

CHARACTERISTICS, USES AND IMPLEMENTATION OF JOB DESCRIPTIONS IN ORGANIZATIONS IN ZIMBABWE

Alice Z. Zinyemba*

Judias Peter Sai**

Abstract

A basic HR management tool that helps organizational and individual effectiveness is the job description. A good job description assists the employee to understand the functions of their job, their duties and responsibilities. It also helps them understand the relative importance of their duties and how they contribute to the overall achievement of the mission, goals and objectives of the organization.

A good job description is helpful to the organization in that it helps to ensure that an employee's work is well aligned with the organization's mission and objectives. Management is assisted to clearly identify the most appropriate employee for a new vacancy by using a job description. Above all most HR management activities evolve around job descriptions. Such activities include recruitment, selection, orientation, training, supervision, compensation, work plan and performance management. Job descriptions also help in legal defence in situations when an employee's contract is terminated because of poor performance.

The Zimbabwean economy is currently typified by downsizing, restructuring, company closures and retrenchments that result in challenges associated with the implementation of job descriptions. Job descriptions play a very important role in the organization as all human resources tasks revolve around them. There is need to constantly review job descriptions to make them relevant and useful to both the employee and the organization.

A job description that is well conceived and properly implemented has many benefits to both the individual employee and the organization. The key is to make most HR activities centre on job descriptions.

Key words: job description, characteristics, benefits, challenges, performance management,

* Department of Business Studies, University of Zimbabwe

** Department of Tourism, Leisure and Hospitality Management, University of Zimbabwe

1. Introduction

For purposes of recruitment and selection a *job description* may be defined as a statement describing the purpose of the job; the nature of the job and the duties and responsibilities which comprise the job. The drafting of a job description is a task that is usually undertaken by a personnel specialist. Job descriptions benefit both employer and the employee in several ways since most human resources management activities evolve around job descriptions right from recruitment and selection of staff to staff appraisals and termination. In spite of all the benefits that accrue from the use of job descriptions, human resources managers and employees in Zimbabwe still experience challenges associated with their implementation.

2. Literature Review

Many Human Resources professionals describe a job description as that document which provides information about the duties and responsibilities which a job contains (Cherrington 1983, Jewell , 2000, Mushipe, 2007 and Mader-Clark, 2008). “It is simply a clear, concise depiction of a job’s duties and requirements” (Mader-Clark , 2008 p: 3). These definitions are in agreement with the one offered by Zeiger (2014), that a job description outlines the roles, responsibilities and qualifications required for a particular job.

There are four (4) components to a typical job description namely a job summary, a list of the duties and functions of the job, job requirements or specification and conditions of work. A job specification contains the education requirements, certificates, licenses and the experience necessary for one to perform the job. The conditions of work describe facts about the location of the job, hours of work, travel requirements, reporting relationships inter alia.

2.1 Content of a job description

The content of a typical job description includes the following:

- Job title and its grade
- Job identification details (employees/job number)
- Reporting line
- Department or section in which the job is located
- Geographical location of the job
- Main purpose of the job

- Task or accountability
- Job context
- Contacts
- Subordinates
- Conditions of employment
- Knowledge and skill
- Competencies

2.2 Benefits of a job description

Job descriptions bring about a number of benefits to the employer and employee. The following eight common benefits are cited (Mader-Clark, 2008, Jewel, 2000):

1. Job descriptions are useful in recruitment and selection of the right staff. Selection criteria are made easy and the job description can be used as a guide to the selection interview.
2. The expectations of the employer are communicated through the job description. Both new employees and those on promotion to new jobs will know what is expected of them and what it takes to excel through the job description. Communication between the employer and the employee is enhanced leading to improved employee morale. Job descriptions are useful in performance appraisals and performance management.
3. Job descriptions can be used in job analysis and job evaluations to determine the value to be placed on a particular job (Mader-Clark, 2008)
4. Misunderstandings with employees can arise after jobs are filled if an organisation does not use job descriptions especially when there are discrepancies over specific aspects of the roles (Everydaylife.Global post, 2014). At times it may also be necessary for the employer to terminate an employee's contract on the grounds of unacceptable performance. The job description becomes useful in legal defence.
5. Job descriptions play a major role in training and development of staff. The type of training and level of performance required for staff is contained in a job description (Simon, 2014).

