



Job Analysis: A Basic Tool for HR Practitioners

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Almost everything we as HR professionals do requires an understanding of the work people are doing. You can't effectively design a compensation system, develop selection tools, manage performance, classify jobs or develop effective training without understanding the work that is being performed. Job analysis consists of identifying a job's component parts and then discovering what employee behaviors are required for successful performance. It would seem then that job analysis should be as handy and familiar a tool for HR professionals as a wrench is for a plumber or a cappuccino maker for a barista. Yet job analysis seems to be something of a lost art. This article contains tips for creating a good job analysis. The tips are divided into two parts: planning for your job analysis and building your model.

Planning for Your Job Analysis

The first step in a good job analysis is understanding what your job analysis information will be used for. The level of descriptive detail in your job analysis should match requirements for use. Some applications require more descriptive detail than others. For example, the detail required to create a structured interview is much less than the detail required to create a job knowledge test. Identify each possible use of your job analysis to make sure you capture a sufficient level of detail when you are gathering job analysis information and, if needed, capture information at multiple levels. For example, we worked in one organization interested in using job analysis information for a range of applications both specific to jobs (such as individual development planning) and across the organization (such as workforce and succession planning). We identified both cross-cutting general work information required for most or all jobs in the organization, such as effective communication, as well as more specific technical work information for each job. Each job in the organization is associated with both a general, cross-cutting set of requirements and skills, and a set of requirements and skills specific for that job.

The next step in job analysis is to assess your risk. If your job analysis will be used to create systems for employment decisions, then the EEOC's [*Uniform Guidelines on Employee Selection Procedures*](#) (1978) apply. Practices such as hiring, retention, promotion, transfer, demotion, dismissal or referral are covered by the guidelines. The guidelines require that selection procedures be linked to critical job behaviors. If the legality of a selection system is challenged, the more validity evidence gathered, the better. Validity evidence includes the accuracy of job analysis information. If your job analysis information will be used for employment decisions, consider multiple approaches to gathering information and make sure each step in the process is well-documented.

Don't forget to involve stakeholders. Job analysis requires resources and does not happen in a vacuum. It requires the input of others, especially people doing or

supervising the work being analyzed. It's important to get stakeholders involved to ensure that you have the resources you need. Stakeholders to consider include incumbents of the job being analyzed and their supervisors, and the end users of products developed based on the job analysis.

Building Your Model

Don't start from scratch. For most jobs there is quite a bit of work information that you can draw from. One source is [O-net](#), which is the Department of Labor's online source for job information. Job information for 812 jobs is available at no cost. O-net and other online sources tend not to be as helpful for highly technical jobs that require specialized knowledge. In those cases consider documentation internal to the organization. Most jobs will have some associated HR products or tools, such as position descriptions, from which you can draw information. In one organization we worked with whose workforce required specialized knowledge of environmental law we were still able to use the Office of Personnel Management's (OPM's) [Executive Core Qualifications](#), published online, to help draft leadership and interpersonal skill requirements for the job. We then drew on internal information and job incumbent interviews to identify the technical requirements.

There are two key types of job analysis information: task requirements and person requirements. Task requirements can include the procedures, methods, and standards of performance of the job, as well as equipment used to perform. Person requirements include the knowledge, skills, abilities and behaviors required for successful job performance. A rigorous job analysis includes both types of information and makes specific linkages between person and task requirements. Job analyses that use competencies as the unit of information often include both the person and job requirements together. For example, a competency might read "ability to analyze data in order to draw appropriate conclusions." Both the person requirement, "ability to analyze data," and the job requirement, "draws appropriate conclusions," are included together. This approach can be an efficient way of summarizing job related information and may be appropriate for workforce planning applications. However, if your job analysis will be used as the basis of a selection system, separately identifying both person and job requirements and the linkages between them is important for meeting legal requirements.

Once you've got a draft job analysis model, you can begin collecting information to validate your model. Job information can be gathered through many mechanisms including interviews, focus groups, observation, or surveys. The scope of the organization and target job can help you determine how to gather information. For example, if the job in question is performed by many people across geographic locations, you may want to use a survey to gather information. If on the other hand the job has only one or two incumbents, an interview approach makes more sense. If the job in question has a large number of incumbents you might consider a combination of approaches, especially if the incumbents are geographically dispersed and may be performing the job in different ways. For example, we worked with a logistics organization with employees at multiple locations of different sizes across the country. We first held a focus group with representatives across the country to refine the model we developed. Then to ensure the model was an accurate reflection of how the job was being performed throughout the organization, we conducted a workforce-wide survey to validate our job analysis model.

Conclusion

There are many reasons why job analysis isn't conducted as often as it should be, including the time and resources required, the dynamic nature of work which can make job analysis challenging, and the difficulty of the job analysis process itself. Hopefully some of the tips included here will make the process seem a little clearer and encourage more of us to practice good job analysis.