

Guidelines for Best Practice in the Use of Job Analysis Techniques

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1. Introduction

Because job analysis is an important precursor to many Human Resource activities, SHL is committed to promoting and maintaining quality practices in this area. These guidelines are based on best current professional opinion and are intended to provide an account of best practice. They are supplied to clients, and should be used for guidance only. They are NOT intended as a substitute for a recognised training course.

1.1 What is job analysis?

Job analysis is a systematic process for collecting and analysing information about jobs. Job analysis provides information about the work performed and the work environment. It also identifies the knowledge, skills, abilities and personal competencies people need to perform their work well. In short, it is a method that provides a description of the job and profiles the competencies people need to be successful.

Most definitions of job analysis identify three key points:

- Job analysis is not a single methodology - it is a generic term which refers to a range of techniques, including observation, interview, and questionnaire based analysis
- Job analysis is structured - the exploration of the role is guided and focused, although the degree of structure varies with the technique used
- Job analysis is analytical. The process attempts to break the job down into its component parts, rather than to describe the job as a whole. Depending on the application, job analysis may look at jobs in different ways:
 - Job oriented procedures tend to concentrate on the work itself, such as the equipment used, the typical working conditions, the end results of the job, etc
 - Worker oriented procedures concentrate on the knowledge and abilities that are required in order that the job holder can perform the job effectively
 - Behaviour oriented analyses look at the specific behaviours that take place in order that the job can be performed effectively.

Note that these differences are not always clear cut. Given that job analysis data may be applied to a number of Human Resource functions, it is unlikely that any one particular method will perfectly suit all of them equally. Combining aspects of various methods, however, can provide information applicable for a variety of functions.

1.2 Why use job analysis?

A wide range of activities within organisations are concerned in some way with the match between people and jobs. In any such situation, it is essential to understand the job in question before any comparisons may be made. For instance, in staff selection, a clear set of criteria against which to measure candidates is required in order to make sensible decisions about the most appropriate person for a job.

Indeed, Ash & Levine (1980) have identified the following 12 applications in personnel management for up-to-date and accurate job information that is derived from formal job analysis:

- Job descriptions
- Job classification
- Job evaluation
- Job design
- Person specifications
- Performance appraisal
- Worker training
- Worker mobility
- Efficiency
- Safety
- Manpower planning
- Legal requirements.

An additional application in the form of defining core 'Competencies' can also be added to this list, and is described in more detail later. These varied uses for job analysis information are not, of course, mutually exclusive.

1.3 Job analysis and employment law

1.3.1 Selection

In assessing people's suitability for jobs, employers may find that proportionately fewer applicants from one group, e.g. men, women, a particular ethnic group, can meet (some of) the selection criteria. A lower success rate for candidates from that group will follow. This means that those selection criteria have *disparate impact*¹ on that group. Under UK law this could constitute illegal *indirect discrimination* against that group, unless the employer could justify the use of the criteria in terms of the job demands. That is, the employer would need to show the relevance of the selection measure.

Job analysis is fundamental in terms of establishing a measure's *content validity*. It provides objective evidence of the skills and abilities required for effective performance in the job which can then be used to provide evidence of the relevance of the selection procedures measuring those abilities. For instance, Codes of Practice and Guidelines on the use of *Psychometric Tests*, often used as a guide by Industrial Tribunals, recommend that job analysis is used prior to implementing a selection process.

Of course job analysis should not be used to justify unnecessary disparate impact. Organisations should always attempt to find another assessment technique that measures the same skill which does not result in group differences.

1.3.2 The relevance of job analysis in legal proceedings

"The use of Job Analysis to design selection procedures not only gives users the obvious benefits of using appropriate selection techniques, but also provides evidence of their relevance should any questions arise." (The Commission For Racial Equality, 1993)

¹All terms in italics are described in the Glossary at the back of the booklet.

