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Effective Remote Management Through Job Task Analysis

An Old School Tool for the New Normal:
How Job Task Analysis Supports Effective
Management of Remote Workers

OVERVIEW

The world of work has changed. Employers and employees around the globe are experiencing a paradigm shift and discovering in many cases that physical proximity between workers and management is less important than previously thought.

Now that “distancing” has become the norm for many workplaces, leaders are feeling disconnected from their workforce, and are struggling to adjust their management techniques to this “new normal.” However, managing from a distance – remote management – does not have to be difficult. In fact, there is an “old school” training methodology – the job task analysis (JTA) – that can provide new utility to leaders whose workforce is no longer at arm’s reach. Having a JTA in place provides benefits to management and employees alike. In this paper, we’ll look at a JTA primer and then discuss three ways that a JTA can help leaders effectively implement remote workforce management: through authentic training design, accurate employee assessments, and effective communication with remote workers.

The JTA – a Primer

JTA is the process of analyzing a job in order to break it down into its individual duties and functions.

A good JTA answers the “how,” “when,” and “why” questions about job tasks, and essentially identifies “what good work looks like.” The JTA process begins by breaking a job into duty areas or broad types of work, and then determining the tasks associated with each duty area. Once this task list is compiled, each task is then broken down into the specific actions (steps) required for its completion and the

conditions under which the task is performed or triggers the task to be performed. Also recorded are the standards by which the performance is evaluated, and the tools, procedures and associated references utilized in the performance of the task. At the end of the JTA, each job analyzed will have a detailed list of the responsibilities and the specific steps required to perform them. A JTA forms the basis, not only for understanding what each job entails, but also the foundation for effective training, communication, and evaluation of employees in that job (Hartley, 2004, pp. 20-21).

JTAs Help Managers Train

The first step in managing an effective work force is training employees to perform their duties to the highest level.

Training is essential in making sure each individual can handle both the day-to-day tasks required of them, as well as the unexpected situations in which they may find themselves. JTAs are the first step in designing effective training (Stone & McClintock, 2005, p. 50; Neitzel 2018). They form the foundation of curriculum design and allow for the development of learning objectives and training experiences that are authentic and directly linked to the job requirements.

Learning objectives based on JTA specify:

- 1) the individual action(s) required to perform the task; 2) the conditions which may help or hinder the employee when performing the action(s); and 3) the standard to which the action(s) must be performed to have mastered the objective (Hartley, 2004, pp. 20-21; Herem, 1979, p. 58; Neitzel, 2018)



JTAs Help Managers Evaluate

JTAs are essential to the assessment and evaluation of employee readiness and performance.

There is a growing trend towards performance-based assessments rather than more traditional testing measures in employee training and certification (Forshay & Hale, 2017, pp. 71-75). Without a comprehensive JTA, it is nearly impossible to make sure an employee is performing all required tasks to the standard required to ensure success (Neitzel, 2018, p. 5). Performance evaluations are most often completed by supervisors or human resource representatives who, unless they themselves

have previously held that specific position, may only have a basic understanding of what a job entails. This makes it difficult for them to evaluate if all required steps have been completed or if potentially dangerous shortcuts have been taken. The use of the JTA as a task inventory can ensure that employees are performing all steps and tasks according to measures such as frequency, difficulty, importance, etc. (Manson, Levine, & Brannick, 2000, p. 1). The information gained from evaluations of this type can then be used to set specific goals for employee performance in the future (Mone & Shalley, 1995, 243-262).

JTAs Help Managers Communicate

JTAs form the basis for effective communication by providing standardized task lists, actions, performance criteria, and even nomenclature and vocabulary.

Current events have highlighted the need for effective communication as more and more employees are working remotely (Robinson, 2020). From their remote desks, employees do not necessarily work independently and still must perform work tasks as part of a group for a larger objective to be reached. This makes it imperative that a common vocabulary and understanding of tasks and their steps is created and utilized (Nonose, Kanno, & Furuta, 2015, pp. 607-618).

Without this common vocabulary and understanding of tasks, management cannot ensure that employees are performing their tasks at the required level or frequency, or provide constructive feedback that speaks directly to the specific job requirements (Caillier, 2013, pp. 638-652). This aspect of employee-management communication becomes increasingly important for remote employees as it is more difficult to “show” an employee how to do something when they are working at a distance. JTA provides the tools necessary to overcome this hurdle and improve communication between employees and management.

Conclusion

A job task analysis is the process of breaking a job into the tasks and actions it includes, and the conditions under which the tasks are performed and performance criteria, leading to the development of learning objectives and effective training design. Having a thorough JTA in place helps leaders face the challenges of managing remote employees by providing the means to implement authentic training, accurate employee assessments, and improved communication – essential aspects of a productive, efficient, and accident-free workforce.



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