

Understanding of Job Analysis of Middle Management in Ministry of Public Works and Transport, Laos, PDR

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Abstract

Job analysis sits at the heart of all human resource practices, making it a critically important management activity in every organization. However, with increasing competition, shorter product life-cycles, rapid technological innovations, and the changing nature of organizational structures, its underlying assumptions are becoming increasingly questionable in today's dynamic work environment. Moreover, the methods used by traditional job analysis are simply not applicable to many new and emerging jobs and some authors feel it may even be an obstacle to organizational success (Singh, 2008). This research paper aims at firstly examining how the 4 breakthroughs of government policy are comprehensible and practicable among the middle management. Secondly to investigate if the application of job analysis developed by Pynes is known and implemented by the MPWT middle management. The qualitative research methods was employed among the middle management personnel at MPWT. The group discussion and in-depth interviews were conducted and content analysis was used to interpret transcribing data to text description. It was found that there were no specific measures for job analysis as reference from the four breakthrough policies of the government of Lao PDR has been applied in job analysis among the middle management personnel. So it was also found that there was no job analysis model which was applied. Therefore, the Pynes model was not actually comprehended by the middle management personnel.

Keywords: Job Analysis, Middle Management

Introduction

The Ministry of Public Works and Transport (MPWT) has a role to assist the Government and to manage the macro environment concerning the communication, land route, land waterway, civil aviation, railway transportation, housing and urban planning and water supply within the country (Ministry of Public Work and Transport, 2013). Even though all rules and regulation related to civil servants are in place but the enforcement is likely to be weak in terms of implementation. The administrative mechanism of MPWT at the national level consists of (1) the Cabinet Office, (2) the Department of Personnel, (3) Department of Planning and Cooperation, (4) the Department of Inspection, (5) the Department of Roads and Bridges, (6) the Department of Transportation, (7) the Department of Housing and urban Planning, (8) the Department of Civil Aviation, (9) the Department of Waterways, (10) the Railways Department, (11) the Public Works and Transportation Institute (PTI), (12) and the Department of Finance (DOF). The Department of Personnel conducted a job analysis

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assessment in 2007 both at the central and provincial levels. The result from this assessment indicated that among 503 employees who hold a middle management position, such as head and deputy head of the division and equivalent, 181 employees did not meet job requirements. This is due to the lack of training for managers, particularly for the middle management level. As job analysis plays a pivotal role within the human resources management field, and is of crucial importance to other functions such as training, compensation and performance appraisal, strategic job analysis of middle management personnel continues to be a top priority in the MPWT. This paper aims to examine how middle management personnel apply four breakthroughs in job analysis, and to investigate job analysis strategy practice in MPWT.

Literature Review

Understanding of Job Analysis

Job analysis may be viewed as the hub of virtually all human resource management activities necessary for the successful functioning of organizations (Singh, 2008). It is noted that at the heart of almost every human resources management program or activity is the need for accurate and thorough job information. Therefore, job analysis is a prerequisite activity for the effective management of human resources in organisations (Singh, 2008). Stone(2002) also asserts that job analysis is seen as a basic Human Resource activity since it focuses attention on what employees are expected to do, while knowledge about jobs and their requirements is collected through job analysis. This can be described as the process by which jobs are divided to determine what tasks, duties and responsibilities they involve (Stone, 2002). They also include worker traits such as the physical demands of the job, working conditions, general educational development level, specific vocational preparation, aptitudes, interests and temperaments (Wei & Salvendy, 2004). Job analyses usually includes aptitudes such as verbal, numerical and spatial requirements or temperaments required in directing others, dealing with others or making judgments and decisions. U.S Department of Labor (1991) points out that a job analysis is a systematic study of a specific job in terms of the worker's relationship to data, people and things, the methodologies and techniques employed, the machines, tools, equipment and work aids used, the materials, products, subject matter or services which result and the worker attributes that contribute to successful job performance. Moreover, researchers note that job analysis is focussed on the collection of work-related information for the job as it currently exists or has existed in the past (Palmer & Valet, 2001; Schneider & Konz, 1989). The procedures are related more to the situation of a one person-one job situation. Yet, as competition and technological innovations increase and product life cycles get shorter, jobs are becoming not only less static, but also less individually-based (Singh, 2008).

