

Understanding Nuances and Commonalities of Job Descriptions and impact on the employee performance while in organization operations

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Abstract - This paper has explored how job descriptions are developed in today's organizations. As job descriptions are the foundations of jobs, they have to be prepared following certain guidelines. However, organizations follow different formats and put contents in those formats differently. This paper has searched for if there is a common ground in developing job descriptions. The paper is based on secondary sources of data. It compares and contrasts information from the available sources. The paper is an attempt to consolidate the pieces of knowledge that were already there. In doing so, it has also highlighted the gaps found in writing job descriptions which become remarkable avenues for further research. It concludes with the message that organizations can benefit if they follow the common practice of writing job descriptions discussed in the paper.

Key words: Job description, job analysis, performance expectations, performance appraisal.

I. INTRODUCTION

'Right person in the right place' is heavily emphasized in today's world of management. We need certain tools and techniques to find out the right person. Finding out the right person with required educational qualification, experience and training is not enough. The incumbent has to be made clear regarding the duties and responsibilities s/he is expected to perform (Arthur, 2008). Again his/her performance has to be appraised in course of time and decisions need to be made about

his/her performance. To do all these managerial activities, we need job descriptions.

There are various sorts of organizations. Some organizations are extremely hierarchical while others are flat. Some are private and some public. Some are specific to one particular locality and some are multinational. Whatever the nature of organization, they all have employees who perform. To make sure that their performance was on track and effective, they are provided with job descriptions. In this connection, Martin (2010) also states that the job description is to the job what the foundation is to the house. However, different organizations develop their own formats of job descriptions. In this context, this paper explores how to write effective job descriptions. The job description should accurately reflect the duties and responsibilities of the position. When well-written, it produces a realistic picture of a job and answers the question, "What does the person in this role actually do?"

Job descriptions are also known as job specifications, job profiles, JDs, and position descriptions (job PD).

Our job description directory contains job description examples covering most roles. We have examples of job descriptions you can quickly download and modify to suit your unique business requirements. You'll find a job description for most common jobs.

Starting with a sample job description will make sure you do not miss any of the key requirements for a role and new hires will have a better understanding of what their role is.

A job description not only describes the position's responsibilities, it sets the foundation for recruiting, developing and retaining talent and also sets the stage for optimum work performance by clarifying responsibilities, expected results, and evaluation of performance. It is also an important component to maintaining an equitable compensation system and ensuring legal compliance. The document should be revisited and updated in line with the annual performance evaluation cycle.

The job description contains sufficient information to describe major responsibilities and essential functions as they exist today. They provide the information necessary to classify the position, not the person; thus they are "incumbent neutral" and not based on any specific quality of an incumbent (such as knowledge, skills, abilities, performance, dedication, loyalty, years of service, or degree). The document should not include every detail of how and what work is performed so that it remains useful even when minor changes occur. Job descriptions can be written as a joint effort between supervisor and employee, but the supervisor must approve.

A job description contains the following components: job title, job purpose, job duties and responsibilities, required qualifications, preferred qualifications and working conditions.

Method

This paper is based on secondary sources of data. The author reviewed the books, dissertations, journal articles. Some samples of job descriptions from some world renowned organizations were also reviewed. In reviewing the documents both electronic and hard copies were consulted. As Tylor (2011) mentions that review articles also provide the readers with practical insights, new thinking and new approaches to old problems, this paper has been prepared following

that spirit.

II. CONCEPT OF JOB DESCRIPTION

A job description is a written statement of the content of any particular job derived from job analysis (Cushway, 2003). Mader-Clark (2013, p. 3) defines it as "a clear and concise depiction of a job's duties and requirements". It is both a hiring blueprint and a performance management tool (Silverstein, 2007). Here it is important not to get confused between job description and person specification/profile. Although the latter is also a product of job analysis, it basically refers to a statement of the skills, knowledge and other attributes needed for effective performance in the job (Rudman, 2003).

Importance of Job Description

A job description is used for various purposes. First, it makes the incumbent clear about the duties and responsibilities s/he is expected to perform (Arthur, 2008). Employees who know what is expected of them can focus their energy on specific goals (Sandler & Keefe, 2004). Second, it communicates where an employee's position in the organization is and its relation to other positions in the company (Rudman, 2003). Next, it serves as a performance contract between management and employee. Likewise, the well-written, comprehensive job description sets a standard for performance (Silverstein, 2007). That is to say, this written document forms a solid base for measuring success and pay. Similarly, it is also helpful in performing job evaluation and job redesign (Cushway, 2003). Finally, it can be used in various HR processes like recruitment and selection, orientation, performance assessment, succession planning, coaching, training and compensation (Hampton, 1947; Firth, 1989; Martin, 2010; Royer, 2010).

Components of Job Description

There are variations in content and format of job descriptions between organizations (Firth, 1989). Despite having the disparities, an attempt has been

made here to search for common elements of a job description.

According to Haynes (1990, pp. 66-67), the major elements of a job description are job identification,

basic function, duties and responsibilities, delegation of authorities, working relationships, working conditions, and qualifications. The table presented below makes us further clear regarding the sequence and description of these elements:

Table 1

| Components | Job identification | Basic function |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------|
| Duties and responsibilities | Delegation of authorities | Working relationships |
| Working conditions | Qualifications | |

Components of Job Description

Component Description

Department, location, salary grade or range, overtime status
Job's basic purpose in brief and direct language

Principal duties and responsibilities in the order of their importance
Financial and/or personnel authority if any

Description of internal and external relationships like staff members, other departments, customers, suppliers, government agencies, etc.

