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CAREER PATH DESCRIPTIONS

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Abstract

Before the Career Path system, jobs were classified according to grades with general statutory definitions, guided by the "Job Catalogue" which defined 6 evaluation criteria with example illustrations in the form of "typical" job descriptions. Career Paths were given concise statutory definitions necessitating a method of description and evaluation adapted to their new wider-band salary concept. Evaluations were derived from the same 6 criteria but the typical descriptions became unusable. In 1999, a sub-group of the Standing Concertation Committee proposed a new guide for describing Career Paths, adapted to their wider career concept by expanding the 6 evaluation criteria into 9. For each criterion several levels were established tracing the expected evolution of job level profiles and personal competencies over their longer salary ranges. While providing more transparency to supervisors and staff, the Guide's official use would be by services responsible for vacancy notices, Career Path evaluations and related decisions as well as external salary and career comparisons.

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1 INTRODUCTION

The issue of careers and job evaluation is a highly sensitive one and has always attracted very much attention from the personnel. The CERN Management has tried to ensure an equitable approach to all staff guaranteeing fair treatment and objectivity in assessing the levels of work. Efforts have been made to refine CERN's job evaluation system recognizing the fact that it is a key management tool. Its importance lies in the fact that, if poorly administered, it could lead to deception and loss of job satisfaction with the consequent negative results. The proposed new guide for evaluating functions is meant to facilitate the application of the Staff Rules and Regulations (SR&R) in classifying staff members according to the Career Path system. Its objective is to increase the transparency of the career structure in the organization and to provide an efficient tool to supervisors at all levels.

2 HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

2.1 The Grade system

In the first 37 years of CERN's existence, the career structure was based on a system of grades. These were linked to general definitions of function specified in the SR&R.

With the growth and increasing complexity of the organization, it became necessary, after about 20 years, to change and apply a tool called the 'Job Catalogue'. This was an inventory of typical jobs classified by different categories, codes, and professional titles based on the statutory definitions of grades. The general definition of grades was determined by the nature of the work and the professional training and experience required to perform a given job. The Job Catalogue also defined six additional factors of evaluation (judgement; originality; responsibility; supervision and control exercised; supervision and control given; variety) which were used by trained Human Resources professionals but whose application was not very transparent.

2.2 The Career Path system

The Career Path system was introduced in 1991. It was superimposed on the already existing grade and step system (thus preserving the salary grid, which was in place). In 1992 all staff members were assigned to a given Career Path in accordance with established instructions. No changes were made with regard to professional categories, codes or titles. The different levels of Career Paths were described by concise descriptions in the SR&R (Annex RA 10). These descriptions remained very succinct and required reference to other criteria as well as evaluation tools based on practice.

2.3 Working Group on Career Path Descriptions

A Joint Working Group of the Standing Concertation Committee (CCP) was established in 1998 with a mandate to study the current Career Path system with the objective to review and complete the descriptions contained in the SR&R. This group was composed of the following members: M. Bénot, P. Berry (Secretary), P. Ciriani, J. Cuthbert (Convenor), L. Linssen, J.P. Matheys, R. Rayson and S. Weisz.

In the first instance, the Working Group analysed the evolution of job classification at CERN. It examined the structure of professional categories and the previous system of grade evaluation based on general definitions of grades and the Job Catalogue. It analysed the Career Path concept as initially defined and with input from a pilot project undertaken by Hay Management, which contributed to the 'benchmarking' of job descriptions, used in the 1994/95 CERN Remuneration Review.

A preliminary report describing the results of the work of this Working Group was published on 17 July 1998 with the final version with recommendations for improvement and the so-called 'Projet de Guide' being published in early 1999.

2.4 Elaboration of the Career Path Guide and Descriptions

The main innovation of the Career Path Guide was the widening of the concept of evaluation factors for functions. Its purpose was to create a universal tool which would provide the means of evaluating every job over the span of a career.

It was foreseen for use by responsible services in evaluating job levels, specifically when establishing job vacancies, examining Career Path changes, and in comparing salary levels with external institutions.

The objective of the Career Path Guide was also to give more transparency to the method of evaluating functions and provide a tool for supervisors in the management of their staff.

2.5 Pilot phase of applying the Career Path Guide

The CERN Management agreed to test the Guide for one year in order to validate its usefulness. When opportunities arise HR division consults internal assessors (where nominated by divisions), supervisors, group leaders, division leaders as well as committees such as TEACC. The feedback is generally positive and it is felt that, although not exhaustive, the Guide is a useful tool.

