

Job Descriptions Can Help to Align Employees with Business Strategy

The Job Description: From Static Relic to Dynamic Business Tool

What if you could compare each employee's actual competency levels to those required for job success? What if you knew which employees were ready to fill jobs in the future at any given time? What if performance planning and evaluation forms were customized to each employee and linked to strategic business objectives?

By rethinking job descriptions, all this is possible.

Recently, many HR pundits have begun advocating abandoning job descriptions as a relic that can't keep pace with the dynamic nature of today's workplace. However, what if the job descriptions were as dynamic as the organization?

Dynamic job descriptions are a blueprint for an organization's ideal workforce designed to achieve its strategic objectives. They enable an organization to compare actual employees against the ideal workforce based on pre-defined competency and performance criteria. And they provide employees a critical "road map" of personal work priorities, performance expectations and job competencies -- all aligned with a company's business strategy.

What is outmoded is not the job description but how it has been designed and used. Job content has been too general; too subjective; and too one-dimensional. No wonder employees have been unclear about their jobs when the job description itself lacks specificity.

Dynamic job descriptions are a powerful vehicle for communicating clearly to employees about specific performance expectations and success competencies. They can also contribute to performance planning, goal setting, and evaluation; feedback and coaching; development planning; career path planning; succession; compensation and rewards; and candidate selection.

WHAT IS A DYNAMIC JOB DESCRIPTION?

A dynamic job description provides functional and detailed information, further modified by essential job responsibilities and required job success competencies. Accounting for that last element -- job competencies -- is the "secret sauce" that makes a job description truly dynamic.

There are two levels of job descriptions.

Functional job descriptions are internal benchmarks developed collaboratively by HR and business function leaders. They reflect what's needed to achieve current business strategy and should be revisited and updated when business strategy changes. In

effect, they translate the organization's broad business objectives into job-specific, actionable deliverables and success competencies.

At the next level down, personal job descriptions reflect each employee's personal roadmap for job success. Once employees are aligned with an appropriate functional job description they should be involved (with guidance from managers and HR) in editing and customizing, if appropriate, the functional job to create a personal job description derived from the functional job that fits their local or work unit circumstances. Involving employees in personalizing their job descriptions helps them understand expectations, and increases their buy-in and commitment to meeting job performance objectives.

Job descriptions should also capture two vital elements that enable job information to be applied to multiple other HR processes.

Essential Job Responsibilities (EJRs) represent the key deliverables, work outputs and performance expectations of a job. But they are often not aligned with current business strategy. They need to be updated when changes occur in business strategy and, in turn, used to plan and evaluate an employee's performance. EJRs provide employees a direct "line-of-sight" between personal performance expectations and business strategy. They can be used to customize an employee's performance planning and evaluation form.

And most important, though often overlooked, are job competencies. Competencies represent core organization, as well as job-specific functional and technical skills, behaviors, and approaches to work required for job success.

Core-Organization competencies reflect an organization's "DNA" -- its distinctive qualities and marketplace persona. They must be understood and practiced by all employees when performing their jobs, interacting with customers, and collaborating with each other. For example, Core-Organization competencies might include communicating openly and honestly, teamwork, and quality focus.

Job-Specific competencies embody the functional or technical knowledge, capabilities or behaviors required to perform a job's essential responsibilities.

If organization core and job-specific competencies are clearly defined, along with their associated proficiency levels and accompanying behavioral anchors, then this provides truly objective standards against which an employee's actual competency levels can be measured and compared to the ideal. This is critical information both for performance reviews and for guiding employee development.

For example, job description competencies and associated target proficiency levels can be used to more accurately assess an employee's development needs as well as readiness to move up to the next job.

Job Description Competency	Target Level	Employee Actual Level	Competency Gap
Advertising Channels and Tools	Level 5-Advanced	Level 4-Proficient+	⊖
Analytical Thinking	Level 3-Proficient	Level 3-Proficient	✓
Campaign Management	Level 5-Advanced	Level 5-Advanced	✓
Copywriting and Editing	Level 4-Proficient+	Level 3-Proficient	⊖
Creativity	Level 5-Advanced	Level 5-Advanced	✓
Knowledge of Color and Design, Graphics, and Layout	Level 3-Proficient	Level 4-Proficient+	⊕
Market Research	Level 4-Proficient+	Level 3-Proficient	⊖

The dynamic job description, when clearly articulated and integrated across multiple talent management processes, can be a powerful tool that supports hiring, measuring performance, identifying training and development needs, coaching, succession planning, career path planning, and analyzing workforce readiness to contribute to an organization's real-world performance.