Making the Most of Job Descriptions

As part of our new approach to compensation, we are now focused on highlighting the primary purpose of the position rather than specific duties of any one job. The primary scope of a position is used for benchmarking and placement in the market. When a position cannot be benchmarked, we evaluate core responsibilities to identify comparable job families and roles. Identifying every responsibility performed by the role, and/or adjusting education/experience requirements in general will not impact the placement in the structure and market.

In this *Leadership Insights* we will discuss the following:
- Engaging Staff
- Tips for Writing Effective Job Descriptions

Engaging Staff

Employees should be informed of the process and provided details associated with potential changes to specific job descriptions. In cases where a job description may be changing significantly we recommend scheduling time with affected employees to confirm they understand the details of the role and ensure alignment. Their knowledge and experience of the position should also be given serious consideration. It is important to note, however, that the supervisor is ultimately responsible for defining the job. All employees will be able to view job descriptions via a public library that will be available in Spring 2023.

Tips for Writing Effective Job Descriptions

Job descriptions generally won't need frequent updating going forward if the language used to describe positions is broad enough. For example, it is not necessary to describe specific projects, tasks, or budget amounts. Major changes including new or differ areas of responsibility that require new skills and knowledge to perform.

Job descriptions for responsibilities performed by more than one person should apply across the board regardless of who is doing the job. We suggest involving the employee(s) who holds these positions when editing or proposing changes to an existing job description.

Writing tips:
- Write using the first or second person ("You are an ideal candidate if…" or "We are looking for…") rather than using the third person (e.g.,, "The ideal candidate is…").
- Use active verbs to start bullets and match the tense of all verbs for consistent tone and structure.
- Use short job titles.
- Broadly define the primary purpose of the role. We recognize that there is rarely a position that doesn't perform duties outside of its primary purpose, but we ask that manager identify the primary purpose of a position, so that we are better able to find comparable positions in the market for benchmarking.
  - F   or example, for an admissions counselor role, the position's responsibilities may include tracking completion of applications, giving tours, and directing questions to the appropriate offices, but the primary purpose is to recruit and counsel students. We use that information to obtain market data for roles at other institutions that   have the same primary purpose.
- Loosely prioritize the list of core responsibilities so the most important tasks are at the top.
  - A job function is considered "essential" when performance of the function is the reason that the job exists. A function may be "essential" when the number of employees available to perform the function is limited, the function requires specialized skills, the function occupies a large percentage of time, and failure to perform the function may have serious consequences.
  - Avoid excessive detail; this list does not need to specify every single task. It can be helpful to create a detailed draft for this section by listing all activities, group them into related "families" of tasks and then replace this with a sentence or two that is broad enough to cover everything in that group.
  - Ideally, each point includes the purpose and/or the result to be accomplished. For example, "Work with senior administrators to set appropriate goals for the ___ program, determine the most effective methods to achieve those goals, implement innovative program activities that engage employees, and evaluate results in order to ensure the College leads our industry in ____results " rather than "Oversee _____ program."
  - Do not include information that changes frequently (e.g.,, refer to "applicable procedures" rather than listing specific procedures.)
- When applicable, state the frequency of the duties that are performed. This gives the employee an idea not only of what is expected of them but how much of their time will be spent performing their tasks.
- Note the duration, and scope, of physical demands required to perform the primary and core responsibilities of a role. Working conditions would include the environment in which the work is performed. This information is important when assessing ADA accommodations, workplace injury/FMLA return-to-work procedures when someone has an injury or illness that could impact their ability to perform their job, etc. For example, a custodian may be exposed to hazardous materials and may be expected to work various shifts as part of the role.
- Look for opportunities to consolidate or keep like jobs together in one job description—if there are varied specific projects or areas of expertise that multiple people in a role might specifically

take on, these can be listed together. Take, for example, for an admissions counselor role that multiple people occupy: a bullet could state that within the role there will be a specialization in region covered, specific student interest areas, and/or partner programs.

Leader Pulse Survey

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