work history, and background should occur in order to determine if the candidate possesses the essential requirements. Our experience revealed that there are too many cases of falsified educational records, non-existent jobs, bankruptcies, convictions for a variety of offenses, and other misdeeds, none of which were included in the resume, of course. Research has shown that in most resumes as many as one-third of all the

so-called “facts” are simply not true. Each of these issues needs to be carefully checked.

This final step of the selection process that we are advocating requires time and effort, but it has the capacity to pay rich dividends in the kind of employee that it yields. Indeed, the same can be said of the entire hiring process that we have described thus far. There is a clear rule at work here: “Hire hard, and manage easy!” The reverse, however, seems to be more often the rule.

Job Orientation

Most descriptions of the initial human capital management process do not include job orientation as part of this process, but we insist that they should do so. Most frequently, orientation involves simply turning the new hire over to the human resources staff, who spend their time explaining the various company benefit programs and having the new hire fill out the necessary forms. While these are important ingredients of any orientation program, they are not the issues that are paramount to most new employees.

What new employees really want to know and should be told is how to succeed on the job and how to avoid getting in difficulties early on. Two questions we often suggest the supervisor should answer as if the new employee were asking them are: “If your best friend were to come to work here, what bit of advice would you offer about how to succeed?” and “What could I do in the short run that would cause me to fail?” This is clearly the advice that one would give to a close friend or relative, but is often very difficult for a new employee to obtain. And this advice should be based on the data developed through the job analysis.

In our judgment, the hiring process does not end with the final selection decision. After that decision is made, every organization should want the successful candidate to succeed. A job orientation that provides psychological support as well as administrative

support enhances the likelihood of that success, as does having a training and development plan in place for the new employee, one based on the job analysis.

Training and Development

Once the new employee is oriented and working toward becoming successful, the issue of the employee's needs for further training and development become important. When a new employee is hired as a trainee, the importance of a training and development plan should be obvious—a plan ready to be implemented should be available. Indeed, virtually all new employees will have training and development needs—needs that the job analysis and the selection process should have highlighted.

Because there are no perfect new hires, each will pose some kind of unique needs for further training and development, and it is at this early stage that these needs should be addressed. While obviously other training and development needs will surface over time, the new hire offers a unique opportunity for training and development. What are this new hire's specific training needs? Where could a training program, a course, some coaching, or mentoring early on make a real difference in performance and enhance the possibilities for long-term success? Further, this kind of effort on the part of organization is likely to make a real difference in the attitude of the new employee. "Someone up there really wants me to succeed!"

That the job analysis is the cornerstone of every employee life cycle process should be obvious, as should the fact that it affects applicants, new hires, employees, and employers. In every instance, the job analysis is the core of the process, from identifying what requirements are necessary to developing training and development plans for individual employees as well as in supporting and mentoring them to become successful parts of a well-functioning organization (Ployhart, Schneider, & Schmitt, 2006).

In summary, we have sketched out a human capital management process that provides a context for understanding the important role competent job analyses play in that process, and we now turn to an in-depth look at what is involved in job analyses.

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