Thompson & Thompson (1982) have identified the following considerations if job analysis data is to be used as evidence in legal proceedings:

- A formal job analysis must be performed: It is not enough to rely on informal knowledge about a job that “everyone” knows, that may be based in inaccurate stereotyped notions of the job demands
- It must occur before a selection system is chosen, rather than as a retrospective analysis after the event
- It must be well documented; it is not enough to simply carry around job information in the analyst’s head
- It should be collected from several up-to-date sources, which will probably entail using several different methods of analysis
- The sample of people interviewed should be sufficient in number to capture accurately the job information
- The sample should also represent the full diversity of job incumbents, e.g. ethnic and gender groups, people with and without formal qualifications, to ensure the validity of the data

- The job analysts should be properly trained in the different techniques to ensure that they collect objective information and are as free from bias as possible
- The job analysis should determine the most important and critical aspects of the job, and it is upon these that the key attributes and selection and evaluation for the job should be based.

More information on Fair Selection and Equal Opportunities Issues can be found in the booklet *Guidelines for Best Practice in the Use of Personnel Selection Tests*, available from SHL.

Example of job analysis being used to ensure fairness

A brewery in a multi-racial area was recruiting production operatives, and wanted a procedure which would shortlist a large applicant pool down to manageable proportions in a fair and equitable manner. By choosing tests that assessed relevant skills on the basis of job analysis, they were able to defend successfully their action in an Industrial Tribunal, since they had assessed the full range of abilities that were needed for the job.

1.4 Job analysis and disability

A common pitfall for a conventional job analysis is to maintain the status quo in an organisation so far as the eligibility of people with disabilities is concerned. The issue here is that it is all too easy for the analysis to determine that, for example, people using wheelchairs could not perform effectively in the job **as it is at the moment**.

However, this perspective fails to allow for the quite small job redesigns that might enable them to perform the role. It is thus imperative that the analyst considers the job at both the functional level (the outcomes required), as well as the behavioural level (how the job is done currently). In the UK, the Disability Discrimination Act (1995) requires employers to make reasonable accommodations to jobs or working practices to allow disabled people to perform effectively.

Examples

Job as it is at the moment: Employees are constantly on the phone to branches, taking down current sales figures, collating them and reporting the results. Job analysis based on the status quo would show Oral Communication is an essential competency.

A deaf employee cannot use the phone but can perform the job using e-mail. Considering how a disabled person might perform the job shows that written communication skills can substitute for oral. In this case, e-mail proved more efficient, because the employee was not interrupted by having to answer calls as they came in.

1.5 Job evaluation and equal pay

Job analysis as a basis for job evaluation follows many of the same principles that are outlined within these guidelines.

In essence, if, via job analysis, an organisation is able to define a role in specific, measurable terms, it becomes possible to compare it with other roles within the organisation. Thus jobs may be graded in a manner that is consistent with the culture and values of the organisation, and fair and appropriate rates of pay determined as a separate process. There are many different methods for doing this, from “points rating” to “whole job comparison”, but at their heart they all still depend upon a detailed knowledge of the jobs in question.

2. Job analysis in practice

The most commonly used job analysis technique is to talk to someone who is currently doing the job and to consult existing documents, such as Job Descriptions and Person Specifications.

However, over the past 20 years, there has been an increasing awareness that the process should be based on something more rigorous and systematic. In this time, a number of different approaches to job analysis have been developed. The ways in which they differ are:

- The type of information collected
- How this information is collected
- Who it is collected from
- How it is analysed
- The way in which it is applied.

2.1 The multi-method approach

It is now generally recognised that a multi-method approach is needed to do justice to the richness of most jobs. This is because, as mentioned before, the dividing line between Job, Worker and Behaviour oriented analyses is not clear, and using several sources of job analysis methods draws on all these types of information. This also allows the user to select the data which best fits their chosen application.

3. Job analysis techniques

Many techniques have been used with varying success for analysing jobs (for a review see Dunnette [1976], Gael [1987], or Ghorpade [1988]). In answer to the question as to which technique is best, as with most things, there is no ideal approach. Research by Levine et al. (1983) has pointed out 11 practical issues that need to be considered prior to using a particular method:

Operational status: Has the method been tested and refined sufficiently?

Availability: Is it available off the shelf?

Occupational versatility: Is it suitable for analysing a variety of jobs?

Standardisation: Is it possible to compare your results with others that have been found elsewhere?

