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9.0 OBJECTIVES

After going through the Unit you should be able to:

- understand the significance of Task Analysis as a **potential** HRD tool,
- do Task Analysis of key jobs, and
- use Task Analysis for improving performance of individual employees and firms.

9.1 INTRODUCTION

Earlier in this Block you have read about job analysis and evaluation. Job is a broad term as a job constitutes many tasks. The job analysis process is becoming more and more difficult with the changes and complex nature of modern day jobs. Though job analysis is popular in consideration for HR planning, more and more organisations are opting for task analysis to find ways of delineating tasks, performance appraisal and employee motivation. Hence, they are using task analysis for HRD.

In this Unit you will learn about the uses of task analysis in HRD. Both its traditional forms (British and American) and proposed guidelines for successful task analysis, combining the two traditional models have been dealt with in the Unit.

9.2 WHAT IS TASK ANALYSIS?

The traditional approach to task analysis is characterized by two models: the British model and the American model. **The British model has emphasized analysis in terms of specific activities for which the jobholder is held responsible whereas the American model has included an emphasis on the competencies needed for the job.** With both models the analysis is usually carried out by management with the help of experts. The two models are quite similar in many respects. Both have been found to be useful in analysing semi-skilled and skilled work.

It is becoming obvious, however that the traditional approach to task analysis is not suitable for the increasingly complex reality of organisational work. **In** particular, this approach is inadequate when it is applied to:

- Managing jobs that are more complex than those previously subjected to analysis,
- Jobs in public systems that are characterised by complex responsibilities, and

- Group or team tasks, which are increasingly emerging as a way of **organising** work in industries.

What is needed in order to address the more complex jobs that characterise today's organisations is a different approach to task analysis.

Before we go **any** further, one must get a comprehensive understanding of a few definitions to understand task analysis better. According to **Stephen P. Robbins**:

- **An Activity or an Element:** A Job element is the **smallest** unit into which work can be divided.
- **A task** is a distinct set of work activity carried out for a distinct purpose. For example, room rent costing is a task of front office executive.
- **A duty** is number of tasks. For example, front office executive's duties include meeting and welcoming the client and explaining the features of the hotel and its surroundings.
- **A position** refers to one or more duties performed by one person in an organisation. There are at least as many positions as there are workers in the organisation, vacancies may create more positions than employees.
- **A job** is a type of position within an organisation. For example, a hotel may employ a dozen front office executives, then there are a dozen positions but just one front office executive job.

Task analysis can be defined as the process of identifying the tasks of a particular job in a particular organisational context by analysing activities, establishing performance criteria, determining required competencies, and analyzing any discrepancies uncovered by this process:

This definition, which is based on the concept of task suggested by the **Tavistock School**, indicates the following guidelines for successful task analysis:

- 1) Analysis should be under taken only after developing an understanding of a particular organisational context involved.
- 2) The job, should be broken down into specific activities performed and expected to be performed by the jobholder or incumbent.
- 3) The activities should be grouped into tasks. A “**task**” is a set of related activities – a function that makes a distinct contribution to organisational goals.
- 4) Performance criteria and their indicators should be established.
- 5) The competencies required for effective **performance** of each task should be identified.
- 6) The discrepancies between perceived and actual performance and between importance attributed and importance reflected in time spent **should** be identified.

9.3 USES OF TASK ANALYSIS

The type of **Task Analysis** suggested here may be useful to the organisation and the individual employees in several ways:

- 1) **Selection and placement:** Better recruitment and selection devices can be prepared on the basis of a task analysis (especially competency analysis). Competency analysis can also help an organisation to place people in jobs in which they can be more effective (matching the **role/job** with people).

