

## OCCASIONAL PAPERS

# Writing a Job Description

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Approximately half of the hospitals in this country are now introducing reorganized nursing structures. A part of this new scheme involves management in writing out each person's responsibilities and work in the form of a job description. This task, however, is only part of a larger process, borrowed from industry, called job evaluation. The words themselves can cause great confusion and are dismissed by many nurses as management jargon.

I visited the British Institute of Management's library in order to find a true definition or formula on job evaluation. Instead I found that most books contradicted each other with regular monotony until utter confusion overtook the reader. It appeared that each writer on management subjects had his or her own private interpretation of the various terms used in connection with job descriptions. This paper is, therefore, written from the mass of literature available on the subject with yet another interpretation of job evaluation.

## How is it Used in Industry?

It is important to see clearly why and in what way industry uses the process of job evaluation.

Table 1 shows that evaluating a job is a process consisting of five parts. 1-2. First, a particular job is analysed.

This is a two-part process involving (a) preparing a statement of the duties, responsibilities and job conditions (job description),

and (b) from the job description, preparing a separate statement of the human qualities required to fill the job (job specification).

3. A careful study is then made of the description and specification, involving in particular the work, qualities, education, qualifications of the type of person to be appointed, and, using a prepared system, giving each part of the job a score value or rating so that a value for the job can be established. This part of the process is known as job rating.
4. Once a rating has been given, a salary can be awarded according to the organization's system or scale (money allocation).
5. The last part of the process is to classify the new occupant in the job according to the work he performs (employee classification).

Some of the aims which can be achieved by this process include the following.

- (a) Management is able to analyse a particular job in the organization.
- (b) The interviewer has before him a statement of the human qualities which are essential and/or desirable for a particular job.
- (c) The occupier of the job is given a detailed description of his duties and responsibilities.
- (d) Management can identify the major areas of work and score these. This score allows the organization to compare one job with another and rate them.

- (e) A salary scale can be determined by this process and revalued from time to time.
- (f) The occupier can be given a recognized grading and status in the organization.

## What do Hospitals Want?

At this point it is useful to pause and ask what the aims of hospital management are in this whole process of job evaluation. In practice, the nursing management in Salmon schemes has tended to reverse some of the processes. In hospital, the process could well be as follows.

The last process is used first. It is quite arbitrarily decided that a nursing officer is required for a unit. The budget is then reviewed, together with other posts and a grading of a, b or c is made. A job description is then written and, more rarely, a specification made.

It will be seen by this illustration that the aims of analysing a job could be very vague—having to describe a job because it is the 'done thing'. I would suggest that some of the aims of evaluating a nursing post could be these.

- (1) Give an opportunity to analyse in some detail the job which is vacant and assess the authority and responsibility which should accompany it.
- (2) From the job description, write a job specification indicating clearly the qualities which are (a) essential and (b) desirable in any new



applicant.

- (3) Having described the job and specified the type of person qualified to do the job, use the specification at interview to match up the applicant with the particular post.
- (4) Match job against job within the same level of management and grade a, b or c.
- (5) After 12 months, ask the person undertaking the duties of the post to re-write the job description.

### Writing a Job Description

As already shown, writing a job description is part of the two-part process of job analysis. Table 2 gives this process in more detail.

Job analysis is defined as 'The process of determining by observation and study and reporting pertinent information relating to the nature of a specific job. It is the determination of the tasks which comprise the job and of the skills, knowledge, abilities and responsibilities required of the worker for successful performance and which differentiates the job from all others.'

More simply, job analysis is a procedure for obtaining pertinent job information. The questions which arise immediately are: who is to write the job description, the type of information to write in it, under what headings are the duties to be written, and do the duties need to be explained very fully?

There are many ways of tackling this job. But first the real question must be asked. Why write a job description at all? What purpose will it fulfil? The answer can be very painful to accept. In many cases, it may be a complete waste of time. The question nevertheless must be faced because much time and energy must go into the process if it is to be successful. There are reasons why job descriptions should not be written, but this must be discussed elsewhere.

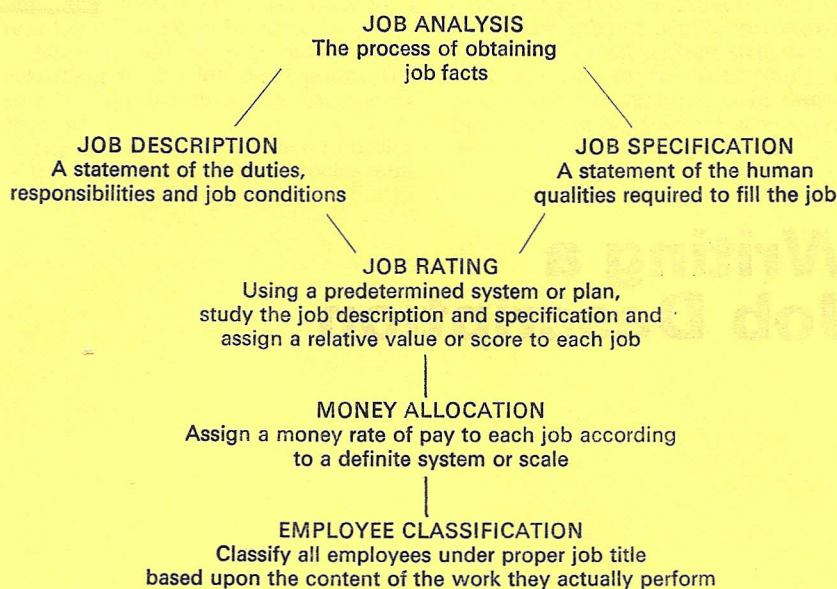
### Who Should Write It?

