



Job Description: **“Development and Application”**

JOB DESCRIPTION: DEVELOPMENT AND APPLICATION

GOALS

1. Understand the correct definition of a job description.
2. Differentiate between a job description and performance standards.
3. Write correct process objectives and terminal goals.
4. Understand the difference between the cognitive, psychomotor, and affective domain.
5. Include necessary content into an effective job description.

KEY WORDS FOR APPLICATION

1. Job Descriptions (Process and Terminal Behaviors)
2. Domains (Cognitive, Psychomotor, Affective)
3. Categories
4. Action Verbs

The goal of this article is to present an introduction to nursing leadership theory as it applies to writing effective job descriptions. The article content is intended to represent a researched, calculated, and reasonable technical approach to describing the levels of nursing performance within a health organization. It is content for the nursing leader who desires to incorporate more exactness into the organization's existing job descriptions. This approach increases job performance accountability and provides a legal basis for evaluations.

DEFINITION, DEVELOPMENT, USE OF JOB DESCRIPTIONS

Job descriptions, by definition and purpose, are statements of expected job behaviors or accomplishments that are supportive of the organization's unique philosophy, mission, and goals. Each job description is intended to work in harmony with other job descriptions of the organization. It is a mutually reviewed and signed contract by the leader and employee.

The development of a new and effective job description requires a leader's intuitive creative thoughts related to the organization's needs and the required maturity, experience, and education of the person to be hired. This intellectual creative approach by the leader was never intended to be a "canned" approach to identify job expectations, but an outcome of understanding the need for integration of supportive behaviors into the existing job descriptions of an organization.

Once developed and signed, the job description becomes the basis for future employee evaluations. This signed agreement by an employee and a leader as to minimal job expectations meets the standard of mutual fairness.

JOB DESCRIPTIONS VS. PERFORMANCE STANDARDS

The trend in writing most job descriptions is to state what a leader expects employees *to do*. However, if there is a need to enhance and clarify *how well* a leader expects the job to be performed, the title “performance standards” (instead of the title “job descriptions”) is used. When writing performance standards, *quality* and *quantity* are intended to be more clearly stated as a part of each job expectation. The written specificity of job expectations is dependent on the type and purpose of the job. Performance standards might include words of minimum and maximum numbers, exact numbers, percentages, time frames, and/or a person’s name.

All written job descriptions and performance standards should follow the RUMBAS criteria. This acronym is a reminder that job expectations should be: REASONABLE, UNDERSTANDABLE, MEASUREABLE, BEHAVIORAL, ATTAINABLE, and SPECIFIC.

Performance standards increase the intensity, exactness, and specificity of an employee’s job accountability to the organization and provide more definitive expectations that measure the extent of an employee’s job compliance.

Reasons to use performance standards:

1. Identifies *specific* positive and expected job behaviors
2. Decreases role confusion
3. Provides a more explicit means for accurate and informative employee evaluation

PREFACE STATEMENT

Job expectations should be presented to an employee with a PREFACE referring to *process objectives* or *a terminal goal*. The term “objective” is most often used for *incremental job expectations* designed to reach a terminal end point (goal). The term “goal” is most often used for referring, specifically, to a *terminal end point*. Usually, process objectives are listed in such a manner as to clearly indicate the process to reach the intended goal.

The wording of incremental expectations (objectives) and terminal end points (goals) as a preface is as follows:

1. Process Objectives (incremental expectations)—are prefaced by the words representing an on-going and given timeframe. It is the process by which goals are met. (Example: *During* the next week, the employee will.....)
2. Terminal Goals (end points)—are prefaced by the words representing the end of the timeframe. It is the end product of the process. (Example: *At the end of* next week, the employee will.....)

INTEGRATION OF DOMAINS, CATEGORIES, & ACTION VERBS

Benjamin Bloom, et.al., through extensive collaborative research, determined three domains of job performance. The three domains (cognitive/thinking, psychomotor/motor activity, affective/feeling) each have within their domains so-called *categories*. The categories range from simple to complex expectations or sometimes referred to varying degrees of expertise.

The categories within each domain have examples of action verbs. Action verbs are used at the beginning (first word) of each job expectation within a job description. The differences in the action verbs (within the domain and category selected) allow the leader to choose an expected job behavior that is unique to the minimal level of expertise required to do the job.

In any domain, leaders (with their extensive responsibility) should have their job expectations start with an action verb representing the *higher levels of difficulty* categories. That is, (in the cognitive domain, as an example), the categories of analysis and evaluation. Conversely, subordinate employees should have their job expectations start with an action verb representing the *lower levels of difficulty* categories. That is, (in the cognitive domain, as an example), the categories of knowledge and comprehension. The result is job descriptions that are clearly and accurately differentiated. This will indicate that leaders do (and are expected to) have higher and more complex job expectations than their subordinates, and subordinates are not to have higher and more complex job expectations than the leaders. That does not mean that employees do not have abilities in other categories; however, the other non-specified behaviors/expectations do not form the basis of the employee's evaluation.

CRITERIA FOR DOMAIN SELECTION--HOW TO SELECT A DOMAIN(S):

Cognitive Domain: When job expectations require mental problem solving and/or mental contemplation.

