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Question: We are about to compare our jobs to the market, but we have a disagreement about how to do this. Some members of our organization say that our jobs are so unique that there aren't any comparisons. Others say that other organizations have similar jobs, so there must be good data. Are there any guidelines that we can use that will resolve our disagreement?

CompDoctor: Of course there are guidelines, and they are quite simple—at least on paper. The actual application of these guidelines, however, is another matter.

Certainly, there is some truth to the fact that your jobs are unique. In fact, you could make the case that no two jobs are alike from organization to organization. But that does not mean that you can't compare them to the market to obtain some idea of how yours stack up. The trick is to identify the essential responsibilities of your jobs and then compare them to other jobs that have similar essential responsibilities. This is easy enough to say, but what does doing it actually entail? Read on.

First, it is essential to understand what a job is and what it is not by consulting or creating its official description. A job description is a summary of the most important features of a job. It should describe and focus on the job itself and not on any specific individual who might fill the job. Important features included on a job description are

- The general nature of the work and the duties and responsibilities of the person performing the job.
- The level of the work performed and the job's SERWC (i.e., skills, efforts, responsibilities, and working conditions).
- The specifications for the job, as well as any employee characteristics required for competent performance of the job.

A job is a combination of positions that describe the general nature and level of work performance. Every person (and every vacancy) is a position, but a single job description can pertain to more than one position. In fact, there should be fewer job descriptions than there are positions. Thus, one of the first things to

recognize when comparing jobs in your organization with those in another organization is that you will be matching jobs in the market and not positions, since job descriptions are not position descriptions. This can be very confusing to individuals who are not in the HR field, and sometimes even to people who have been trained in human resources. Nearly everyone uses the terms "position" and "job" interchange-

Class Summary

Incumbents are responsible for performing professional-level work and for managing the daily financial activities of a department. Incumbents are required to supervise professional and support staff.

Typical Class Essential Duties

(These duties are a representative sample; position assignments may vary.)

| | Frequency |
|---|--------------------|
| 1. Supervises staff, to include prioritizing and assigning work, conducting performance evaluations, ensuring staff are trained, ensuring that employees follow policies and procedures, maintaining a healthy and safe working environment, and making hiring, termination and disciplinary recommendations. | Daily—20% |
| 2. Manages and coordinates fiscal matters for assigned department. | Daily—20% |
| 3. Plans, develops, coordinates and administers departmental operating, capital and/or grant budgets. | Daily—20% |
| 4. Analyzes and provides financial data and special reports. | Daily—15% |
| 5. Investigates and resolves complex contract, payables, receivables, funding and/or other related issues. | Daily—10% |
| 6. Participates in special projects; participates in/on a variety of meetings, committees and/or training sessions. | Daily—5% |
| 7. Maintains departmental project files, which include contracts, payment records and other related information. | Daily—5% |
| 8. Serves as a liaison with information technology in identifying and implementing information management technologies. | Daily—5% |
| 9. Performs other duties of a similar nature or level. | As Required |

Training and Experience

Positions in this class typically require

Bachelor's degree in accounting, finance, business administration or a closely related field and five years of progressively professional-level accounting experience; or, an equivalent combination of education and experience sufficient to successfully perform the essential duties of the job, such as those listed above.

Licensing Requirements

Some positions may require

- Certification as a government financial manager.

ably. Some people even define a job in the same way we have defined a position, and vice versa. It can all get very confusing, and non-HR types can have trouble seeing the differences, especially when it comes to their own position.

What you need to keep in mind, however, is that when people say that no two jobs are alike, what they really mean is that there are no two positions that are alike. You should not be comparing positions;

you should be comparing jobs. To make matters even more complicated, if there is only one person in a job, how can you separate the person from the job? Again, read on.

If you are comparing jobs, how do you go about ensuring you have a valid comparison? WorldatWork, the professional association for compensation and benefits professionals, states that jobs can be compared when 70 percent or more

of their job descriptions are similar. How does that help? Well, here is the more specific guidance.

In our experience, most jobs can be defined by two or three essential and critical responsibilities. We know everyone says that jobs should be described by eight to 10 essential functions. We don't disagree, but, again, in our experience, you can boil this all down to about three. Basically, if these essential three aren't done, then there is little reason for the job to exist. How this works is that if you can match the essential three responsibilities identified in two separate job descriptions, you will have matched about 70 percent of the job. An example may help make this clearer.

The sidebar presents a typical job description for a business manager. This was selected from our inventory of actual job descriptions used by one of our clients; it was not changed for this example. The title is fairly generic, so you need to look at the job responsibilities. (You should never match just on the title because, as the old saying goes, "You can't judge a book by its cover.")

Now, read the summary of the job description and then read the first three essential duties. This job requires that the job do the following things:

- Manage a department of people.
- Manage the financial affairs of an assigned department.
- Plan, monitor and manage budgets.

This encompasses 60 percent of the time that the incumbent spends on the job, so these three tasks define the essential responsibilities of the job. While listing the other duties clarifies some tasks that are performed, it is supporting information rather than the primary description of this job. If you can match these three responsibilities to three listed as essential for a job in another organization or an industry survey, you will have found a comparable job.

