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MULTIPLE USE JOB DESCRIPTIONS

**A Guide to Analysis, Preparation, and
Applications for Human Resources Managers**

Philip C Grant

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Multiple Use Job Descriptions

A GUIDE TO ANALYSIS,
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MANAGERS

Philip C. Grant



QUORUM BOOKS
Westport, Connecticut • London

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Grant, Philip C.

Multiple use job descriptions : a guide to analysis, preparation,
and applications for human resources managers / Philip C. Grant.
p. cm.

Bibliography: p.

Includes index.

ISBN 0-89930-416-8 (lib. bdg. : alk. paper)

1. Job descriptions. I. Title.

HF5549.5.J613G73 1989

658.3'06—dc19 88-23664

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data is available.

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Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 88-23664

ISBN: 0-89930-416-8

First published in 1989 by Quorum Books

Greenwood Press, 88 Post Road West, Westport, CT 06881

An imprint of Greenwood Publishing Group, Inc.

Printed in the United States of America



The paper used in this book complies with the
Permanent Paper Standard issued by the National
Information Standards Organization (Z39.48-1984).

10 9 8 7 6 5

Contents

| | |
|--|-----|
| Preface | vii |
| Acknowledgments | ix |
| Chapter 1. Job Descriptions: Their Nature and Importance | 1 |
| <i>What job descriptions are</i> | 2 |
| <i>What job descriptions are not</i> | 3 |
| <i>Why job descriptions are so important</i> | 6 |
| Chapter 2. One Hundred Thirty-Two Major Management Uses for the Job Description | 9 |
| <i>Job and organization design</i> | 9 |
| <i>Reward system design and employee motivation</i> | 17 |
| <i>Employee staffing</i> | 20 |
| <i>Employee training and development</i> | 25 |
| <i>Controlling employee-job performance</i> | 31 |
| <i>Other key uses</i> | 37 |
| Chapter 3. How to Write a Job Description | 45 |
| <i>Major sections of the job description</i> | 46 |
| <i>Major parts of the duties/responsibilities section</i> | 49 |
| <i>Why categorize duties?</i> | 54 |
| <i>How to order and write duty statements</i> | 57 |
| <i>Time and priority distributions</i> | 60 |
| <i>Matrix format</i> | 62 |
| Chapter 4. How to Gather Data for Preparation of the Job Description | 63 |

| | |
|---|-----|
| <i>General principles of data gathering</i> | 64 |
| <i>Procedure for gathering and assembling the data</i> | 70 |
| <i>Common methods and sources for data gathering</i> | 76 |
| <i>Other methods and sources</i> | 84 |
| Chapter 5. The Most Common Problems with Job Descriptions | 91 |
| <i>The written document</i> | 91 |
| <i>Use of the document</i> | 97 |
| <i>Gathering data for the document</i> | 103 |
| Appendixes | |
| A. Job Description | 112 |
| B. Person Specification | 117 |
| C. Procedure and Method | 118 |
| D. Performance Evaluation Instrument | 120 |
| E. Rules, Regulations, and Policies | 122 |
| F. Objectives | 123 |
| G. Job Design Quality Factors | 124 |
| H. Job Analysis Questionnaire | 125 |
| I. Managerial Positions Description Questionnaire (MPDQ) | 137 |
| J. Position Analysis Questionnaire (PAQ) | 139 |
| K. Quantitative Task Inventory (QTI) | 141 |
| L. Work (Time) Log for Non-Managers | 143 |
| M. Time Log for Managers | 144 |
| N. Random Observation Sheet | 145 |
| O. Job Factor Sheet | 146 |
| Bibliography | 149 |
| Index | 155 |

Preface

This book was designed as a specialized reference on job descriptions—how to prepare them and how to use them. Managers in any type of organization, personnel administrators and specialists in human resource management, and students in the field of human resource administration should find the book of real practical value.

The volume breaks new ground on a number of fronts. First, it identifies a far more extensive array of uses for job descriptions than any other book—132 major management uses are discussed. Second, it develops important points on how to gather data for job descriptions, heretofore neglected by the literature. Third, it emphasizes the importance of developing task/responsibility categories as an aid to understanding the design of work. Fourth, the book shows that the design of jobs can be accurately depicted by job descriptions only if attention is given to key unconventional types of job description information such as task times and priorities, non-work and semi-work activity, and unplanned work. And fifth, the book provides a comprehensive compilation of the most common problems associated with the preparation and use of job descriptions.

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Acknowledgments

The author wishes to thank the following organizations and individuals for their considerable and much appreciated help in providing data for the book and in preparing the manuscript. The Jasper Wyman and Son Company helped by providing an opportunity for the author to test, firsthand, some of the job analysis techniques discussed in the book. The Greater Bangor Personnel Association helped by participating in an extensive research project that provided data on job description uses. Students in the author's spring 1987 Personnel Administration course contributed by gathering data about job description preparation practices and job description usage in various companies, both public and private. The author's wife, Kathy Grant, provided much help in proofreading the manuscript. Suzanne Bruce typed numerous drafts of various parts of the book. Sue McLaughlin did a super job typing and proofreading the final manuscript. All these people put considerable efforts into making this book a reality.