Work place, safety hazards, travel required, etc. Required experience, training, and other qualifications

Components presented in Table 1 above are the common ones. These components appear in a sequential order in job descriptions. One example job description has been presented in Appendix B of this paper. However, these are not the only components of job descriptions. Other scholars have presented them in different terms. Some scholars have presented even greater number of components. Cushway (2003, pp. 6-9) talks about fifteen components of a good job description (see Appendix A).

Compared to the components given by Haynes (1990), the ones provided by Cushway (2003) are greater in number. Here it is important to note that all these components as provided by Cushway may not appear in all job descriptions. In this context, Brannick, Levine, and Morgeson (2007) categorize the different components of a job description into four major parts. These parts appear in almost all job descriptions. Their idea has been summarized in the following table:

Major Parts Identifiers Summary Duties and tasks

Other information

Table 2

Major Parts of Job Description

Description of Parts

Job title as well as the physical and functional locations of the job Description of the essence of the job; primary functions of the position Details not found in the job summary; answers three questions – what, how, and why

Working conditions, required knowledge, skills, and abilities, or job evaluation information

Job Description Development Process

It is important how job descriptions are developed. Organizations follow a standard process of developing job descriptions. According to Haynes (1990, pp. 65-66), the process of writing a job description consists of the following five stages:

Information gathering

In the first stage, necessary information about a job is collected, usually through job analysis. It is an act of gathering data about a specific job and what a person needs to do that job (Rudman, 2003). Sometimes, job descriptions are not developed through job analysis. In that case, managers and HR professionals list all the duties and responsibilities associated with a specific job and develop the job description (Royer, 2010).

Drafting

After collecting information, a draft is written. It is usually done by the person who collected the information. One important point is that the draft should follow the standard formatting desired by the organization (Haynes, 1990).

Reviewing and approving

Review and approval generally starts with the employee directly involved in the job. It then proceeds to the supervisor who is in charge of the job. Other managers and specialists may also contribute in

reviewing the job descriptions.

Finalizing

Once the draft copy is approved, it is finalized by the authorized body of the organization. Now the job description is in the standard format and it can be provided to the concerned employee.

Updating

Jobs keep on changing in course of time. No job will stay the same for very long. Therefore, job descriptions must be kept up to date and relevant (Rudman, 2003).

Discussion

It has become clear that there is variation in contents and formats of job descriptions between organizations. Management experts have stressed on the point that there should not be different formats of job description in the same organization (Haynes, 1990). Now it has become a challenge to those organizations which do not have their own standard format of job description.

Cushway (2003) regards 'principal accountabilities or responsibilities' as the core of job description. According to Royer (2010), this section should answer the questions: what, how, and why. For example, one duty or task of a receptionist might be, "to answer phones using the switchboard in a timely

fashion to ensure customers receive a prompt and courteous greeting.” The what, in this example is “to answer phones . . . in a timely fashion.” The how refers to the equipment, in this case, the switchboard. The why refers to the goal of the task, in this case, the goal is for customers to “receive a prompt and courteous greeting.” This piece of information is very important from performance appraisal point of view. Sandler and Keefe (2004) and Kirkpatrick (2006) also state that the performance appraisal is built upon the foundation of a well-crafted job description. If the ‘duties and responsibilities’ section is presented in measurable terms, performance review becomes more objective. Therefore, utmost care must be provided in writing this section.

Employees may see the job description as defining the limits of their jobs and therefore refuse to do anything not specifically listed in the duties and responsibilities section. To circumvent this potential problem, the last item of the duties section on many job descriptions reads: “All other appropriate and reasonable duties that may be assigned” (Haynes, 1990). Perhaps outstanding performers are those who go beyond the duties and responsibilities that are given in the job description (DeNisi, 1996).

Job description and job specification are different things. Rudman (2003, p. 48) says, “Job descriptions and person profiles are different and should be kept separate.” However, there are many scholars like Haynes (1990) who incorporate job specification in job description. In this connection, Cushway (2003) states:

While the knowledge, qualifications, skills and experience required to do the job are strictly part of a person specification, rather than a job description, it is useful to include them in one composite document which can then be used for a variety of purposes. (p. 9)

Some scholars like Haynes (1990) propose the idea of developing results areas and performance standards. However, they do not fully incorporate these things in the job description. The scholars suggest that such standards should supplement the job description in separate forms. On the other hand, there are other experts like Rudman (2003) who make the point that we can incorporate the results areas and performance standards in a single job description (see Appendix C).

Many interesting issues have emerged from the review. One issue is that who prepares job descriptions and how they are prepared in our organizational context. Another issue is the uses of job descriptions in our context.

III. CONCLUSION

A job description is a communication tool that makes the concerned employee clear about his/her duties and responsibilities. It is used in different HR processes like recruitment, selection, orientation, performance appraisal, job evaluation, job redesign, training, and compensation. Although it is not free from its limitations, it should be kept up to date, relevant and fresh. Experts have further stressed the point that employees are to be encouraged not to become rigid and be confined only to what has been there in job description. It is to be developed and used effectively so that it becomes a boon in organizational success. This review paper has brought different ideas together, sought a common thread of developing a job description, and opened avenues to interested bodies for further studies on its different aspects.

IV. REFERENCES

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