Psychomotor Domain: When job expectations require manual/muscular dexterity.

Affective/Feeling: When job expectations require consideration of others, kindness, thoughtful behaviors, cooperation of/with others.

DOMAINS, CATEGORIES, AND ACTION VERBS

Following is an introduction to the three domains, their categories (listed separately in each domain) and suggested verbs under each category. (see Bloom's Taxonomy on-line)

Cognitive Domain:

Knowledge (lowest performance)--- The employee must be able to recognize, know, and/or recall previously learned information/material. Examples of action verbs used at the beginning of each job expectation could be: who, what, why, when, where, which, choose, find, how, define, etc.

Example: Define the usual medication errors in transcribing medication.

Comprehension/Understanding (next to lowest performance)--- The employee must be able to organize information to grasp meaning, explain, and restate ideas. Examples of action verbs used at the beginning of each job expectation could be: convert, defend, interpret, predict, summarize, explain, generalize, etc.

Example: Summarize the provider's list of patients.

Application (middle-of-the-road performance)--- The employee must be able to use information and learned material in new situations and in different ways. Examples of action verbs used at the beginning of each job expectation could be: apply, build, choose, compute, construct, demonstrate, interview, etc.
Example: Interview patients to determine their views.

Analysis (next to highest performance)--- The employee must be able to examine and break information into parts, combine information, influence outcomes, and show relationships between parts. Examples of action verbs used at the beginning of each job expectation could be: differentiate, select, analyze, relate, compare, contrast, diagram, etc.
Example: Analyze the interviews to determine the most qualified applicant.

Evaluation (highest performance)--- The employee must be able to use facts and complexity of ideas to determine consistency or inconsistencies and judges the worth of material against a stated criterion. Examples of action verbs used at the beginning of each job expectation could be: appraise, compare, critique, summarize, justify, discriminate, evaluate, etc.
Example: Compare the pros and cons of moving the orthopedic area.

Psychomotor Domain:

Perception (lowest performance)--- The employee uses sensory cues to guide their motor activity. Examples of action verbs used at the beginning of each job expectation could be: choose, detect, describe, hear, listen, observe, sense, etc.
Example: Choose a room for patient conferences.

Set (next to lowest performance)--- The employee is mentally, physically, and emotionally ready and able to perform. Examples of action verbs used at the beginning of each job expectation could be: achieve, establish, begin, react, state, proceed, explain, show, etc.
Example: Explain to new nurses the steps used to chart vital signs.

Guided Response (middle-of-the-road performance)--- Adequate performance is achieved by practice. Uses trial and error to learn complex skills. Follows directions. Examples of action verbs used at the beginning of each job expectation could be: follow, imitate, operate, practice, react, copy, respond, etc.
Example: Follow the charting directions as stated on the computer.

Mechanism (middle-of-the-road performance)--- Able to perform complex and accurate moves with increasing efficiency, confidence, and proficiency. Performs without hesitation. Examples of action verbs used at the beginning of each job expectation could be: complete, conduct, execute, construct, organize, calibrate, accurate, etc.
Example: Organize patient rooms to accommodate at least three patients.

Complete Overt Response (high performance)--- Able to perform complex movement patterns. Quick, --accurate, and highly cooperated performance. Performs without hesitation. Examples of action verbs could be: act, control, direct, manage, organize, proceed, perform, etc.
Example: Manage the Emergency Department during a disaster.

Adaptation (next to highest performance)--- Well developed skills. Able to modify effectively movement patterns to adapt to needs. Examples of action verbs used at the beginning of each job expectation could be: alter, change, reorganize, rearrange, vary, adapt, revise, etc.

Example: Change the nursing conference weekly to accommodate changing needs.

Origination (highest performance)--- Creates new patterns to accommodate specific situations.

Outstanding creative skills. Examples of action verbs used at the beginning of each job expectation could be: arrange, create, compose, design, make, initiate, combine.

Example: Design a nursing conference brochure that shows compassion for the hurricane victims.

Affective Domain:

Receiving Phenomena (lowest performance)--- Awareness, willingness to hear, selected attention with respect for others. Examples of action verbs used at the beginning of each job expectation could be: acknowledge, Follow, Listen, Understand, Attentive, Identify, Reply, etc.

Example: Listen to each patient as they state their health problems.

Responding to Phenomena (next to lowest performance)--- Attends and reacts to situations. Finds satisfaction in responding. Examples of action verbs used at the beginning of each job expectation could be: answer, assist, aid, conform, perform, practice, report, etc.

Example: Perform CPR according to hospital protocol.

Valuing (middle-of-the-road performance)--- Attachment of worth and value to any phenomena.

Sensitive to cultural differences. Examples of action verbs used at the beginning of each job expectation could be: complete, differentiate, explain, initiate, justify, share, propose, etc.

Example: Justify the request for an increase in nursing staff.

Organization (next to highest performance)--- Organizes contrasting values. Resolves problems as a result of considering contrasts. Compares and synthesizes values as they relate to the organization, family, and self. Examples of action verbs used at the beginning of each job expectation could be: adhere, alter, arrange, complete, integrate, organize, synthesize, etc.

