



Defining the Job: *An Employers Challenge!*

By Jim Stewart

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Achieving and maintaining top organizational performance is more than just designing the right strategic plan. Rather, it depends on many other important considerations: predicting the market, analyzing the competition, financial planning, strategy choices, learning curves, and operational decisions to maximize productivity.

Employees represent a company's most expensive, yet most valuable asset—and finding a way to improve the recruitment, utilization, and performance of employees is an essential ingredient in building long term success.

Long before the tedious recruitment process starts (creating/placing job ads & postings, perhaps contracting an employment agency, receiving and reviewing resumes, conducting interviews and reference checks etc.), the job must be defined! There are many items that need to be considered about the job before the task of finding that “perfect person” begins. Important items to consider, and document in advance, include: job activities & duties, measurable performance standards, training to be provided, compensation and benefits, organization culture, type/quality of supervision, previous experience required, and knowledge and skills desired as a prerequisite.

Once each of these items has been successfully documented and agreed upon, there remains a final step to be taken, and that is to define and evaluate the behavioral requirements of a job—one of the most important yet difficult steps in the recruitment process. All too often, a recruitment campaign is undertaken without any clear idea of the type of behavioral characteristics required by the incumbent to successfully and comfortably perform the job. This means that personal standards, rather than specific job-related requirements, are used as the measuring stick to evaluate candidates. It's no surprise therefore to see people being hired for positions for which they are unsuited; typically, they can do the job, but they don't want to. They may possess all the essential knowledge and hard skills, but their natural behavioral style does not match up with the behaviors that are necessary for success in the job.

So, what are these behavioral requirements which ultimately lead to the development of a more thorough job profile—and ultimately to a more successful job fit in the recruitment process? There are nine key behavioral-based performance dimensions for each job being profiled: decision making, directing and influencing others, detail and accuracy, service to others, diversification, type of thinking, problem solving, organization of work, and task focus (e.g., internal/external, alone or with others, etc.). The challenge and objective is to properly define the extent to which the job requires, and provides the opportunity for, each behavior to be used.

Ideally, to ensure objectivity and high quality, these nine dimensions should be profiled individually, and by at least two or three people who are knowledgeable about the position. They should then meet as a group to review and discuss their views and arrive at a consensus. It is also important when going through this exercise to focus on what is needed in the job rather than what is wanted. Also, try to separate the person who may currently be in the job from the job itself, and instead address what the job requires rather than what that person is like—in other words, be as objective as possible!

It's not enough to simply generalize about a few apparent (but perhaps isolated) traits and call that a job analysis. It's far too easy to make expensive selection mistakes with this kind of superficial preparation.

Job behavioral analysis is critical—not just for selection, but for effective performance management as well. It may be less obvious, but without clear, well-defined performance expectations, it is difficult for any employee to perform to their fullest potential. There's no doubt about it: explicit, job-relevant, behavioral expectations make all the pieces fit—the right hire, improved performance, employee satisfaction, the impact of training, and communication within the organization.