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Job Descriptions: Why are they Important?

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A job description is a "snapshot" of a job. The job description therefore needs to communicate clearly and concisely what responsibilities and tasks the job entails and to indicate, as well, the key qualifications of the job – the basic requirements (specific credentials or skills) – and, if possible, the attributes that underlie superior performance. In this sense, writing (or updating) a job description is not a relatively passive and administrative task, but one that helps to really clarify what the job does and the person in it is supposed to achieve.

Job descriptions are important. Job descriptions improve an organisation's ability to manage people and roles:

- * clarifies employer expectations for employee
- * provides basis of measuring job performance
- * provides clear description of role for job candidates
- * provides a structure and discipline for company to understand and structure all jobs and ensure necessary activities, duties and responsibilities are covered by one job or another
- * provides continuity of role parameters irrespective of manager interpretation
- * enables pay and grading systems to be structured fairly and logically
- * prevents arbitrary interpretation of role content and limit by employee and employer and manager
- * essential reference tool in issues of employee/employer dispute
- * essential reference tool for discipline issues
- * provides important reference points for training and development areas
- * provides neutral and objective (as opposed to subjective or arbitrary) * reference points for appraisals, performance reviews and counselling
- * enables formulation of skill set and behaviour set requirements per role
- * enables organisation to structure and manage roles in a uniform way, thus increasing efficiency and effectiveness of recruitment, training and development, organisational structure, work flow and activities, customer service, etc
- * enables factual view (as opposed to instinctual) to be taken by employees and managers in career progression and succession planning

Because job analysis can be complex, time-consuming, and expensive, standardized job descriptions have been developed that can be adapted to thousands of jobs in organizations across the world. In the U.S., two examples of such databases are the U.S. government's Standard Occupational Classification (SOC), which has information on at least 821 occupations, and the Occupational Information Network, which is also known as O*NET, and this site provides job descriptions for thousands of jobs. In the UK, the website www.prospects.ac.uk is the UK's graduate careers website and contains complete

job descriptions for various positions, and do several other sites/sources.