Laying the foundation for safe placement and fitness for work: a practical application of a system-wide approach to job analysis in a major health organisation.

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1. Introduction

SA Health faces several challenges to employing and maintaining a workforce that is fit for work. With 38,000 employees, the public health sector is the largest and most complex government organisation in South Australia. With work related musculoskeletal and psychological injuries on the rise, the importance of understanding the physical and psychological demands imposed on workers is paramount. In the aim for a healthy and resilient workforce SA Health undertook to develop a task analysis management system that would deliver consistent but multi purposed information that was relevant across the complex and varied workforce.

1.1 Practice Innovation

Job analysis is used widely across organisations and serves as the foundation for a range of human resource activities and includes the study of work activity and worker attributes (Morgeson & Dierdorff, 2011). The job analysis method and descriptors used can vary considerably depending on the intended purpose. To enable the promotion of fitness for work at the point of recruitment and ongoing employment; provide a mechanism to address the ageing workforce and to streamline injury management processes WorkFit Services developed a system wide approach to job analysis including both the physical and psychological components of work.

1.2 Sources of Information

The development of the SA Health Job Analysis Management System has provided a consistent approach to analysing the psychological and physical demands involved in tasks for all roles in the organisation. This information will underpin SA Health’s processes for employability, ongoing capacity and management of work and non-work related injury and illness.

The system has provided an efficient method to carry out job analysis without the need for wide surveying of employees, reducing duplication of and increasing the access and use of such valuable information. Task analysis methods include direct observation and worker and manager interviews by an occupational physiotherapist.

The parameters, interview questions and rating scales for physical and psychological work demands were informed by current job and task analysis literature and review of existing functional and psychological capacity evaluation and ergonomic assessment tools. The Content Model and Classification recommendations for the SSA Occupational Information System (2009) were also referenced.

441 existing job analyses previously conducted for jobs within SA Health were reviewed for task description and demand information, a process which revealed a number challenges to the success of this undertaking. Many questions were raised and explored during the course of the project:

- How do we accurately quantify physical demands when patient sizes, shapes and weight vary significantly?
- How do we account for the variability in the method used to assist patients in everyday care?
- How do we account for unpredictable situations that are faced by our workforce?

1.3 Findings

The size, complexity and variability of jobs within SA Health presented many challenges to developing a single system wide approach to job analysis. This was particularly evident in the review of existing job analyses of like jobs in different locations. There was a large degree of inconsistency in tasks description
and analysis of demands. Task descriptions were often too broad and did not allow sufficient information for use for effective return to work planning.

Very few job analyses included the assessment of psychological demands, and where this was described the information was minimal. Gaps were identified in the literature for a reliable method to analyse and rate the psychological components of specific job roles without relying on the workers perception of their role.

Work environments were highly variable and many tasks were unpredictable, particularly where patient handling was involved. Assumptions needed to be included within a task analysis description to account for the variability. Patient related tasks were described based on the level of assistance required by the patient-a clear distinction from the level of effort supplied by the worker.

1.4 Discussion
The demands of work activity must be presented in way to allow a consistent and reliable match to an assessment of worker attributes. There is a fine balance between the level of specificity required for a single approach to job analysis for a large and highly complex organisation in order to meet each proposed purpose.

Task descriptions must be specific enough to facilitate or develop a return to work strategy, yet broad enough to encompass the subtle variations across multiple like roles. Methods to ensure a consistent approach between job analysts will be explored.

The implementation and evaluation of the system wide Job Analysis Management system will be discussed.

References