2.3 Challenges of Job Descriptions

Although job descriptions provide a number of benefits to both the employer and employee sometimes they fail to achieve the purpose when they do not accurately reflect

the job content. The following are some common job description deficiencies (HR, BL R, 2014):

1. Exaggerating or downplaying the importance of a job in which case it will be of little use to both the organization and the employee.
2. Failure to be specific on what distinguishes successful and unsuccessful job performance in which case, the job description will not be useful for evaluating performance.
3. All jobs require a degree of decision – making. When a job description ignores that aspect the scope of responsibility and accountability remains unclear.
4. A common problem with job descriptions is failure to describe what an employee should do in specific and measurable terms which then makes it difficult for performance evaluation.
5. Sometimes job descriptions fail in that they demand qualifications that are not really needed for one to succeed in the particular job. Acceptable candidates who might do very well in the job are therefore screened out thereby denying the organization of potentially good employees.

Another challenge with job descriptions is that there are often some unforeseen demands of the job that only surface when one is actually performing the job. This is what is referred to as the hidden curriculum of work (Sostrin, 2013). Organizations hire new staff without acknowledge of the hidden curriculum of jobs. Other than making the job description concrete, organizations should make the job description discussable.

Zimbabwe is currently experiencing economic hardships leading to most companies operating below capacity levels. Companies are downsizing or restructuring their operations, with others actually closing down and retrenching staff. Organizations still need people to get the job done. The implications for this are that many workers are finding their jobs expanding because they are taking on more work which was previously being performed by others. This normally happens when an employee is asked to add more projects to an already heavy workload, taking on tasks that are outside the scope of one's education, training or experience, performing work normally done by a junior or a

superior and performing duties that they neither feel comfortable with nor enjoy doing (Shepell, 2014).

3. Statement of the problem and Purpose of the study

Although a Job description is a valuable tool for performing human resources management functions, there are several problems that are often associated with their implementation. Sometimes the job descriptions are not updated as job duties or job specifications change.

Their contents and implementation sometimes violate labour laws. A poorly written job description provides little guidance to the employee, supervisor or manager when it comes to performance management and appraisals. The current economic situation in Zimbabwe has seen companies downsizing with staff getting retrenched. Companies are operating with skeleton staff leading to a situation where jobs are combined and performed by one person to cut down on labour costs. It thus becomes necessary to establish the current state of affairs as regards job descriptions in Zimbabwean organizations today.

The purpose of the study was to establish the purposes of job descriptions in Zimbabwe, how they are used and challenges managers and employees meet in the implementation of job descriptions.

4. Research methodology

A questionnaire was designed to establish the characteristics, uses and implementation of job descriptions in Zimbabwean organizations. The questionnaire consisted of 23 statements that focused on the characteristics, uses and implementation of job descriptions.

5. Findings and discussion

There was a 100% response rate as all the 59 administered questionnaires were returned. The findings are therefore valid.

5.1 Reliability of instrument

Reliability of a research instrument is the ability of that instrument to give the same outcomes in future investigations. This is normally measured through Cronbach's alpha. According to Nunally (1978), a minimum acceptable Cronbach's reliability alpha is 0.7. However, it is suggested by Santos (1999) that lower alpha levels are at times acceptable. The overall alpha for

this study is 0.914. Since this alpha value is greater than the minimum threshold, the research instrument for this study is therefore reliable even in future studies.

5.2 Validity Mean analysis

The statistical mean was used to test the validity of the responses in this study. In this study, a median mean of 2.5 is the threshold from a scale of 1 to 4 where, 1 denotes strongly disagree, 2 disagree, 3 agree and 4 strongly agree. The mean is used to show the degree of agreement by respondents on a particular variable. Given a threshold mean of 2.5, all variables with a mean of less than 2.5 show no agreement by respondents, while those with mean of 2.5 and above have been agreed on by the respondents.

5.3 Characteristics of job descriptions

The study shows that every employee in organisations has a written job description. This aspect has a mean score of 3.03. This is a major finding given that with the economic meltdown in Zimbabwe and the resultant retrenchments and restructuring in organisations, most management systems and procedures have been diluted or are being ignored.