Now I can hear you all saying that if that is all you match, you could be way off in the market. Maybe, maybe not. But here

Knowledge

Position requirements at entry

Knowledge of managerial principles; budgetary principles; project management principles; applicable laws, rules and regulations pertaining to program requirements; accounting and government contracts; public administration principles; fiscal management principles; governmental accounting principles; and generally accepted accounting principles (GAAP).

Skills

Position requirements at entry

- Prioritizing and assigning work
- Operating a computer and applicable software
- Applying laws, rules and regulations
- Administering operating and capital improvement budgets
- Conducting research
- Managing projects
- Managing operations, policies, procedures and practices
- Conducting research
- Analyzing, interpreting and preparing financial documents
- Performing mathematical calculations
- Managing the fiscal activities in an assigned area
- Developing and implementing goals, objectives, policies and procedures
- Reading, comprehending, and reviewing financial information
- Making program decisions based on financial considerations

Communication and interpersonal skills as applicable to interaction with coworkers, supervisor, the general public, etc. sufficient to exchange or convey information and to receive work direction

Physical Requirements

Positions in this class typically require fingering, grasping, talking, hearing, seeing and repetitive motions.

Sedentary work: Exerting up to 10 pounds of force occasionally, and/or a negligible amount of force frequently or constantly to lift, carry, push, pull or otherwise move objects, including the human body. Sedentary work involves sitting most of the time. Jobs are sedentary if walking and standing are required only occasionally and all other sedentary criteria are met.

Incumbents may be subjected to travel.

Note

The above job description is intended to represent only the key areas of responsibilities; specific position assignments will vary depending on the business needs of the department.

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is the thing that you have going for you. If the three responsibilities define the essential characteristics of the job, look at all the other data that you have at your disposal to make the match even better.


So how about looking at the minimum qualifications? Does the job you are matching in the market require a bachelor's of arts degree? If the answer to that question is yes, then you have one more matching characteristic. If the answer is no, then maybe your job is a bit stronger than the one in the market. That is good to know when you look at the salary data. How about certification as a government financial manager? Yes? Then, once again, you have another piece of evidence that the jobs are similar. No? Then, again, maybe yours is stronger than the ones in the market.

And so the process goes. While it may sound like 70 percent is a high number, it is easily achievable.

Two final notes:

- Don't include secondary responsibilities as part of your matching criteria. Secondary responsibilities are those that do not consume more than about 10 percent of the time spent doing the job. Thus, you would not throw out a match because a job description doesn't include "serves as a liaison with information technology in identifying and implementing information management technologies" because that responsibility does not constitute the essence of the job.
- Recognize that when you collect market data, you are collecting data about a range of jobs—some of which match very well, and some of which match less well. Some of the jobs are occupied by employees who have been in the job for a long time, and some are occupied by individuals who have just been hired. Some of the job holders are excellent performers, and some are struggling to meet stan-

dards. This means that the salaries that you get are going to reflect this variety of information. The information you collect will simply be an estimate of the market. It gives you guidance regarding what you are paying and a benchmark against which to make reasonable decisions. What you do with the information is entirely your decision.

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 installment of Comp Doctor™. —

IPMA-HR Staffers Promoted

Staff members Jessica Allen, Tina Ott Chiappetta and Elizabeth Brown Kirkland were recently promoted to serve as IPMA-HR's director of membership services, senior director of government affairs and communications and director of publications, respectively.

Allen, who joined the IPMA-HR staff in March 2006 as director of association services, earned a bachelor's degree in sociology from McDaniel College in Westminster, Md. Prior to her move to IPMA-HR, she served as the director of meetings and membership at another association in Alexandria. Allen brings extensive experience in membership recruitment and retention, meeting planning, committee work, certification/training program development and marketing campaigns for various programs and services. In her new role as director of membership services, she leads the membership recruitment and retention program, serves as the primary liaison for the regions and chapters and manages the certification program.

Chiappetta, who is licensed to practice law in Washington, D.C., Virginia and New York, has worked for IPMA-HR for 11 years, having joined the association as manager of government affairs. A year after joining the association, she was promoted to director of government affairs. Now, as senior director of government affairs and communications, Chiappetta oversees the communications function of the association in addition to her government relations and research responsibilities.

Kirkland joined the staff of IPMA-HR in March 2005 as publications manager. She earned a bachelor's degree in journalism in 1998 from The University of Mississippi, and has written professionally since 1996 as an intern and staff member of her college newspaper, The Daily Mississippian, as a staff writer for Oxford Publishing in Oxford, Miss., and as a full-time writer for a weekly community newspaper and a statewide business journal. Kirkland, who has freelanced for various publications throughout the United States, and has experience writing grant proposals and press releases for nonprofit and governmental organizations, will, in her new position at IPMA-HR, continue to head up IPMA-HR's magazine, *HR News*, as well as the association's quarterly scholarly journal, *Public Personnel Management*. She also handles other functions that relate to the publications of IPMA-HR. —