User acceptability: Is the method acceptable to the respondents?

Training requirement: How much training is needed and available?

Sample size: How many respondents does a method need for reliable results?

Reliability: Will a method give results that are consistent?

Cost: What are the costs of a method in materials, consultancy, training and person hours?

Quality of outcome: Will a method yield high quality results, e.g. legally defensible?

Time to completion: How many calendar days will the data collection and analysis take?

The remainder of section 3 lists some of the most effective job analysis methods; however the most appropriate blend of these will inevitably depend upon the ultimate objective of the job analysis project.

3.1 Critical incident interviews

First developed by J.C. Flanagan for looking at the role of Air Force pilot, this technique involves a trained interviewer eliciting from an interviewee several incidents which were critical to achieving job objectives and were either handled extremely well or extremely badly. These incidents are then explored more deeply to determine what the interviewee actually did (in behavioural terms), and what skills are needed to cope effectively with the incident.

The benefit of this approach is that it explores actual events that have occurred within the job in the past, rather than opinions and speculations about what might be important. It also provides a rich source of real life material on which to base situational interviews and assessment centre exercises.

Example incident (to be investigated more thoroughly)

"When I was working a Saturday night shift I had to pacify and negotiate with a group of young men who came into the restaurant drunk. They started to be abusive to other staff and customers complaining about the service they were receiving. I had to intervene, calm the situation down, and discuss the problems with them. In the end all of the group paid for their meals and left without further upset."

3.2 Repertory grid interviews

Developed by the American Psychologist George Kelly in the 1950s, repertory grid interviews were originally used to determine how people perceived and classified things that went on in the environment around them.

This technique has been applied to job analysis. Most commonly, it is used with managers who are asked to compare individuals who work for them to identify the skills associated with success. The manager is asked to generate "constructs" by picking three job holders, and identifying how two are different from the third in terms of the way in which they perform their jobs. This process is repeated until a number of constructs associated with job effectiveness have been built up. This technique is particularly useful when large numbers of grids have been created, as it lends itself to a range of statistical analysis techniques.

The benefit of this approach is that it consults the line managers, and asks them in a structured way to consider the qualities of actual people who have performed the target job in the past.

Example construct (to be investigated more thoroughly)

"Jane and Jean prepare by reading and planning before divisional meetings. Peter relies on thinking on his feet, and his contributions are usually not as useful."

3.3 Structured questionnaires

Structured questionnaires are usually computer analysed tools which allow you to develop a comprehensive and detailed picture about a certain job. They are typically completed by job holders, but can be completed by the job holder's line managers, or even people responsible for the development of a job which does not yet exist.

Questionnaires also allow the views of more than one person to be combined together. Three such structured job analysis questionnaires are McCormick's Position Analysis Questionnaire (PAQ), the Job Component Inventory (JCI) and the SHL Work Profiling System (WPS).

The benefit of using these questionnaires is that they add much more scientific rigour to the job analysis process and can allow the combination of the views of different raters. They ensure full coverage of all aspects of the job, which allows for greater comparability of jobs, and also tap into expert psychological knowledge which would normally only be available in the form of consultancy.

Example information about one task (out of many)

In the job of Technical Systems Assistant, job holders spend about 15% of their time answering client enquiries verbally, and this task is critical to the achievement of most of the job objectives. The attributes and skills needed to do this task effectively are social confidence, oral communication and detailed technical knowledge.

3.4 Visionary/Strategic interviews

The tools mentioned so far tend to be historic and retrospective in their orientation. To combat this tendency for job analysis simply to maintain the 'status quo', more recent approaches have also included interviews with senior strategic 'visionaries'. It is agreed that by using these senior perspectives it is possible to anticipate likely changes to the role in the future, and make the results of the job analysis compatible with the desired future direction of the organisation.

Example visionary interview (extract)

"The organisation is experiencing rapid change as it seeks to restructure itself in order to become more flexible and innovative. This means that employees at all levels will need to be more creative, challenging existing procedures and searching for better ones.

Senior Managers especially will need to become more tolerant of ambiguity and to encourage a culture of risk taking."