The results further indicate that job descriptions show the title and position of the job, with a mean of 3.32. This gives a clear picture of the employee's chain of command, communication channel and point of reference when comparing with other jobs. This is a very important motivating factor, which assists in self-actualisation of employees.

From the study, job descriptions clearly define employee's level of responsibility and accountability with a mean score of 3.00. Respondents also indicated that their daily duties and responsibilities that they actually do were laid out in their job descriptions, with a mean of 2.56. Respondents further agree that their job descriptions describe their responsibilities and functions well (mean 2.80). These are very important results in that every employee should be responsible for given tasks, actions and decisions. This is what employees are paid to do. Employees therefore know what they are paid for. They also know what they are accountable for, that is, what they are answerable for in terms of their actions and decisions. Employees therefore can anticipate courses and nature of any disciplinary actions against them. Normally, disciplinary proceedings are undertaken for not complying with one's clearly stated and described responsibilities and accountability requirements. This is in line with the characteristics of job

descriptions reviewed earlier (Mader – Clarke, 2008 and Jewel R. B. 2000, Everydaylife. Global post, 2014).

Respondents agree, through a mean of 2.68, that their job descriptions were specific. Specific job descriptions are of paramount importance as they define in unambiguous terms the duties, responsibilities and other aspects that employees should pay great attention to. Non-specific descriptions can easily confuse and mislead employees as to what their responsibilities and what they are accountable for are. It is therefore encouraging to see that this aspect is fully covered.

The respondents agree to a large extent, mean 2.71, that their job descriptions show the attributes needed for performing their jobs. Further, the study finds that job descriptions spell out employees' conditions of work, as shown by a mean statistic of 2.57. The job attributes are of great necessity as they endeavour to match the job and the employee's qualifications, work experience and personality. This helps in avoiding frustration and de-motivation on the part of both the employee and the employer. People should get into jobs that best fit their job qualities and attributes. It is equally important for employees to be made fully aware of their work conditions, in order to avoid unnecessary human relations problems. Poor conditions of work or poor understanding of these frustrate employees. Employees should therefore go into work contracts fully aware of their work conditions.

It is agreed by respondents that their job descriptions show where their jobs are physically located (mean 2.69). This means that the place from where the employee will be working or operating is indicated in the job description, such as an office, a control room or in the premises yard. This gives employees a sense of domicile while at work and would motivate them as place of work provides shelter, security and safety at work. Employees do not have to be told where to work from every time. They should have a full feeling of belonging to a specified location of their work.

However, it was interesting to find that respondents marginally agreed (mean 2.51) that most of the duties and responsibilities that they do are not in their job descriptions, when the job descriptions clearly state the responsibilities and functions to be performed (mean 2.80). Perhaps

the reasons for this contradiction are that there is poor utilization of human resources and that due to economic decline in Zimbabwe, organisations are continuously restructuring and not updating the job descriptions. In fact, the respondents disagree that their job descriptions are updated regularly (mean 2.08). This result therefore supports the fact that employees are performing duties not in their job descriptions. This therefore supports the concept of the hidden curriculum of work referred to under the section on challenges of job descriptions (Sostrin J 2014).

With a mean rating of 2.56 the results show that duties and responsibilities that respondents actually do are not always laid out in their job descriptions. The clause “and any other duties” that appear at the end of job descriptions gives leeway to managers to delegate duties which may not be on the job descriptions. The challenge comes when those duties become the daily routine and when this happens there will be need to revise the job description.

The concept of the hidden curriculum of work is also reflected in the research findings. The study finds that respondents disagree that evaluation criteria for employee’s performance are clearly stated in their job descriptions (mean 2.37). Although the inclusion of the evaluation criteria is not common in Zimbabwean organisations, it could assist employees to work in line with the criteria in order to avoid surprises during performance evaluation exercises. Performance management would be greatly improved by the inclusion of this aspect in the job descriptions.

The respondents disagreed that their job descriptions show the certificates, licences and registrations required for the person performing the job. This is not a common practice in Zimbabwe for all jobs. It is however common for job descriptions for specialist professions such as medical nurse, medical doctor, veterinary surgeon, accounting auditor, architect, quantity surveyor and others to indicate the required licenses, certificates and registrations.