- 2) Work planning, including the following:
 - a) Setting individual tasks for a specific period
 - b) Helping a job incumbent to decide priorities of task
 - c) Minimising overlap between jobs
 - d) **Identifying** neglected tasks in a work unit
 - e) Planning delegation
 - f) Job enrichment
- 3) Performance appraisal, including:
 - a) Negotiated tasks and activities to be performed
 - b) Evaluation (by self and the supervisor) of the **quality/quantity** standards of task performance (both process and outcomes effectiveness)
 - c) Analysis of factors helping and hindering task performances
- 4) Potential appraisal, including preparation of a system on the basis of the competency analysis, and actual **potential appraisal** work.
- 5) Employee development, including:
 - a) Feedback on strength and weaknesses
 - b) Performance counselling
 - c) Training
- 6) **Team** building, especially:
 - a) Better understanding of each other
 - b) Locating areas of task conflicts and dealing with them
 - c) Building linkages and mutuality between jobs

9.4 CONTEXTUAL ANALYSIS

On the basis of the guidelines stated above, we can say that task analysis involves the following steps:

- 1) Contextual analysis,
- 2) Activity analysis,
- 3) Task delineation,
- 4) Competency analysis,
- 5) Performance analysis, and
- 6) Discrepancy analysis.

It is essential to know the mission, orientation, and goals of the organisation of which the job is a part. An understanding of the organisational context also helps in clarifying the general **orientation** of the job. For example, the mission of a hotel may be defined as providing effective hospitality services and related support to the guests wishing to use the hotel. The term "related support" may be an important dimension of the mission of the **hotel** and it may imply that the jobs of the managers and other staffers also need to include "psychological support" as a task. If task analysis were undertaken in this situation without the development of this understanding, the observers may not "see" activities involving psychological support.

The mission of a hotel may be defined as providing comfortable accommodation and customer care to the guests wishing to stay at the hotel. The "Customer care" term may be an important dimension of the mission of the hotel as it may imply that the job of the hotel staff includes understanding the needs of each guest and make them feel comfortable and relaxed, as a task. If task analysis were taken in this situation without development of this understanding, the observers may not "see" activities involving customer care.

Those who undertake task analysis must first develop an understanding of the organisation's mission, which is the direction or combination of directions in which the organisation is moving. The mission includes such elements as a definition of the organisation's basic business how it markets its products or services and to whom; and its intentions with regard to profitability, growth, liquidity, values, treatment of employees and customers, and its stature in its field. Sometimes an organisation's mission exists in written and published form. **Regardless of whether a formal mission statement exists, those responsible for task analysis should summarize the mission in a one-sentence statement and should keep this statement handy throughout the process of task analysis.**

The organisation's broad goals or objectives also must be identified. These goals may or may not be a part of the mission statement. A sampling of employees may be asked to state these goals, and then these various statements may be compared with any goal statement that exists in formal documents. This exercise is also helpful in terms of testing whether the employees know the organisation's formally stated goals or whether the goals have changed since they were originally stated in documents.

The last phase of contextual analysis, an optional one, is to identify the main tasks of the organisation. Again, groups of employees may be asked to identify the tasks that pertain to each goal and to identify the jobs mainly responsible for these tasks. These employee statements then may be compiled and discussed. Such an exercise is also useful to analyse employee statements. This exercise also helps in clarifying goals and tasks and in increasing employee's commitment to them.

9.5 ACTIVITY ANALYSIS

The second step is activity analysis. The successful completion of this step is dependent on a clear understanding of the qualities of an activity. An activity has three characteristics:

- 1) **It is observable.** For example, planning is not regarded as an activity because it cannot be observed where as serving a guest is an observable activity.
- 2) **It is descriptive.** The behaviour concerned must be capable of being stated specifically in terms that describe rather than evaluate or interpret. For example, if a behaviour on the part of a nurse is recorded as taking a patient's temperature, this behaviour qualifies as an activity; however, if the same behaviour were recorded as doing diagnosis, this phrase would be an interpretation of what had occurred and would not qualify as an activity.
- 3) **It is objective.** An activity, when observed by more than one person, should be capable of being recorded in written form in the same way by all observers. This is not to say that all observers will record all activities in the same way, but that anyone reading the written record of all observers' descriptions of an activity would interpret these descriptions to be of the same activity.

In addition, a distinction should be made between an activity and a sub-activity. An activity is a behaviour undertaken to accomplish a task, while a sub-activity is one of a set of behaviours undertaken to complete an activity. For example, when a front office employee makes an entry in a guest register he or she is performing an activity whose sub-activity might include taking the ledger from the shelf, opening the ledger, lifting a pen, and so forth.

