Writing Job Descriptions



AN OVERVIEW

The cornerstone to any employment decision begins with job analysis. Job analysis is the most basic activity in human resource management. Accurate information on all jobs is necessary to efficiently direct and/or control the operations of a small business.

Competition and equal employment opportunity legislation has made job analysis a mandatory organizational consideration for small businesses. Because human resources represent the largest cost item for smallest businesses, managers must have current and systematized information on all jobs in order to produce products and services efficiently. The myriad of laws, guidelines, and court decisions concerning equal employment opportunity make job analysis necessary. Small businesses have been quite vulnerable on the issue of discrimination in employment practices. One way to defend employment practices is to conduct job analysis and prepare job descriptions.

Job descriptions are the most visible output from job analysis. Comprehensive job descriptions developed from job analysis are used in selection, training, performance appraisal, and compensation. There are many formats used in preparing job descriptions. Included in this factsheet is one job description format used by small businesses. J**ob Analysis**

Job analysis is an in-depth study of a job and provides information for job descriptions. The job analyst will gather information about jobs through interviewing employees, observing performance of certain tasks, asking employees to fill out questionnaires and worksheets, and collecting information about a job from secondary sources such as the Dictionary of Occupational Titles.

The job analysts will write up the results of the analysis and review them with the job incumbent. The documentation is then presented to the incumbent’s supervisor for review (often the incumbent’s supervisor is the job analyst.) The supervisor may add, delete or modify duties, knowledge, skills, abilities, and other characteristics. After supervisory approval is obtained, the documentation is forwarded through channels for final approval. A signed and dated job description is then prepared. This job description becomes the official record for this particular job.

ROLE OF JOB INCUMBENT

The job incumbent has an important role in this process. The following suggestions should help incumbents assist the job analyst: Spend some time thinking about the job. Make notes, or keep a diary of work related activities;

- At the outset fully explain the incumbents' concept of the job to the analyst;
- Focus on the facts – do not overstate or understate duties knowledge, skills, abilities, and other characteristics;
- Refrain from side issues. The analyst is only concerned with the job itself. Job performance, wages, complaints, relationships with co-workers, etc., are not relevant to this activity;
- Remember that the incumbents' input is critical; however, establishing the boundaries of the job is a management decision; and
- Be aware that there will be no adverse consequences from job analysis. For example, no person's salary will be reduced and no person's job will be eliminated. The analyst may recommend changes in title or other realignments, subject to management decision.

Definitions

The following is a list of commonly used job analysis terms.

- Job duty – a single specific task.
- Knowledge – a body of information applied directly to the performance of a duty.
- Skill – a present, observable competence to perform a learned activity.
- Ability – a present competence to perform an observable behavior or a behavior that results in an observable product.
- Physical characteristic – the physical attributes employees must have in order to perform job duties; unaided or with the assistance of a reasonable accommodation.
- Credentials and Experience – the minimal acceptable level of education, experience, and certifications necessary for employment.
- Other Characteristics – duties, knowledge, skills, and abilities that do not have a logical place in the job description.

WRITING STYLE IN JOB DESCRIPTIONS

Job descriptions should be written in brief and clear sentences. The basic structure for sentences in a job description should be "implied subject/verb/object/explanatory phrase." It is best to use action verbs like "types" and "files."

EXAMPLE JOB DESCRIPTION

As stated previously, job descriptions are written narratives of the major duties and responsibilities of job incumbents. The following job description is derived from the Dictionary of Occupational Titles (DOT).

Sample Job Description

Title: Secretary

Pay Range: E10

Date: May 3, 20XX

Job Analyst: XXX

FLSA Status: Nonexempt

DOT Code: 201.362-030

Reports to: Office Manager

Job Summary (from Dictionary of Occupational Titles; DOT):

- Schedules appointments, gives information to callers, takes dictation, and otherwise relieves officials of clerical work and minor administrative and business detail.
- Essential Functions (modified from DOT by job incumbent and supervisor)
- Opens, date stamps, sorts, and distributes mail.
- Answers telephone and provides information/assistance or routes caller to appropriate staff member.
- Takes phone or visitor messages and delivers to appropriate individual.
- Greets visitors to the office and directs them to appropriate individual.
- Composes and types routine correspondence and memoranda using word processing software.
- Compiles and types statistical reports including tables and text using spreadsheet software.
- Assists Office Manager with monitoring office supplies.
- Operates and maintains fax machine.
- Makes copies, collates, and staples materials as requested.
- Establishes and maintains permanent files; files and retrieves files as requested.
- Performs other related duties as required.

KNOWLEDGE, SKILLS, AND ABILITIES (ESTABLISHED BY SUPERVISOR)

- Knowledge of modern office procedures and methods including telephone communications, office systems, and record keeping.
- Knowledge of modern business communication, including style and format of letters, memoranda, minutes, and reports.
- Skill to use a personal computer and various software packages.
- Skill to type 50 words per minute.
- Ability to establish priorities, work independently, and proceed with objectives without supervision.
- Ability to handle and resolve recurring problems.

CREDENTIALS AND EXPERIENCE (ESTABLISHED BY SUPERVISOR)

- Associates degree with courses in secretarial/office administration.
- Two years related experience or
- Equivalent combination of education and experience.
- Special Requirements: (established by supervisor) Willing to work overtime, holidays, and weekends as requested by Office Manager.
- Physical Requirements: Requires occasional lifting of boxes weighing between 10 to 20 pounds.

- Mental Requirements: Occasional last minute deadlines may cause stress – ability to handle stress and multiple tasks.
- Working Conditions: Semi-quiet surroundings with occasional interruptions from visitors and staff. Florescent lighting, position is not located near window or direct sunlight.

DICTIONARY OF OCCUPATIONAL TITLES

The ONET program is the nation’s primary source of occupational information. Central to the project is the O*NET database, containing information on hundreds of standardized and occupation specific descriptors. The database, which is available to the public at no cost, is continually updated by surveying a broad range of workers from each occupation. The Occupational Information Network (O*NET) is being developed under the sponsorship of the US Department of Labor/Employment and Training Administration (USDOL/ETA) through a grant to the North Carolina Employment Security Commission.