5.4 Uses and implementation of job descriptions

5.4.1 The greatest use and benefit of job descriptions agreed upon by respondents is that employees are made aware of what is expected of them in their jobs (mean 3.22). This is very important as every employee needs to be advised of their responsibilities as already

alluded to above. It is beneficial to both the employee and the employer to ensure that this awareness exists to avoid motivational and performance management problems. (Mader-Clark, 2008, Jewel, 2000)

5.4.2 The other major use, according to the respondents, is that job descriptions make it clear to whom the employees are supposed to report (mean 3.22). This makes allocation of duties, supervision and communication at work quite easy and smooth. Theory has it that each and every employee should serve one master and not more than that in order to avoid confusion and conflict at work. If an employee does not know whom to report there would be inefficient use of that employee as s/he will not be properly accountable and accounted for. Taking of instructions by the employee is made easier when s/he knows her/his boss at work.

5.4.3 The third most important use of job descriptions that was agreed on was that job descriptions in organisations are used for selection of staff (mean 2.59). The selection process in an organisation is very important, as it results in the introduction of new people into the organisation or people to new jobs. Any mismatch between the person and the job may have adverse consequences in future, which include none performance, lack of cooperation and other human resources problems. Further, the job itself may turn out to be too unchallenging for the selected person, resulting in lack of motivation and wasted skills, expertise or talent. The job description is therefore a key tool to avoid these problems. With a mean rating of almost 2.6 the results show that some organisations use job descriptions for selection of staff while others do not use them for such purposes.

In fact the Chi – Square Test reveals another interesting finding on the uses of job descriptions when gender is cross tabulated with selection of staff on the basis of job descriptions.

Null Hypothesis (H_0): Selection of staff using job descriptions is not dependent on gender

Alternative Hypothesis (H_1): Selection of staff using job descriptions is dependent on gender.

From the analysis, the observed p-value was 0.052, which marginally approximates 0.05 which is within the acceptable range for rejection. We therefore reject the null hypothesis

and conclude that the selection of staff using job descriptions in Zimbabwean organizations was indeed dependent on gender.

- 5.4.4 This study finds that organisations in Zimbabwe use job descriptions in establishing performance standards. Respondents agreed through a mean score of 2.57 on this very crucial aspect. Performance standards are instruments for performance management, which is necessary for attaining desired results in organisations. The job duties and requirements are matched with attributes necessary for desired performance. This use is enhanced by the fact that employees' job descriptions outline what employees are supposed to do in specific measurable terms, as shown by a mean score of 2.56 on this variable. Specific measurable terms are essential to clarify performance expectations in organisations. If performance is not measurable and specific, attainment of objectives of the organisation becomes difficult. Objectives are achieved when performance towards them can be measured, while performance evaluation is only possible when there are measurable standards. Through a mean score of 2.53, respondents agreed that job descriptions in their organisations are used in performance management and appraisal. This tends to reinforce the importance and relevance of job descriptions in this matter. Meaningful performance management could fail without relating it to job descriptions.
- 5.4.5 However, respondents disagree that job descriptions are used in establishing training and development needs in their organisations, with a mean score of 2.35. Job descriptions provide the trainer with the required areas of induction and training especially for new employees and for those on promotion to new senior positions.
- 5.4.6 The respondents in this study do not agree that job descriptions in their organisations are used to benchmark with jobs in other organisations. This disagreement is shown by a mean score of 2.30. It is probably difficult to equate jobs and job demands in organisations especially where different organisations have diverse work processes, products or services and manpower requirements. However, in very few organisations, such as universities, schools, bakeries, fuel refining and distribution firms and millers there may be similar operations and therefore these organisations can benchmark their management systems including job descriptions. Organisations in Zimbabwe have not yet significantly attempted this, except for benchmarking of salaries and wages based on job descriptions by National Employment Councils (NECs) in cases where particular

industries are unionized, such as in the hotel and catering business and in the rubber and allied industries.