Source of information about activities

There are three main contributors of information for activity analysis: (1) **the job incumbent**, (2) **those who interact with the job incumbent** (called "role-set members"), and (3) **outside experts**. The role-set members include the incumbent's supervisor, subordinates, colleagues, and in some cases others who interact with the incumbent (for example, minor passenger travelling alone and his or her family or relatives in the case of air hostess. as job incumbent). The outside experts may be task analysts, educators, specialists, in the field, or the organisation's top management. These three sets of contributors can produce a great deal of usable information based on their observations, their reports of the activities that the job incumbent actually completes, and their assessments of activities that the job incumbent is or should be expected to complete.

Collecting information on activities

Several methods can be used to prepare a comprehensive list of activities. The most commonly used methods are interviews, diaries; logbooks, and questionnaires.

- 1) **Interview:** The interview is the most widely used and useful method of collecting information for activity analysis. Generally the respondent is simply asked to report observations and expectations. Sometimes, however, it may be useful to ask specifically what the job incumbent did on a particular day. Because respondents tend to give general answers, it is necessary to probe in an interview so that actual activities are revealed. For example, when interviewed about what an airhostess does, a role-set member might say, "Well, she takes **care** of passengers. It then becomes necessary to ask how the airhostess takes care of passengers; what she actually does. For this reason interviews require patience on the part of the interviewer. After questioning the respondent becomes "educated" about the concept of an activity, and his or her answers become more pertinent and require less intervention from the interviewer.
- 2) **Logbooks:** A logbook is a record that someone else keeps while observing a job incumbent. Again, it may be useful to discuss the potential contents of the log with the person keeping it. Providing a combination of instructions and examples may be helpful in this regard.
- 3) **Questionnaire:** A questionnaire may be devised and administered to the job incumbent, the role-set members, **and/** or outside experts.

The Product

After one or more of the suggested methods has been used for activity analysis the product will be a long list of activities. At this point the list is comprehensive and has not been subjected to any kind of sorting; it includes a number of essentially redundant items as well as both highly specific and less-specific items.

You may prepare as many such lists for various job incumbents in hospitality sector.

9.5 TASK DELINEATION

After activity analysis has been completed, the next step is to **group the activities into tasks and to name these tasks**. This process, known as **task delineation**, involves **subjective decision-making and should be undertaken only by people who know and understand the job**.

There is no set rule regarding the number of tasks to be delineated. However, they should not be so few that one cannot review them and form a clear picture of a job. Similarly, there should not be so many that the differences among the activities are not readily apparent and that their numbers become cumbersome for performance appraisal and other purposes.

The tasks should be balanced in terms of the number of activities each comprises. If one task has too many activities, it needs to be divided into two or more tasks. For example, when delineating a tour executive's tasks one should not call "handling tours" a task because too many activities are covered by this term. Instead, handling tours should be broken down into requiring special skills (such as tour costing), tour activities requiring few skills (such as getting the reconfirmation of hotel booking) and customer support. After the tasks have been delineated, it is a good idea to rate the importance of each to the job and to assess the percentage of time spent by the job incumbent on each.

9.6 COMPETENCY ANALYSIS

A job incumbent needs different types and levels of competencies in order to perform job tasks well. Competency analysis helps in identifying the competencies that are necessary for the tasks that have been delineated.

Competencies can be divided into five main types; knowledge, skills, abilities, orientation, and experience. Of these five types, orientation may require some explanation. **Orientation is a general attitude reflecting the values of the jobholder.** For example, in the case of a front office assistant, respect for the guest may be deemed to be an important orientation. Following is an example of an orientation description.

Orientation Description for the Position of District Health Officer

With the increasing government emphasis on community participation and collaborative work in matters concerning health, the district health manager needs to see the community and its various health agencies as resources. He or she needs to respect and be willing to use community traditions and customs that **promote** good health. In addition, the district health manager should be proactive in identifying and seeking community resources that can be harnessed for promoting health programmes. He or she should be oriented towards innovation and experimentation in solving problems and should encourage the doctors and other staff members in the district health clinics and hospitals to be similarly oriented. He or she needs to be dedicated to providing strong, creative leadership for subordinates, including those on staff at the district health clinics and hospitals. Finally, the district health **officer** should be willing to learn and experiment in this position.

Activity: Give Orientation Description for hotel industry jobholders.

Another process that may be completed is the identifying of the job incumbent's present level of each identified competency. A five-point scale is recommended for this purpose. The same group that establishes competencies – with the possible exclusion of the job incumbent, depending on his or her level of insight – may make this assessment.

