Job Analysis at the Speed of Reality

By Darin E. Hartley

Take this job analysis and speed it up.

In the spirit of staying aligned with the editorial calendar, this month's column is on Training Fundamentals. In particular, this piece is going to cover job analysis. I will define "job analysis," identify some common training terms that are lumped together as job analysis, share an extremely streamlined methodology I use to make this happen (Job Analysis at the Speed of Reality, JASR), and discuss ways to use technology to enable job analyses to occur virtually.

What does *job analysis* mean?

Job analysis is the process used to break a job into its component duty or functional areas and the task statements associated with those duty areas. The key deliverable of the job analysis is a validated task list. This task list is a critical deliverable because it can be used as the foundation to create multiple derivative products, including curriculum design, behavioral interview guides, self-assessment tools, organizational assessments, job descrip-

tions, and competency models. Competency models should always be based on job analyses, but often they are not. Many organizations pull competencies from ad hoc discussions of HR staff and their perceptions of what competencies should be.

Job task analysis, or JTA, is another term used interchangeably with job analysis although the two are not synonymous. When a JTA is conducted, the analyst is going a step further and breaking each task from the task list into its component steps or elements. That's an important step when you get into specific task-based courseware or intervention development. It seems like a trivial difference, but it's key if you're trying to get a sense of the amount of effort required to get the information you need regarding a job. The job analysis in many cases can provide key information to get products to your clients.

Job analysis at the speed of reality

When I had been at Dell about three months in early 1996, I had a dose of reality smack me like a two-by-four across my face. I was asked to do some job analyses for inside sales representatives. I was really excited because I'd been using a three-day tabletop job analysis method when I worked at Lockheed Martin that seemed speedy at the time. My manager asked me what resources I needed to make this happen. I said, speaking with great confidence, "I just need four to six exemplar inside sales reps and a couple of their managers for three days." I was shocked when she laughed out loud. "You think you can have sales reps for three days? You'll be lucky if you can get them for three hours." That statement was a key inflection point in my professional training life. I had to reinvent the job analysis process I'd used to work within the business parameters of Dell. So, I started reengineering the process to make it work within three hours. That's where the "speed of reality" part comes into play. JASR is truly in tune with Digital Beat, because people expect things quicker and at the appropriate level of detail.

The JASR way

The JASR method has the following key benefits:

- A validated task list can be created in two to three hours for most positions.
- Level of detail is similar to detail obtained from three-day analyses. I know this because I compared task lists from the longer sessions with JASR sessions and they were equivalent in detail, structure, and format.
- A small number of resources is required, including four to six exemplars for a position at mid-level and a senior manager.
- Because exemplars and managers are engaged in the session at the same time, validation occurs in real time.
- Derivative products can start to be developed as soon as the JASR session is completed.
- The process is easy to facilitate with appropriate process review and practice. You need a facilitator and a recorder. The recorder captures all of the proceedings in a task list template on a portable for real-time processing.

How to conduct JASR

Here are the major steps of the JASR process. Those with an exclamation are the most important.

1. Greet participants, and conduct introductions. It's important to arrive ahead of time at the room where you'll conduct the session, to ensure that the room is set up properly and you can greet participants as they arrive. If you're using virtual collaboration tools to conduct the session, it's important to log in ahead of time so you're ready to start. Introductions should be brief.

2. Briefly explain the JASR process and participant roles. One reason some traditional job analysis methods take so long is that an inordinate amount of time is spent "training" the participants about training and analysis terminology that, frankly, they don't care about. Use participants' time to gather job information, not to try to make them experts in training fundamentals. Explain the process and their roles. You're a facilitator and process expert. They're content experts, and you are going to ask questions to gather this information from them.

3. Determine the scope of the job to be analyzed. For this key step, I recommend spending the necessary time to nail it in 10 to 15 minutes or less. This step is critical because you want to make sure you're conducting an analysis on the right job scope. If it's too broad, you could analyze multiple jobs and not be able to complete the work. If it's too shallow, you might not have complete information for the job you're trying to analyze. Additionally, you want to get agreement on what the job is called.

4. Identify the functional or duty areas. Use flipchart paper to capture the key "duty areas" associated with the job. Most positions have an "administrative" duty area that includes tasks such as, "Complete timecards" or "Make travel arrangements." This duty area is a good one to use as an example. Once you've shared this, have participants write on paper at their tables what they think the other duty areas are for their jobs. You can use a round-robin technique to ask questions around the table. Capture participants' response on a piece of flipchart paper. The key here is that participants should scratch from their lists items that have already been mentioned. That shortens the process and ensures that all participants have a chance to take part. At the end of this step, work with the group to synthesize the list. Most jobs have approximately six to 12 duty areas.

5. Identify tasks within each duty area. Write one of the duty areas on a flipchart. Ask the group to identify task statements associated with that duty

area. All that participants need to know about task statements is that they should include solid action verbs and an object of the verb, at a minimum. Your role is to help ensure that they're creating task statements in present tense, with solid action verbs, that represent measurable activities. You'll help the group consolidate the tasks in each duty area. Each duty area should have at least three task statements and up to about 12, although there can be more in some cases.

6. Print the task list and have it signed by the group. One of the great things about this approach is that you can get the task list signed off at the end of the session and you can share it with participants. That helps ensure a sense of ownership around the task list and subsequent training interventions.

For more detail, feel free to refer to my book, *Job Analysis at the Speed of Reality* (ASTD, 1999).

The beat goes on

I have used JASR to conduct job analysis with participants in multiple locations simultaneously. I've used WebEx, but you can use any virtual collaboration tool that allows you to share applications or whiteboards—such as Interwise or Centra. The process is the same except that the recorder is using either a shared version of the template in a word-processing application or a virtual whiteboard to capture responses from participants. I highly recommend creating a virtual seating chart to facilitate the questioning process with participants.

What training fundamentals activities can you leverage using technology?

Your Input

To suggest new technologies you'd like covered, contact Darin Hartley at dhartley@intrepidls.com.