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CHAPTER 1

Job Descriptions: Their Nature and Importance

Job descriptions have enjoyed varying degrees of popularity over the years, with perhaps the height of their popularity coming during and shortly after World War I, as organizations grew rapidly in size and sought means for making large aggregations of resources manageable and efficient. In the mid-1960s and early 1970s job descriptions were shunned somewhat as people began to see them as primarily a symbol of bureaucracy and essentially a constraint on normal employee growth and development, as well as a factor limiting what management could do in the organization in response to demands for rapid change.

No one format and style for job descriptions have ever been widely accepted. They still come in all colors, shapes, and sizes in the practicing world. Sometimes they are highly elaborate documents. At other times they paint a portrait of the job in very few simple sentences. Often different types of formats and styles are found for job descriptions within a given organization. Most organizations do not do a very good job of preparing job descriptions.

Job descriptions are used by all types of organizations in various ways and to different degrees. Some organizations do not use them at all. Large organizations tend to use them more than do small organizations. Many organizations get excited about them at one point in time and then forget about them for extended periods until they come on hard times, for example, and experience a critical need for control. Most organizations do not understand the potential value of job descriptions and consequently highly underutilize them. The real tragedy comes in the many organizations that misunderstand what job descriptions are and consequently misuse them. The thrust of this chapter will be to

identify clearly what job descriptions are and to emphasize, in general, why they are valuable.

WHAT JOB DESCRIPTIONS ARE

To understand and appreciate the job description (JD) it is useful to describe it in different ways from different angles:

A written display. A job description is a written display (paper document, computer screen image, blackboard presentation, etc.) explicitly describing what an employee does in the organization. It communicates to the reader what the job is like. It includes information about the employee's job but its focus is on depicting the duties and responsibilities the employee is expected to execute for the organization. A sample job description is presented in Appendix A. When such a written display is prepared for each position in the organization instead of for each class of similar positions (a job) it is often, and probably more appropriately, called a position description. In this book it will not be necessary to make this distinction. The term *job* will be used throughout all ensuing discussions.

A model of work design. A JD is a model of the design of the work performed by the employee. When properly developed it profiles the major components of a job's structure. It will generally not attempt to cover *all* facets of a job's design. To describe everything about a job is not necessary and indeed is impossible since jobs contain unplanned components—necessary but unfore-seable engagements. Also, trying to describe a job in great detail may require too costly an effort.

Key elements of the intrinsic (task) makeup of the job and of the physical and social environments in which the tasks are performed are generally included in the JD model. How the job relates, administratively and operationally, to other jobs in the organizational system is an element of structure usually identified in the model. Also, certain kinds of relationships among different tasks are often implied if not displayed explicitly in the JD.

A work plan. A job description is a work plan—a “map” that shows direction. As a plan it shows that the work the employee engages in has been thought through in a rational, conscious fashion—anticipated in advance of execution. As a plan it shows that work is not left to chance. It shows work is not something that is largely spontaneous. As a plan it shows that somebody has engaged in the considered evaluation of alternatives—that deliberate choices about what the employee does in the organization have been made. Moreover, as a plan the JD serves to bound, or constrain, employee activity in the organization. One is expected to conform to the plan, not to vault into any duty domain that might suit the fancy.

A role prescription. The job description is (or should be) a role prescription. It should not describe what the worker does if this is not what the organization wishes the worker to do. JDs must prescribe—spell out those duties (tasks) and

responsibilities in which the organization thinks the employee should engage. JDs must never become simple written reflections of whatever employees actually do. The JD is the standard. It defines a pattern of behavior expectations. Actual behavior must be compared with this prescription for control purposes.

The term *role* is significant here too, and it has a broader connotation than the term *job*. The word *job* usually connotes simply a set of tasks operative and/or managerial—but, nonetheless, tasks. The concept of role incorporates such notions as work relations with others, justification for existence of the position, the impact of one's behavior in the position on the other workers, as well as when, where, and with what resources tasks should be performed. It implies that a number of features of one's work world need to be identified and understood if JDs are to serve as a useful management tool.

An "attachment" to the position. The JD attaches to the position not the person. An employee may perform the tasks incorporated in a number of different positions. This can happen when staffing for certain positions cannot be found, or when workers are out sick or on vacation. One employee may have to cover other positions while performing his or her own regular job; but the employee's job does not change during this effort. The job stays the same. It is just that now the employee has other jobs to fill in addition to the regular. Separate JDs should exist for each different position (job) the employee covers. The organization should not rely on just one document to cover the spectrum of this employee's activities.

Just as one person usually plays one role but on occasion may play multiple roles, a given role is usually played by one person but on occasion, such as with shift work, multiple individuals may take turns playing a role. There need be only one JD for the *role*, not multiple JDs for the multiple persons.

A picture of human resource investment. The job description shows what the organization's investment in the human resource is for. It is an expression of organizational need. It shows how the human resource should be utilized. It shows how that resource is to contribute to the organization's output. It shows any interested reader what the organization should be getting for what it gives out in paychecks. It is, in a broad sense, something like a contract with the employee, spelling out what demands the organization makes on the employee in exchange for giving the employee rewards such as pay, benefits, and such.