9.7 PERFORMANCE ANALYSIS

The main purpose of performance analysis is to evaluate the impact of a job – how effective it is being done or has been done. This step consists of assessing how well the job incumbent has performed the tasks for which he or she **is** responsible.

The effectiveness of a task can be measured in **terms** of its outcome, or the end result, as well as in terms of its process, or how it is performed. **Hard** data may be gathered indicating both kinds of effectiveness. For example, one can evaluate the task of taking customer orders with regard to the number of orders taken (outcome) as well as with regard to the time spent on the task or the number of mistakes made (process).

9.8 DISCREPANCY ANALYSIS

Discrepancy analysis is the identification of any discrepancies that become obvious as a result of the previous five steps. For example, discrepancies may exist between activities reported by the job incumbent and those reported by the role-set numbers, between activities reported and those observed or expected, between the importance of a task and the time spent completing it, between needed competencies and existing competencies, and so on. These gaps may indicate a need for certain remedial measures, such as redefining the role, training, additional work planning, delegating, increased monitoring, or counselling.

It is a good idea to check periodically for discrepancies between the job definition as reflected in the delineated tasks and actual job performance. Information about performance can be obtained by any one or a combination of the following methods:

- The job incumbent may monitor the time spent on each activity;
- The role-set members may analyse the importance attributed to various tasks versus the time spent on them; **and/or**
- Trained observers may observe the job incumbent for a few days.

Discrepancies between desired activities or tasks and actual performance may then be noted and acted on accordingly.

9.9 TASK ANALYSIS AS A SUPERVISORY TOOL

Task analysis, as briefly described in this Unit, can also be used as a supervisory tool to improve the functioning of an organisation. Some uses of Task Analysis have already been suggested. A few are focused below:

- 1) **Designing training:** Discrepancy analysis of the required competencies and the present level of these competencies in the employees concerned will help in identifying training needs, and then designing a training strategy, or at least training programmes to upgrade the competencies which seem to be at a lower level.

Information about the importance of the various tasks may also help in designing training programmes for high priority task. Similarly, the discrepancy between the importance of a task and the time spent on it may give some useful information. One reason for not spending enough time on a task may be lack of competency required to do the task. Such information may help in indicating the training.

- 2) **Performance monitoring:** A performance monitoring system can be developed based on the indicators of process and outcomes effectiveness for the various tasks. Some of these indicators can be used in designing a format or a system of meetings for purposes of performance monitoring.
- 3) **Work planning:** Analysis of the discrepancy between expected and reported activities, or importance of the tasks and time spent on them, may indicate the need of work planning, including delegation and redistribution of work among various jobs in a work unit. The concerned employees may work in a group with the supervisor in redistribution of work among various jobs in a work unit. The concerned employees may also work in a group with the supervisor in redistribution of tasks, so that each employee can maximise his/her contribution to the organisational goals.

Check Your Progress

- 1) What do you understand by Task Analysis?

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2) Discuss Activity Analysis.

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3) Explain why Task Analysis is seen as a Supervisory Tool.

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9.10 LET US SUM UP

In this Unit, you have read about Task Analysis and proposed guidelines for successful task analysis. It is very important to understand the difference between the three – **activity**, the smallest unit into which work can be divided, also it is an observable action often bound by time; **task**, the distinct set of work activity carried out for a distinct purpose; and **job** the type of position within an organisation.

The analysis can be said to involve the following steps. – Contextual Analysis, Performance Analysis and Discrepancy Analysis. Task Analysis can also be used as a supervisory tool to improve functioning of the employees as training modules can be designed keeping the various tasks in mind. Performance of the employees can be **better** monitored and also work planning can be done keeping in mind the various tasks to be completed.

9.11 CLUES TO ANSWERS

Check Your Progress

- 1) Task Analysis can be defined as the process of identifying the tasks of a particular job in a particular organisational context by analysing any discrepancies uncovered by this process. Read **Sec. 9.2** and answer.
- 2) Activity analysis is based on information. These are three main contributions of information for activity analysis. And these are several methods of collecting information from the contributors. Read **Sec. 9.4** and answer in **detail**.
- 3) Task analysis can help supervisors in designing training programmes, for performance appraisal and also for planning for work. Read **Sec. 9.9** and expand the above answer.