3.5 Diaries

It can sometimes be helpful to ask job incumbents to complete a diary that details their workload and activities. Although useful as a remote data collection tool, this method can be inconvenient for the participant and can be difficult to analyse.

3.6 Direct observation

Simple observation of existing job holders at work can often provide insights into a job that cannot be provided by other means. This is particularly true for more manual roles where the work is visible. When the work involves more covert cognitive skills, e.g. a senior manager, this method is less effective. However, one problem is that simply by the act of observation, the Job Analyst may alter the job holder's behaviour.

3.7 Existing documentation

Existing documents, such as job descriptions, training manuals, person specifications, etc., may be used to get more information about a job. However, they must be thoroughly reviewed to ensure that the job has not changed and that the information is still relevant.

3.8 Job analyst performs the job

A very unstructured technique where the analyst trains to perform the job as a means of identifying the key demands that the role makes upon the job incumbent without needing to get other people involved.

4. The application of job analysis information: the generation of competencies

One of the most common modern uses of job analysis information is in the generation of competencies that define the behaviours, skills and abilities that an individual needs to display for effective performance within a role. An example of this process, and some tools that can be used, is given in this section.

4.1 Data collection

SHL tends to use a combination of four of the methods mentioned earlier:

Visionary Interviews, Repertory Grid, Critical Incidents and The Work Profiling System. This method has the advantage of capturing different types of job information from a variety of perspectives.

4.2 Data integration

The information from these techniques is then combined, by distilling it down to the key themes (competencies) for the role. There are no hard-and-fast rules for competency generation that can be applied in all situations. Instead it depends upon the judgement of the job analyst who understands the purpose of the analysis, the role being analysed and the techniques involved.

In order to be most useful, a set of competencies will usually need to be:

Manageable: Too many competencies will tend to become unwieldy and inefficient.

Defined behaviourally: They should be defined in terms of identifiable behaviours as opposed to desired outcomes, e.g. they need to be specific and observable.

Independent: Any important behaviour should be included in one and only one competency. They should not overlap.

Comprehensive: No important behaviours should be omitted.

Accessible: They should be regularly reviewed in response to organisational change.

Compatible: They should fit in with an organisation's visions, goals and culture.

4.3 Generic versus tailored competency models

Although job analysis is the key step to defining specific competencies for an organisation, there is much research to show that often managerial roles contain many common components, and this has given rise to the use of bought in generic models of “meta” or “core” competencies. These models are easily available off the shelf, but may not fit precisely into a given organisation. Examples of such models are “The Inventory of Management Competencies”, “Perspectives on Management Competencies” (both published by SHL) and work done by Hay McBer, M.C.I. and Professor Schroder.

4.4 Advantages of bought in generic competency models

- They are usually comprehensive
- They save time and money by not needing job analysis
- They are produced by experts
- They are usually well researched.

4.5 Advantages of tailored competency models

- They capture the language of the organisation
- They encourage ownership of the model
- They reflect the culture of the organisation
- They can be weighted for different functions
- They are manageable in number.

In practice, the choice of which of these approaches to adopt will depend on the resources and the credibility of the HR function in an organisation, since these factors will necessarily preclude the use of the generic approach in some situations.

5. Social and organisational issues

The accuracy and validity of the job analysis information obtained may be maximised by giving some detailed consideration to the following issues.

5.1 The role of the job analyst

The role of the job analyst is easily taken for granted, and this can lead to problems. Effective analysts should:

- Be properly trained in job analysis techniques
- Have a working knowledge of the organisation and the job in question
- Have good interpersonal skills
- Be comfortable working as a group facilitator.

5.2 The purpose of the job analysis

What is the purpose of the job analysis? This may sound obvious, but answering this simple question helps to identify appropriate data collection techniques and appropriate information sources (i.e. participants).

For instance, if the purpose of the job analysis is to anticipate the competencies for a job that currently does not exist, it would be inappropriate to ask current employees to participate, as they are unlikely to know much about the new job activities. Instead, the job analyst might seek out the persons responsible for designing the new job. This may include human resources staff, consultants or human factors engineers, or staff who will be providing training in the new job.

