

By Jim Fox and Bruce Lawson, Fox Lawson & Associates, LLC

Question: In your last column, you talked about how to get a 70 percent match between a job in the labor market and a job in our organization. However, we are a small organization, and some of our jobs have some rather unique combination of duties that are not typical in other organizations. How do we match those jobs or figure out how much to pay the people who hold them? One of our employees thinks we should price each part separately, add up the two numbers, and pay the person for doing two jobs. How do I tell this employee that there is a more logical way, assuming that there is?

CompDoctor: Of course there is a more logical way. Our guess, though, is that your employee will not like the approach, since it means getting paid for one job and not two—unless you are working this person 16 hours a day, in which case you may actually want to pay him or her for doing two jobs.

Actually, your situation is not all that unique. We see similar situations in many organizations. Our all-time favorite combination job was “Saudi Student Advisor/Bull Semen Collector” in an Ag school at a major western university. We could not have made that one up if we had tried, and there really was a logical reason for that combination. But we won’t go into that here.

The real issue is that you need to know what to do to figure out what the combination job your employee holds is worth since neither part of the job represents 70 percent of the total (see the January 2007 CompDoctor column). Rather, it is more like a 50-50 mix.

The first question that we ask clients when we see mixed jobs is, “Does the employee work under a single employment contract for the whole job, or is the employee really employed in two one-half-time/part-time jobs?” This is significant because in the latter situation, the employee could be paid separately for each part-time job. In the former scenario, the employee clearly

has one job and should be paid one salary or hourly rate. For example, in some colleges, some coaches are hired on a part-time contract but are then given another job as groundskeepers or athletic department staffers. The coach reports to a different supervisor/manager than the groundskeeper and the positions are technically two part- or half-time jobs. Consequently, if the employee is terminated as a coach, he or she would still have a part-time job as a groundskeeper. If a person is hired under a single contract and later terminated from one part of the job, however, that person is also terminated from the other job.

If it is two separate jobs, then the matching would be simpler, and the process we outlined in our last column could be used. But where there is an eclectic mix of duties, we have to get a bit more creative. In this case, you can do a couple of things. The first option would simply be to look for duties that have the highest requirements or involve the highest level work. For example, if you have a doctor who is required to perform brain surgery, even though the doctor does that just five to 10 percent of the time and spends the rest of his or her time doing administrative work, you could (and probably should) recognize that you need a brain surgeon, so that is what you match the job to (unless you really want an administrative physician doing brain surgery, at which point your risk manager would want to have a conversation with you).

The other approach would be to identify the market value of each component of the job and then take the salary for the highest valued component, since you obviously need someone with those skills doing that job. This second approach basically answers the question of which skills you would need to replace if the employee left.

A third approach would be to average or blend the two rates for the component responsibilities of the combination job. This sounds reasonable, but it would result in you underpaying for the skills you really need, and that would result in your not being able to hire the right kind of person for the job.

One of the most common areas where we see jobs being blended is in cities where the city clerk may also be assigned other duties, ranging from finance director to personnel director and assistant city manager. In our opinion, this is probably the easiest situation to deal with because it is fairly clear which part of the job has the highest market value (see the second option above). In these cases, we normally recommend that the value be tied to the highest level component of the job if that is really what you are expecting the employee to do and it is not a second job in name only.

While it will be difficult, if not impossible to get a 70 percent match for the whole job, you should easily be able to get a 70 percent match for the portion of the job that has the highest value.

There is one other scenario that we have seen in rare situations. That is a job that was created for a particular individual with a truly unique set of skills (e.g., someone who is both a licensed attorney and a licensed medical doctor), and you need someone who can use both sets of skills. In those rare cases, you may very well have to pay a premium above the highest valued individual skill set in order to recognize the unique combination.

Hopefully, this will help you defuse the argument that your employee is using to get you to pay them two salaries to perform one job, even if it is a bit unique.

The CompDoctor is the team of Jim Fox and Bruce Lawson of Fox Lawson & Associates LLC, a compensation and human resources consulting firm that specializes in assisting governments in fixing their compensation and classification systems. They are seriously irreverent about their specialty. You may find them on the Web at www.foxlawson.com. If you have a question, you would like to have them answer, please write to them at jfox@foxlawson.com or blawson@foxlawson.com. They will try to include it in the next issue of CompDoctor.

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