5.4.7 Respondents do not see their job descriptions being used for compensation purposes (mean score of 1.95). Normally, job grading and valuation, which are based on job description, address job compensation concerns. It is therefore surprising that the respondents are not aware that their job descriptions are used in determining their salary grades and remuneration. The job content and the level of responsibilities and accountability are key considerations in determining compensation levels throughout the organisation. Again, due to the very low economic activity in Zimbabwe, most organisations may not be practicing job grading and valuation since they would not afford the resultant salary and benefits enhancements.

5.5 Factors with significant influence on job descriptions

This study used factor analysis to determine the factors that have significant influence on the characteristics, uses and implementation of job descriptions in organisations in Zimbabwe. Five factors were identified using the rotated component matrix extraction method. **Table 1** shows the factors that influence the characteristics, uses and implementation of job descriptions in organisations in Zimbabwe, from the Principal Component Analysis Extraction and Varimax with Kaiser Rotation method. The table also shows the eigenvalues of these factors.

Table 1: Factors that influence the characteristics, uses and implementation of job descriptions in organisations in Zimbabwe

Variables	Component				
	1	2	3	4	5
My job description is updated regularly	.691				
Job descriptions are used for selection of staff	.744				
Job descriptions are used for compensation purposes	.575				
My organisation uses job descriptions in establishing performance standards	.644				
Job descriptions are used in performance management and appraisals	.712				

Job descriptions are used to benchmark with other jobs in other organisations	.664				
Job descriptions are used in establishing training and development needs	.664				
Job descriptions show the certificates, licences and registrations required for persons performing the jobs	.500				
Daily duties and responsibilities are laid out in my job description		.538			
My job description is specific enough		.571			
My job description describes what I am supposed to do in specific measurable terms		.696			
I am aware what is expected of me from my job description		.559			
My job description describes the attributes needed for performing my job		.707			
My job description spells out my conditions of work		.758			

Table 1 (continued): Factors that influence the characteristics, uses and implementation of job descriptions in organisations in Zimbabwe

Variables	Component				
	1	2	3	4	5
The evaluation criteria for my performance is clearly stated in my job description		.547			
Every employee in my organisation has a written job description			.558	.543	
My job description makes it clear to whom I am supposed to report			.714		
My job description shows the title and position of my job			.876		
My job description clearly defines my levels of responsibility and accountability			.706		
My job description shows where the job is physically located				.743	
My job description lists a lot of unnecessary					.851

functions and duties					
Most of the duties and responsibilities that I do are not in my job description					.829
Eigenvalue	9.619	1.936	1.731	1.209	1.165
ExtractionMethod:	Principal	Component	Analysis.		
Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.					

- 5.5.1 The first factor is the purpose of job descriptions. There are 8 variables that are found in this factor and all these show the purpose of job descriptions through their uses in organisations. This factor has an eigenvalue of 9.619. Normally, a factor should have an eigenvalue of at least 1.0. This factor is therefore very strong. This is imperative because job descriptions should be used to capture and inform what employees are hired for and under what work conditions.
- 5.5.2 The second factor is the job content and requirements in organisations. This is shown by also 8 variables in this study. The job content includes duties and responsibilities in specific measurable terms (component value .696), conditions of work (component value .758) and performance evaluation criteria. The job requirements are shown by awareness of what is expected to be done (component value .559) and the attributes needed for performing work (component value .707). This factor is also strong, with an eigenvalue of 1.936.
- 5.5.3 The third factor is the identity of a job on the organisational chart in organisations. This has four variables revealing it in this study. Every employee has a written job description (component value .558) that shows a job title and position to help identify him/her within the organisation (component value .876). Further, every employee has a position to report to (component value .714) and has clear levels of responsibility and accountability (component value .706). This factor has an eigenvalue of 1.731, indicating that it is quite significant as well. The factor caters for the motivation and self-actualisation aspects of employees, as present and future job identities are important for these. Employees feel satisfied when they are in positions they consider suitable with future prospects of promotion and development.
- 5.5.4 The fourth factor is the location of the job. This is the physical place from where the job is to be performed. This factor has one major variable, that is, the job description shows where the job is physically located (component value .743) and a shared variable, a written job description (component value .543). The factor has an eigenvalue of 1.209,

showing it is significant in this study. The job location is very important as already discussed in this study.