Who then should write the job description? The personnel department could be involved in observing a person working in the job and describe the main points of that post. Senior management may do this in the isolation of an office without discussion at all. The person performing the job may be asked to undertake the main task of collecting the information.

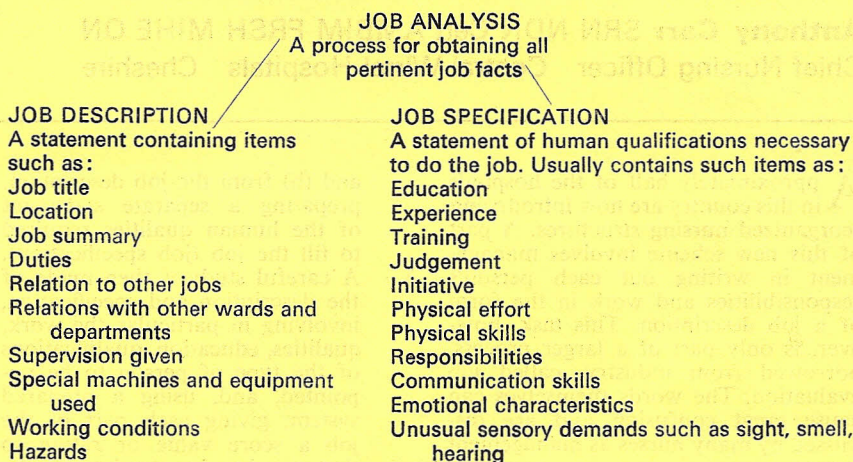
A combination of some or all these people could produce a workable description. It is, however, important that once the job description is written the employee works towards it. Therefore, employee involvement may be important. If each employee was asked to look at his job description, then a suitable plan for a ward sister could be this.

*1st day.* Jot down in a notebook a list of headings which describe the main areas of work—say between 7 and 10 headings. The notebook should be small enough to carry in a uniform pocket.

## 1 Chart showing the elements of job evaluation



## 2 Chart showing elements in job analysis



*2-4 days.* Think about headings and start writing notes under main headings—one heading per page.

*5-10 days.* Revise main headings and rearrange in logical order. Develop short paragraphs.

*11-15 days.* Check the amount of time normally spent on each main activity and give each major duty a percentage of time—10%, 20%, etc.

*16-20 days.* Review the work done with the sister and answer for herself three questions: (1) Have I logically indicated the major areas of work done? (2) Have I clearly described the job as I do it, rather than as I want others to see it? (3) Have I indicated by my writing the responsibility and authority inherent in the job?

As an experiment, a group of 74 ward sisters, all from the same hospital authority, who were attending a study day at the William Rathbone

Staff College, were asked to spend an hour thinking and writing about their job under three main headings. Most had previously written out their jobs under the Salmon headings of administrative, professional and personnel in their own hospital. More than a few were critical of the result. Nearly all stated that the result still did not indicate clearly what they did day by day. The headings they were requested now to write under were:

- (a) Actual technical work undertaken
- (b) Types of decisions made
- (c) Responsibilities (to include supervision of staff)
- (d) Other duties which cannot be mentioned under headings 1-3.

They were required to write not more than five items of work under the first three headings. The total results under these headings were as in Table 3.

The advantages of the sisters writing about the work they actually undertake were evident. They became very enthu-



siastic doing this exercise and asked many relevant and intelligent questions. The information collected in this way could be rewritten into a job description very successfully.

Whatever headings are chosen and whoever writes down the work done, it should be remembered that a job description should contain the objective facts that explain:

- WHAT the job is
- WHAT specific duties and responsibilities are indicated
- WHAT general conditions and situational factors are involved
- WHERE the job is performed
- HOW the duties are performed, may also need to be indicated.

### Objects of the Exercise

What to write depends upon the purpose of the exercise. If the object is to gather material to teach, then a very detailed description needs to be written. In this situation, the writer has to extend the description in the 'HOW' and 'WHY' areas. Managerial job descriptions should not emphasize factors like physical skill, effort, working conditions and hazards. Instead

they should emphasize education, experience, knowledge, decisions made, authority, responsibilities, outside contacts, other professional contacts, standards of performance and creative work.

Should a description be written as the job should be performed, or as it is actually performed?