Job Analysis Techniques

A number of job analysis approaches have been developed over the years. These approaches gather information on job content and worker characteristics that are common to jobs across a wide spectrum. Stone (2002) proposes two approaches to job analysis that include a job-oriented (or a task) approach and an employee-oriented (or behaviour) approach. It is elaborated that a job-oriented approach is associated with what gets done which is the tasks, duties and responsibilities of the job (job content); whereas, the employee-oriented approach is focused on how the job is done. That is, the human behaviour required to perform the job (job requirements). Also, Schneider and Konz (1989) create an eight-staged approach for job analysis which is called a 'multi-method job analysis'. The eight stages include "collecting information on the current job; specifying job tasks and building task

clusters; developing and administering task surveys; conducting statistical analysis of task survey responses; conducting the knowledge, skills and abilities process; developing and administering the knowledge, skill and ability surveys; gathering information about the future; and revising tasks and/or task clusters, and knowledge, skill and abilities or knowledge, skill and abilities clusters in light of future changes” (cited in Singh, 2008: 2). Furthermore, Guion (1998) proposes a personality-based job analysis. This approach is developed based on twelve personality dimensions which involve general leadership, interest in negotiation, achievement striving, friendly disposition, sensitivity to others, collaborative work tendency, general trustworthiness, adherence to work ethic, attention to details, desire to generate ideas, tendency to think things through, and emotional stability. In addition, Pynes (2009) recommends a team-based job analysis and it is noted that as working in teams has become more important, job analysis questions and measures need to be developed to identify the job elements and competencies for successful collaboration and teamwork. The elements of team-based job analysis are associated with “task interdependence, which means that jobs performed by team members are related to one another; goal interdependence, work goals come directly from the goals of the team; interdependent feedback and rewards means that performance evaluations are strongly influenced by how well the team performs; and communication and cooperation between groups which imply that teams cooperate to get the work completed on time” (Pynes, 2009: 174).

Framework for Job analysis

According to the work of several researchers (Boxall & Purcell, 2000; Meshoulam & Baird, 1987; Tichy, 1985), it is generally agreed that different human resources functions must be integrated into the overall strategic management process of the organisation. Once a strategic direction for the organization is chosen, human resource practitioners have a crucial role in designing and developing human resources management systems that will assist in successful strategy implementation (Colbert, 2004; Cooke & Armstrong, 1990; Wright & Snell, 1991). One such function is the strategic job analysis which can be viewed as job analytic methods which help management anticipate and manage change relating to jobs and work. Thus, strategic job analysis means aligning current and future jobs with the strategic orientation of the organization. That is, strategic job analysis is a purposeful systematic process of collecting current and future work-related aspects of a job, within the organization's strategic context. Job analysis plays a pivotal role within the human resources management field, and is of crucial importance to other functions such as training, compensation and performance appraisal. As such, strategic job analysis should not only be integrally linked to the strategic management process of the organization, but to other related organizational functions as well. The strategic job analysis process, with some of its vertical and horizontal links should follow this process (Colbert, 2004; Cooke & Armstrong, 1990; Wright & Snell, 1998). This paper, therefore, will apply the framework of strategic job analysis process for middle management people in MPWT; while at the same time, the four breakthroughs of Lao Government policy will also be used as guidance, particularly the second breakthrough that is concerned with “breakthrough actively in human resource development especially in development and building capacity of civil servants in various areas according to the real situation”(Chanthaphouvang, 2012: 3).