Example: Arrange, if possible, nursing schedules according to the requested needs of nurses.

Internalizing Values (highest performance)--- Values behavior control. Personal behavior is pervasive, consistent, and predictable. Displays teamwork. Values others with a commitment to ethical practice values. Examples of action verbs used at the beginning of each job expectation could be: act, display, influence, modify, perform, serve, practice, etc.

Example: Serve on the Ethical Standards Committee of the organization.

REVIEW OF JOB DESCRIPTION DEVELOPMENT

The flow of job description development, then, is as follows:

1. Determine the preface to be used (“During_____” or “At the end of_____”).
2. Determine the domain (cognitive, psychomotor, affective).
3. Determine the category within the chosen domain(s) according to the level of performance desired (leader or subordinate).

4. Determine appropriate action verb(s) representing the categories selected.
5. Write the job expectations (after each selected verb) to the specificity required and to the degree the employee will be held accountable (considering job description or performance standards).

EMPLOYEE JOB DESCRIPTIONS (NEW AND EXISTING)

The expectation of nursing leaders is to evaluate a new employee's history of the previous job performance, or a new graduate's academic success. The adage of PAST BEHAVIOR PREDICTS FUTURE OUTCOMES (good or bad) might be correct for determining a future employee's employment success. If this is true, and especially if the past was not "wonderful," the leader has a responsibility to identify specific written job expectations that will help make sure there are successful future outcomes. Successful outcomes by employees will increase health care outcomes for patients and increase positive community evaluations. Personal employment success will elevate an employee's ego and will promote self-assurance in nursing behaviors.

The process of updating existing job descriptions by a leader requires personal leadership abilities of intelligence, intuition, sensitivity, and constant ongoing awareness and evaluation of each employee's degree of job success. It represents consistent mutual job awareness and accountability between a nursing leader and employee—not Laissez Faire behavior. This requires a leader to understand, appreciate, and treat employees in a way that recognizes that *most* employees desire to be remarkable! The goal is to establish mutual respect and commitment to job expectations.

Out-performing of current minimal job expectations deserves recognition and commendation; however, that does not necessarily mean a job upgrade. Recognition and appreciation of quality performance can be its own reward! The job promotion of an existing employee to a new job description without participating in an employment process or existing hiring policy is often controversial and *can be* considered to be legally discriminatory under some circumstances. The appearance or consideration of nepotism (family and friends) might also be of legal concern.

Self-evaluations are to be accomplished before a formal nursing leader evaluation. Peer evaluations can be helpful; however, sometimes there is misinformation provided by peers. Negative peer evaluations in question should be carefully evaluated.

The leader retains the right to add, subtract, or change job-related behaviors or expectations. The successful key to job expectation changes on a job description requires the leader to *discuss* the change(s) with the involved employee before or at the time of the change. The more accurate a job description, the *less likely* a misunderstanding about job expectations will occur at the time of a formal evaluation. An employee is to have an opportunity to respond in writing to a formal evaluation. A signed copy by the leader and the evaluated employee should be available to the evaluated employee after each formal evaluation.

JOB DESCRIPTION CONTENT

Lists/statements of job expectations usually (not always) should include the following information: (It is not necessarily in order of importance or sequence of appearance in the job description.)

1. The title of the organization, job title, onset date, and/or duration, hours, break times/dates, supervisor, and job location
2. A philosophy statement of the hiring organization and how it relates to the specific job
3. A mission statement of the organization and how it relates to the specific job
4. A statement indicating that the organization is an “equal opportunity employer without discrimination” and a statement of civil rights
5. Job or employee goal(s) and incremental objectives
6. Existence and frequency of formal peer, self, and/or leader evaluations
7. A reminder that Montana is legally an “At Will” employer allowed to legally hire and terminate employment, as desired, and without a stated cause within a stated probationary period-- or by the end of six months if no probationary period is stated
(The same courtesy is given to the employee during the probationary phase).
8. Pre-requisites required to be hired---education, experience, recommendations, etc.
9. Resources available to support positive outcomes---material and human
10. Expectations of the job
11. Evaluation timeframe
12. Superordinate(s) and subordinate(s)
13. Intended salary or salary range
14. Existing budget constraints, government requirements, regulations, and safety expectations
15. Behavior expected during work hours to promote a supportive work environment
16. Vacations and benefits
17. Signatures, dates, and any relevant comments from the employee and leader regarding the successful completion of the job evaluation

The secret of employee success is to have the leader help, serve, and support an employee to meet the expectations of a job description. Managers, leaders, and supervisors, therefore, should have included in their own job description the responsibility to answer questions and support employees. This means that leadership knowledge about how to manage employees is not found in a drawer, but experienced as a talented “people person” that is fully visible and a resource for problem solving.

The success of a leader is dependent on a positive view of the Nature of Man! That is, nursing employees should be considered by nursing leaders to be naturally enhanced with “goodness.”

SUGGESTED READING

Benjamin Bloom Taxonomies (on-line)

Carolyn R. Taylor, Ed.D. M.N. R.N.

carolynrtaylor21@yahoo.com

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