5.3 Communication

Communication is paramount to a successful job analysis project, and it is up to the analyst to make sure all participants are properly informed. Without proper communication, participants may be suspicious of the process and may not provide important information.

Communication with the participants should take place prior to a job analysis session and again at the start of a session. The briefing of participants should be comprehensive, open and honest, stressing that their co-operation is voluntary, but that their assistance and insights are essential to success. (See section 5.5 "Briefing the Participants" for more detail.)

Once the session begins, it is also important to:

- Develop a rapport with the individual
- Avoid being judgmental
- Ask probing questions to clarify issues
- Avoid turning it into a counselling session.

5.4 Identifying participants (subject matter experts)

Which people should participate in a job analysis exercise? They should be the ones most familiar with the job and how it is currently performed, and as such are often known as Subject Matter Experts (SMEs). Usually, job incumbents and line managers or supervisors are the most expert source of job information. However, anyone with detailed knowledge of the job may participate in the job analysis sessions.

It is good practice to take a sample of people who are representative of the target population in terms of age, gender, ethnic origin and background. Different perspectives on the job can produce a more rounded picture. The participants should feel comfortable with the process or activities that will be used, and be both able and willing to participate.

5.5 Briefing the participants

All subjects for job analysis studies should be fully briefed, either by letter or in person, before they go through a job analysis procedure. This briefing should explain such issues as:

- What job analysis is
- Why the job is being analysed
- Why the person has been chosen for the study
- What the person will be expected to do
- What the outcome of the study will be
- What preparation the person will need to do.

5.6 Interview protocol and question style

Interviewing Subject Matter Experts for a job analysis relies upon the same basic principles as other types of interviews. Establishing rapport and being an active listener are important skills on the part of the job analyst. Again, it is good practice to inform the participant about what will be taking place, including information such as the purpose of the interview, the degree of confidentiality, and the amount of time available. Make it clear that it is a two way process, and that the candidate's views are very much welcomed.

- Use plenty of open questions during interviews
- Don't be nervous about asking "naive" questions, especially regarding technical vocabulary or company jargon
- Be sure to ask for clarification.

More information on interviewing issues can be found in the booklet entitled *Guidelines For Best Practice In Selection Interviewing*, available from SHL.

5.7 Validation interviews

Any job analysis report depends upon the information being accurate and of a high quality. If, for whatever reason, the information is not of the required quality, then any decisions which follow may not be as effective as they could be.

It is for this reason that SHL recommends that the reliability of information gained during job analysis is checked. These validation interviews are especially important when the information is coming from a tool such as a structured questionnaire.

In interview-based techniques there is naturally a certain element of probing and questioning, such that validation is an integral part of the process. However, with structured questionnaires the analyst may not be involved in the completion process, and so it is important to validate the information collected.

5.8 Feedback interviews

The communication of the final results of a job analysis study is extremely important, for several reasons including:

- There is an ethical obligation to fully share recorded information with the person it concerns
- It can act as a valuable check of the study's **face validity**
- It can create a feeling of ownership of the results for the participants, may well give them something to think about in terms of the sort of skills and abilities that are important for them, and help in their own development
- The way in which data is stored and accessed must be in line with the requirements of the Data Protection Act (1998)
- Respondents should be informed if data is stored about them, and give their permission for its use (they should be given access to their own records on request)
- Job analysis studies are undertaken to address specific human resources concerns. If people are made aware that they will be given opportunity to discuss the results they are likely to be more committed to subsequent developments on the basis of the analysis, e.g. new selection procedures, appraisal/development programmes etc.

This is likely to take the form of the participants reviewing the final outcome of the analysis to obtain their views and comments.

5.9 Application of the data

It is essential that job analysis data is actually used for its chosen purpose once it has been collected. The SMEs tend to be interested in the project and become very disillusioned if the report gets 'shelved' or misused once it has been prepared. There is no point collecting job analysis data just for the sake of it.