Strategy for job analysis methods

Environmental Analysis/Job Scan: An environmental analysis/assessment entails the purposeful scanning of an organization's internal and external realms for information on opportunities, threats and probable changes. Basically, it is a fact-gathering exercise in which data on future trends and changes are collected and examined.

This activity may be integrated with the environmental analysis conducted for the organization's overall strategy formulation, or it may be conducted specifically for job analysis keeping in mind the strategic orientation of the organization.

An integral aspect of environmental analysis is the environmental scan which can be defined as "a process of systematic surveillance and interpretation designed to identify relevant events and conditions" (Schrenk, 1988: 88). Environmental scanning provides a rational basis for action by anticipating future conditions. Forecasting is an integral part of the process and includes a wide variety of processes such as the Delphi method for combining expert opinion, the creation of alternative scenarios (Manzini & Gridley, 1986), and the use of forecasting models (Sheridan, 1990).

Analyze current jobs: Analyzing current job is a focused internal analysis. This step is very similar to the traditional job analysis and does not need much elaboration. Basically, work-related information, which can be collected through a variety of methods, is analyzed and used to determine knowledge, skills and abilities necessary for effective performance of the job as it exists. However, it is important to address the issue of job analysis for team-based work since this has not received considerable attention in the literature due, in part, to the fact that it is a relatively recent North American phenomenon (Pynes, 2009:175).

Job analysis for teams: In the analysis of current jobs, rather than looking solely at within-job activities, we also need to look at the wider perspective that integrates inter-job activities, as well as teamwork into the analysis. Organizing employees into work teams is becoming an extremely popular management strategy

Determine and prepare for future jobs/conduct a "gap analysis": At this stage, the present and most likely future situations are compared by SMEs, job analysts and relevant personnel within the organization. Such a comparison allows an assessment of the extent to which changes in the environment of the organization yield significant task and KSA changes for the job in question. This comparison, or gap analysis, will reveal one of three possibilities: little or no significant differences, moderate differences, or significant differences.

Evaluate effectiveness/establish validity of procedures: Over time, the effectiveness of strategic job analysis must be evaluated on a continuous basis. One such way is to assess the "correctness" of the derived employee specifications through regular assessments of related activities, such as selection and performance appraisal. Such evaluations can also indicate the predictive/criterion-related validity of tools linked to strategic job analysis. Considering strategic job analysis is extremely significant in an organization's selection, training, performance evaluation, and compensation, it is critical that the criterion

Middle Management

Middle management is a concept that can be viewed from multiple contexts. In the business context, however, middle management can be best viewed as "two levels below the CEO and one level above line workers and professions" (Huy, 2001: 2). Uytterhoeven (1989: 136) supports that middle manager has been variously discussed as "a general manager who is responsible for a particular business unit at the intermediate level of the corporate hierarchy". In this respect, a middle manager is in "a hierarchy of authority between the operating core and the apex" or those below the small group of top strategic managers and above first-level supervision (Mintzberg, 1989: 98). The traditional view of the middle management job as simply listening to, understanding and interpreting the strategic plans of senior management and then seeing that these plans are communicated to, and implemented by, the rank and file, is becoming obsolescent if not obsolete (Hancock & Hellawell, 2003).

The main concerns of the middle manager are frequently the management of the tension between long-term and short-term organisational purposes, the linking of dispersed

knowledge and best practices across the organisation, and the development of individuals in embedding the processes of change and renewal into the organisation (Kanter, 1979). Middle managers need to be, synchronistically, masters and slaves and serve both the tops and bottoms, while enacting the complex roles of 'living' as a subordinate, an equal and as a superior (Huy, 2001) and having the ability to shift quickly and frequently from one to another. King, Fowler and Zeithaml (2001: 95) describe this as the middle manager acting as the "synapses within a firm's brain" where the middle manager works with senior management to create a sense of shared organisational identity by fostering the linkages that are required for intensive knowledge transfer.