- 5.5.5 The fifth and final factor in this study is the integrity of job descriptions in organisations in Zimbabwe. This is revealed by two variables. The first variable is listing of a lot of unnecessary functions and duties in job descriptions (component value .851). Unnecessary aspects in job descriptions serve to tarnish the good intentions of job descriptions. The second variable is that most duties and responsibilities that employees do are not in their job descriptions (component value .829). This may retard the effective implementation of job descriptions and efficient utilization of personnel in organisation.

6. Conclusions

This study reveals very interesting features regarding characteristics, use and implementation job descriptions in organisations in Zimbabwe.

6.1 Most organisations utilize job description system to deploy employees to various jobs. In this case, written job descriptions are used. This is in line with best practices in human resources management.

6.2 The job descriptions adequately cover the job content and requirements in that duties, responsibilities and accountability are spelt out in the job descriptions.

6.3 The job descriptions state the attributes necessary to perform job content and requirements. This is of paramount importance to avoid placing unqualified persons onto jobs requiring certain expertise and skills.

6.4 However, job descriptions are not regularly updated. This has the effect that redundant job descriptions continue to be used to manage staff. It also brings about the problem of employees carrying out duties and responsibilities that are not in the job description.

6.5 Organisations in Zimbabwe tend to dilute the integrity of job descriptions by making employees perform most duties and responsibilities that are not in their job descriptions, the hidden curriculum. This de-motivates employees.

6.6 Not all organizations in Zimbabwe use job descriptions for benchmarking with other organizations except for those industries which are unionised.

6.7 Job descriptions in Zimbabwe are not used for compensation purposes. As already discussed in this study, compensation should be based on job grading and evaluation. These two processes use job descriptions for fairness. Each job is ranked and graded against other jobs on the basis of job content, responsibilities and degree of accountability. All these factors are found in an employee's job description. It is not surprising that job descriptions are not used for compensation purposes given the economic situation in Zimbabwe where unemployment levels are high and people are willing to accept low salaries for survival.

6.8 The use of job descriptions to clearly state criteria for performance evaluation has not yet been widely adopted in Zimbabwean organizations. Performance management, discipline and even termination of employment are made easy when employees are aware of their performance evaluation criteria (everydaylife. Global post, 2014).

7. Recommendations

7.1 The job description system should be maintained and encouraged in all organisations in Zimbabwe. Job descriptions help organisations manage human resources properly and profitably as all human resources activities centre on job descriptions

7.2 Job descriptions should be regularly upgraded to be in line with changes in job content, requirements and attributes.

7.3 Organisations in Zimbabwe should not dilute the integrity of job descriptions by including unnecessary functions and duties and also by making employees perform duties and responsibilities that are not in their job descriptions. In order to avoid the hidden curriculum, job descriptions should be discussable with employees.

7.4 The job descriptions are critical for determination of employee compensation in organisation as discussed in this study. It is therefore crucial that they accurately reflect all aspects of the requirements for the job.

7.5 Organisations in Zimbabwe will add value to the whole essence of performance management if they clearly stated the evaluation criteria for performance in job descriptions.

References

Cherrington, 1983, Personnel Management: the Management of Human Resources, WM.C. Brown Co. Publishers

HR, BL R.com, 2014, Compliance Tools for HR professionals, hr.blr.com/HR-news, accessed 28.07.2014

<http://everydaylife.globalpost.com/characteristics-job-description>, (accessed 28.07.2014)

Jewel, 2000, An Integrated Approach to Business Studies, 4th edition, Pearson Education Limited

Mader-Clark, 2008, The Job Description Handbook, NOLO publications

Mushipe, 2007, A 'Level Business Studies, ZPH Publishers

Simon, 2014, What Role Do Job Descriptions Play in Training, Demand Media?
<http://everydaylife.globalpost.com/role-job-descriptions-play-in-training>, accessed 28.07.2014

Sostrin, 2013, When Job Descriptions Lie: The Real Demands of Every Position,
Hiring.monster.com/hr-best-practices/recruit-hiring-advice/job-descriptions, (accessed 28.07.2014)

www.schepellfgi.com/en-ca/takingcharge/work, (accessed 28.07.2014)

Zeiger, 2014, Characteristics of a Job Description, Demand Media
work.chron.com/characteristics-job-description, accessed 28.07.2014)