6. Future trends in job analysis

It is reasonable to foresee the following trends in the field of job analysis in the not too distant future:

- Continued refinements of computer-based systems for aiding the job analysis process. These include computerised job analysis data collection questionnaires, report printing packages and sophisticated statistical integration and analysis programs. This should make the job analysis process provide more information, of a better quality and more quickly, which will help make the whole activity more cost effective
- Increased use of well documented job analysis information as a defence against claims of unfair practice at work. As Equal Opportunities, Race Relations and Redundancy case law develops, so too will the use of structured job analysis techniques as a means of designing and auditing human resource procedures at work
- The further development of job analysis questionnaires in languages other than English
- The increased use of job analysis based “competencies” as the standard unit of currency within an organisation (or an occupation). Targeted selection, development, appraisal initiatives and ERP systems, e.g. SAP, PeopleSoft etc. at work are consistent with this approach
- A continued trend toward focusing on worker and behaviour (attribute) oriented information rather than conventional task oriented information. This includes job analysis to identify job-relevant temperaments and personality traits
- The use of job analysis data to identify job families based upon skill and temperament requirements. In the past, jobs were grouped by the tasks or functions performed, but as the rate of job change and the mobility of workers within an organisation continues to increase, it may become more efficient to group jobs by competencies rather than by work outcomes
- The use of job analysis data to identify not only job relevant skills, e.g. reading but also the appropriate skill levels. Many job analysis methods only identify the need for a skills, e.g. reading, rather than the specific level required by a job, e.g. reading at “level B” or “moderately complex”
- Improved links between job analysis information and human resources applications. This includes improved Person-Job-Match to identify “gaps” in a person’s competency profile, which can be used to identify development areas or used in pre-employment screening. It also includes applying job analysis data to design skill-based compensation systems, performance management systems, succession planning projects and organisational re-engineering initiatives. Visionary and strategic job analysis are critical under these circumstances.

7. A final word

Whilst it is generally agreed that a thorough job analysis should provide the foundation for any assessment or development project, it is important to be aware that jobs are not static entities. Jobs are constantly developing in response to the multitude of changes that are going on in an organisation at any one time. Therefore, job analysis information should not be regarded as permanent, and should be revisited when appropriate.

It is also important that information arising from a job analysis should always be interpreted in context by appropriately trained individuals, and it must be treated as confidential.

Information arising from a job analysis should only be used to describe a job, and not as a way of evaluating the performance of any of the individuals whose views have been used in the analysis.

These guidelines should serve as a useful addition to a personnel practitioner's library, but they should not be seen as any substitute for formal training in the application of the techniques which have been mentioned.

These guidelines were prepared by Ian Newcombe and James Bywater.

Glossary

Content validity: The behavioural domain of a job; that is, can be rationally related to the activities which make up the job.

Face validity: The extent to which an instrument appears to be measuring what it claims to measure.

Disparate impact: A selection of criterion has disparate (or adverse) impact when proportionately fewer members of one ethnic or gender group can meet the criterion.

Indirect discrimination: An unjustifiable selection requirement or condition which has disparate impact on people from one ethnic or gender group, to their detriment.

Psychometric tests: The process of collecting a standardised sample of behaviour which can be measured by a scale or category system.

Reliability: The extent to which a measure produces consistent scores over time.

SHL services

SHL is committed to maintaining high standards in all aspects of assessment and development work, and views job analysis as the essential precursor to this type of work to maximise its effectiveness and fairness. Clients that have used our services in this area in the past include representatives from the following sectors:

Sectors

Aerospace	Leisure
Banking	Local Authorities
Brewing	Manufacturing
Building Societies	Media
Catering	Petrochemical
Energy	Pharmaceutical
Engineering	Retail
Health Service	Telecommunications
Information Technology	Tobacco
Insurance	Transport

SHL can provide a professional contribution in the following areas:

- Job analysis to define competencies for a current job
- Job analysis to define competencies for a future job
- Job analysis as a basis for Assessment or Development Centres
- Job analysis based test development and validation
- International job analysis projects
- Training in job analysis on a public or in-house basis
- Joint projects which allow client personnel to observe a consultant conducting data collection
- Design of competency-based appraisal programmes and succession planning systems
- Review, monitoring and validation.

For more information on any of the above services, call our Client Support Team on 0870 070 8000

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