A problem is that some people possess other skills and knowledge not demanded by the description and so alter the job as it should be carried out. This point should be remembered at interview. The best person chosen at interview is not always the best person for that particular job. The more qualified and intelligent person will gradually create another job within the main job if the main job does not fulfil expectations. Those who select staff could well remember this with benefit.

The completed job description should include:

- Job title and location
- Job summary (a few sentences summing up the job)
- Job duties (under headings previously agreed)

- Relationships with other jobs
- Relationships with other departments and wards
- Supervision given
- Working conditions and hazards.

### Job Specification

While the description is essentially an objective statement, the specification is a more subjective statement of human qualities necessary to do the job. It is useful to have a small team to look at the job description and produce the specification. Management must decide how the team is comprised. A useful team could be a senior nursing officer, a person of the grade being specified and a non-nurse, either from personnel, if a personnel department exists, or an administrator.

It should be clearly understood that the team will specify the type of person they want or can attract according to the needs of the hospital as they see them. This already takes place in most hospitals with regard to the selection of student nurses. One hospital will specify five O levels while another hospital nearby will ask for little evidence of formal education, relying on the entrance test. It is in this sense that the specification is subjective to those persons making the standards. As such they will vary from one organization to another. Pronouncements will need to be made on education, experience, training and many other areas, as shown in Table 3.

Remember, lastly, that jobs change and what a ward sister does this year a staff nurse may do in two years' time. A ward sister may continually be taking to herself more technical/managerial work which demands that other staff take over some of the sister's duties. A proper review every two years is the only way to assess this progress of change.

It should be carefully noted that as a sister enlarges her job, so other grades of staff move up and take over some of her areas of work. In turn, other staff move up to cover the junior sister's and staff nurse's work. This process continues both downwards throughout the ward and upwards into senior management. Where this can be observed, it is a sign that the organization is changing and has healthy growth. A severe application of job descriptions could stunt this growth and cause stagnation and apathy. All other staff have the experience of job enlargement both outwards and upwards and have to make preparations to have these various areas covered by other staff. Failure or inability of lower levels of management to recognize this change can result in poor staff morale, high turnover and sickness rates.

This also emphasizes the importance of continuous in-service training if each grade of staff is to remain competent to perform successfully her changing job.

If the organization decides on analysing jobs, then they must be prepared to appoint a staff person to spend a considerable amount of time

### 3. Technical Work Undertaken (total number of duties mentioned=111)

	<i>Number of Sisters</i>	<i>% of Sisters</i>
Undertaking dressings	45	61
Giving of DDAs	37	50
Care of IV infusions	31	42
Taking IV blood	30	41
Serving meals	29	39
Writing reports	28	38
Teaching nurses	26	35
Answering telephone	25	34
Maintenance of equipment	24	32
Giving injections	23	31
Pre/postoperative care	22	30
Giving medicines	21	28
Checking/taking TPRs and chart	18	24
Checking/taking BP	17	23
Giving ward reports to nurses	17	23
Feeding patients	15	20

### Types of Decisions Made (total number of duties mentioned=51)

	<i>Number of Sisters</i>	<i>% of Sisters</i>
Liaison with outside bodies/other departments	45	61
When to send the patient home	37	50
When to call for medical aid	35	47
Deciding special diets	28	38
Arranging on duty for ward	28	38
Timing for admission of drugs	27	36
Deciding priority in work done	21	28
Talking to patients' relatives	20	27
Type of nursing patient requires	17	23
Contact with chaplain	15	20
When to remove stitches	13	18
Admission of patient	10	14

### Responsibilities and Supervision of Staff (total duties mentioned=49)

	<i>Number of Sisters</i>	<i>% of Sisters</i>
Teaching nurses	45	61
Supervision of new staff	43	58
Custody of DDAs	36	49
Supervision of domestics	36	49
Checking and maintenance of equipment	20	27
Completion of student and pupil nurses' assessment forms	18	24
Checking, ordering, receiving linen and other stores	17	23
Interviewing relatives	16	22
Answering telephone	15	20
Arranging ward duty times	14	19
Allocating duties	13	18

Other duties not included under 1-3 were insignificant and not recorded here.



each year co-ordinating the work.

The headings of 'professional' 'administrative' and 'personnel' under the title Job Descriptions in the Salmon Report do not always seem relevant to those staff working in hospital. Therefore, suitable headings should be chosen under which jobs can be described realistically. They should show clearly the function of the job and the responsibilities and authority which accompany the job. It may be import-

ant to describe in some detail the formal relationships with other people in the organization. Under these headings staff should feel that there is a real job of work to be done.

All staff will be required to work according to the job descriptions and will be expected to review their work each year.

The management will have to decide if the advantages of this process outweigh the disadvantages.

Careful assessment has to be made of the effects of applying job descriptions to staff. Will this system stifle innovation and initiative? Will the nurse gain greater benefit in following a closely defined written structure, or may the reverse be true? Only the individual organization can answer these questions after a fairly lengthy period of trial and assessment.