

Position Descriptions and Job Analysis

Summary Information

The starting point: defining the requirements (job analysis)

Once it has been determined that a new position is to be created or an existing position needs to be staffed, the starting point of a recruitment process for both new and existing positions is to clearly define the requirements. The process is also called “job analysis”. The goal of this process is to ensure a clear understanding of the primary responsibilities of the position and the qualifications and characteristics that are required in order to perform them successfully.

This is obviously important for a new position. It is equally important to complete a full analysis for a replacement position since it is an ideal opportunity to make any required changes to adjust to changing environments and expectations.

Once this review is completed, a summary can be documented in the position description. **The job analysis and resulting position description create the foundation for the entire recruitment process.**

Tip: In completing a position review, it is best to begin by focusing on the required outcomes, or goals, of the position. From that point, you can work back to determine what will be required to meet them successfully.

Tip: Managers should be careful not to limit opportunities by overly focusing on procedural issues. For example, a required outcome might be to compile ongoing data for reports. It could be limiting to require extensive knowledge of Excel when this data could possibly be compiled in other ways, through an Access database for example.

Tip: It is a very worthwhile investment to spend some additional time upfront at this stage of the process... it will likely save a great deal of time in the long run.

The Position Description

The position description is a profile of the job. It should summarize the main functions of a position and its key responsibilities. Most positions have between 3 and 7 main functions.

The position description should be clear, objective and results oriented.

The position description is not meant to document policy or procedural items. The focus should be on responsibilities and required outcomes of the position.

Most Position Descriptions are between 1 and 2 pages.

Tip: If the position description is longer than 2 pages, it should be reviewed to ensure that it is properly summarizing responsibilities and not procedures.

Position Summary

This section should summarize the main elements of the position in a short paragraph. It should summarize, concisely in a few sentences, the primary actions required in the position. It should basically tell what the position is, how it is done, and why.

Further information on specific responsibilities will follow in the next section.

This paragraph would typically be used to develop a posting or advertisement.

Position Responsibilities

This section should provide further clarification on the particular responsibilities of the position related to the main elements. This is often written in concise sentences, even point form. This section should not delineate procedural issues, it is meant to focus on the specific responsibilities of the position. It is recommended that the major responsibilities appear first.

Other possible sections might include:

- Supervisory responsibilities
- Work environment
- Key relationships and contacts
- Decision-making, problem-solving
- Schedule, hours
- Other - particular physical requirements, continuing study required, etc.

Qualifications

This section should summarize the qualifications required in order to be successful in the position. This could include a combination of skills, abilities and qualifications. The minimum required qualifications, desired qualifications, and those that would be considered an asset should be clear. The minimum required level of education and experience should be clearly stated.

Suitable qualifications, skills and abilities should be considered.

Qualification: a qualification is normally a formal accomplishment of some type that makes a person suitable to complete particular requirements of a position. It could include a bachelors degree, a stationary engineer licence or a full year of experience in a particular field.

Skill: A skill can be defined as a developed capacity that is acquired through training or experience. For example, it could include proficiency with a computer software program.

Ability: An ability usually involves being able to do something that often requires a natural propensity, aptitude or talent, such as an ability to work with detailed calculations, the ability to multi-task, or an ability to communicate with a wide variety of clients.

Tip: In summarizing qualifications, always use the position responsibilities as a reference point.

Tip: Managers should be careful not to overstate qualifications so as to unnecessarily narrow the pool of candidates too early in the process.

This paragraph, in addition to the summary above, would typically be used to develop a posting or advertisement.

*The above summary was revised by the Mount Allison Human Resources department.
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