Middle managers articulate valuable contributions to the realisation of radical change at an organisation. These contributions exist in four major areas which are associated with value-adding entrepreneurial ideas, leveraging the informational networks at the organisation, staying attuned to staff members' mood and emotional needs, and managing the tension between continuity and change (Huy, 2001). In one of these areas, middle managers are able and willing to realize; they seek to improve their unit and to adapt it to a changing condition as well as seeking mentors and career guidance in times of change (Huy, 2001; Mintzber, 1975; Shanley, 2006). In addition to this, middle managers perform a number of critical roles although there is no single aspect of successful measure. These critical roles are concerned with challenging the status quo and creating a readiness for change; enabling others to act by empowering, building teams and providing tangible support with appropriate resources (Graetz, Rimmer, Smith, & Lawrence, 2011; Lucas, 2001). Middle managers communicate the message repeatedly up, down and across the organisation (Caldwell, 2003; Graetz et al., 2011; Huy, 2001; Kotter, 1998). Huy (2001) supports that middle managers are suited to communicating proposed changes across the organisation, and can spread the word and get people on board since they usually have the best social networks in the organisation. This appears that middle managers act as the key communicator in providing core information about the change process in the organisation (Graetz et al., 2011; Kotter, 1998).

Research Method

The qualitative method was employed by conducting group discussion and in-depth interviews with middle management personnel in the MPWT. The content analysis is used to interpret transcribing data into understandable text description.

Findings

Understanding Government Policy Implementation

It was found that the application of the 9th Party Congress of People's Revolutionary Party policy (Chanthaphouvang, 2012) '4 breakthroughs' was also employed in job analysis for the MPWT since it has implementable measures for job analysis. However, from the discussion, it was found that 4 breakthroughs has limited indicators as references to analyzing the needs of the MPWT. It was used as a guideline to establish job analysis according to the actual needs of the MPWT. The findings also revealed that the ministry concerned was 'the Ministry of Home Affairs' which has not yet developed certain measures for jobs analysis since public organizations such as the MPWT has to follow and implement accordingly.

It was so found that, by the time of the study, the middle management personnel had a relatively low comprehension of the process, procedure and policy on job analysis practices within the MPWT. However, there is a strong foundation of leadership guidelines in the actual practice of job analysis. The description of jobs for personnel working in the MPWT

depends on the departments or divisions as a top-down approach rather than a two-way approach, top-down and bottom-up approach.

Job-Analysis Model

It was firstly found that the practice of MPWT on environmental analysis or job scan was not actually based on future needs. However, there was in-depth analysis of the existing situation, which was based mainly upon the vacancy availability. As a result, there was an increase in positions needed while recruiting personnel for the right position when needed, which implies that job scan or environmental analysis did not work in MPWT as it required confirmation of an employment quota from the central government. Above all, the environmental analysis or job scan was ignored by the middle management personnel.

It was secondly found that the ignorance continues to other stages in the model such as job analysis for teams and determining and preparing for future jobs/conducting a "gap analysis". Whereas, the middle management personnel have a clear understanding of evaluating effectiveness or establishing validity of procedures, which was annually held for newly-appointed staff.

Discussion

By the time of study, the knowledge of job analysis was not widely known by the middle management as they only specialized in the field of specialists rather than human resource management. The development of human resource management and the recruitment of staff has no specific measures in the 4 breakthrough policies of the government. The best practice of job analysis should be disseminated among middle management personnel who are actually close to the jobs and have a better understanding about the jobs' requirements.

Conclusion

It can be concluded that based upon the 4 breakthroughs developed by the 9th Party Congress of People's Revolutionary Party were unable to apply to job analysis among the middle management personnel since there was no specific indicators or measures. For their comprehension, the MPWT have their own system and procedures on job analysis.

The model of job analysis was not fully applied and was ignored by the middle management personnel since they only specialized in their work areas rather than in human resource matters.

Recommendations

The MPWT should develop its own model for job analysis and make it comprehensible to the middle management personnel who actually need the right persons for the jobs implemented in their departments or divisions.

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