WHAT JOB DESCRIPTIONS ARE NOT

To fully understand and appreciate the JD it helps to look at what the JD is not:

Not a person specification. A job description is not a person specification or, more commonly called, a job specification. A person spec details the kinds and levels of skills, abilities, knowledge, and so on one must possess in order to do the job well or up to standard. Usually qualifications—experience and educational requirements—are specified in person specs. These requirements spell

out the kinds and amounts of experience and training needed by employees if they are to acquire the skills, knowledge, and abilities necessary to perform at standard.

A person specification describes the kind of person needed to do the job. A JD, on the other hand, describes the nature of the work to be done. In practice, person specifications are often included in the same document with the description of the work. But the reader should recognize the distinction here and at least conceptually separate the two. See Appendix B for a sample person specification.

Not a description of how. A JD is not a procedure or methods description. Written procedures and methods present the steps to follow in accomplishing something. Procedures and methods show *how* to execute duties and responsibilities. The JD shows *what* to do but not how. See Appendix C for a sample procedure and a sample method.

Not a performance evaluation instrument. The JD is not a performance level assessment device. It does not specify performance criteria (ways to measure performance) nor does it specify performance standards (desired levels of performance). The JD shows *what* the worker is supposed to do. *How well* it is done is determined with a performance evaluation instrument that is best distinguished from, and kept separate from, the JD. Such instruments are used to measure the quantity, quality, timeliness, and cost of one's performance.

Sometimes JDs do identify key outcomes—results expected—or accountabilities; but specification of such is not a substitute for a fully developed performance assessment instrument. Doing this does aid in developing a performance assessment instrument, however. See Appendix D for a sample performance evaluation instrument.

Not a set of rules, regulations, policies, or proper practices. The JD is not a set of rules, regulations, policies, or proper practices. These specify acceptable and unacceptable behavior, or provide guidelines for doing the work and making decisions relative to the work. For example, good health and safety practices, or management policies on striving for a quality product, should not show up in the JD. The JD identifies what the work is. Rules, regulations, policies, and desired practices should be in separate documents. See Appendix E for sample rules, regulations, and policies.

Not an employment contract. A JD is not an employment contract, though as mentioned earlier it has similarities. Employment contracts may incorporate JDs, or refer to JDs, but JDs alone are not contracts, and must not be treated as contracts, with all those inherent rigidities. No JD can ever cover *all* demands that the organization may have to place on the worker. Things change. Organizations need flexibility in their usage of the human resource. Outside forces may influence an organization to completely change an employee's job overnight. Treating the JD as a work contract covering a required duration of time is dangerous. It excessively limits the capacity of the organization to adapt.

Not a set of objectives or goals. A JD is not a set of job objectives or goals. Job objectives and goals are formulated *from* the JD to assure their relevance and validity. But objectives are targets with measurable levels of accomplishments and time frames for accomplishment. Objectives are specific *results* to be achieved at some point in time. See Appendix F for a set of sample objectives.

Not a work schedule. A JD is not a work schedule. A well-written JD indicates how much time one should spend on different tasks but it does not tell precisely when specific tasks are to be done. The JD may, however, make general implications of when tasks are to be done or give broad time frames for accomplishment. For example, it may point out certain tasks be done during certain seasons or during a particular part of the year, but it is inappropriate to build into the JD weekly and daily task scheduling. Other documents should be used for this.

Not a description of informal organization and behavior. The JD does not focus on describing informal work, social, political, and other relations and behaviors with which workers typically are involved. The JD's emphasis is on planned, formalized, anticipated work roles and behaviors. The informal structures and processes that emerge spontaneously in any organizational setting may be elaborately described with appropriate sociometric techniques, but the JD is not the place for this material. As discussed later in Chapter 3, some reference to the informal system is often appropriate in a JD in the non-work/semi-work activity category.

Not a picture of rewards. JDs do not describe reward structures and privileges that employees experience. Salary levels and grades, benefits, time off for good attendance, and so on, should be highlighted in separate documents designed to disclose what the organization gives employees in exchange for their performing the tasks in the JD. These documents are sometimes called reward schedules.

Not time and motion study results. A JD is not a time and motion study write-up. Time and motion studies are done to identify better means of performing duties and to set precise cycle time standards for executing repetitive tasks. Time and motion study data are generally too detailed for incorporation in the JD. The JD specifies responsibilities and tasks, not individual motions, and indicates approximately what percentage of one's annual work time is spent on given tasks and responsibilities rather than precise cycle times.

Not a statement of why, or of rationale. The JD's emphasis is not on explanation of *why* tasks are performed. The JD may state overall job rationale and the objectives of certain tasks, but elaborate developments of *why* is not the purpose of the JD. Separate documents should be written for such purposes. The JD states *what*.

Not a job factor sheet. See Appendix O for a job factor sheet. These are used in job evaluation to rate jobs on their relative value to the organization so that equitable pay—base pay—can be established. Job descriptions can aid in the preparation of a job factor sheet and are used to help score jobs after the factor