3 PRINCIPLES OF THE GUIDE - NEW APPROACH

The basic principle of the Guide is that it provides a number of general and specific evaluation factors. The nine specific factors were expanded from the previous six specified in the Job Catalogue but used only to a limited extent.

For each of these factors several levels have been established which trace the expected evolution of job levels and personal competences within a given Career Path.

The evaluation criteria have universal application and can be applied for every job in any job family and professional category at any level. This provides a tool that can also be complemented by sample job descriptions.

The specific factors, which are the basic elements of evaluation, are the following:

- Integration
The necessity of integrating diverse tools, tasks, aptitudes, knowledge, technology or projects.
- Obtaining of results with/through others
The necessity of assuring functional and/or hierarchical management of other persons.
- Managing relations/communications
The necessity of developing and maintaining work relations which contribute to the efficiency of the Organization.
- Complexity of problems
The necessity of analysing situations, resolving problems, and drawing conclusions.
- Change and innovation
The necessity of managing change and/or formulating and/or promoting and/or implementing innovations. One takes into account not only internal developments but also the use of and adaptation to specific needs of developments which have originated outside CERN.
- Responsibility for results
The degree of independence exercised in the course of obtaining results in the required time, with resources assigned, within budgetary limits and other constraints (the general obligations common to all staff are not taken into account).
- Managing information
The nature and importance of information at one's disposal, produced, communicated and managed.

- Organizational knowledge
The necessity of knowing the structure and functioning of CERN and/or external institutions.
- Official languages
The necessity to use at least one of the official languages of the Organization as a foreign language (functions of official translation/revision excluded).

Each of these factors is comprised of five to eight levels which measure the competences, capacity, knowledge and responsibility required to do the job. One of the major innovations was the introduction of the factor which evaluates the knowledge of CERN's official languages on a systematic basis, thus recognizing its importance in determining the overall level of competence.

The Guide also recognizes the fact that the level is not uniform within a given Career Path. Over a longer period, even in the same post, the acquired experience and development of professional competences leads to a change of the functions (although not necessarily sufficient for a change of Career Path). The Guide distinguishes between newcomers just starting their professional practice and those who already have a number of years of experience by tracing the evolution over the various levels attained over a career. There are three such levels defined in the Career Path Guide, which are independent of professional category and therefore of being generally applicable. Referred to as General Factors, they are as follows.

- Basic level, which is normally expected of someone who has 5 years of experience.
- Practitioner level, which is normally expected of someone who has 10 years of experience.
- Expert Practitioner level, which is normally expected of someone who has 20 years of experience.

With regard to recruitment, the approach still remains which takes into account the formal qualifications of the potential candidate for a staff position. These are specified as follows:

- Career Path II
One or two years of apprenticeship or an equivalent diploma
- Career Path III
Three or four years of apprenticeship or an equivalent diploma
- Career Path IV
A technical certificate or an equivalent diploma
- Career Path V
Higher technical diploma or an equivalent diploma
- Career Path VI
Technical engineer diploma or an equivalent diploma
- Career Path VII
University diploma or an equivalent diploma
- Career Path VIII or IX
University diploma or an equivalent diploma accompanied by at least 10 years of experience

4 PRACTICAL APPLICATION

The practical application of this tool goes beyond its use by HR division in assessing jobs or individuals. Supervisors at all levels can also use it in planning their staff's development and in designing jobs (e.g. for recruitment). This can help them in addressing specific areas when considering the career development of staff.

It is a useful tool for special assessment commissions where they have been created by divisional management to help in streamlining the process and in verifying cases put forward by supervisors before they are formally submitted for analysis by HR division. It must be clear, however, that its formal use is by expert committees and by HR division.

For Career Path changes it should be noted that the following basic criteria have to be respected: the staff member has to exercise the functions at the level of the higher Career Path for a minimum period of one year. The level of competence in exercising these functions has to correspond to the level of 'Practitioner' in the higher Career Path. It is furthermore required that performance has proved to be at an entirely satisfactory level.

It should be noted that the Career Path descriptions/profiles, although very comprehensive, should serve as a guide and not be applied too rigidly. One should avoid a purely mathematical approach consisting of inventing 'points' obtained for each criterion.

5 CONCLUSION

This is a tool that should be known as widely as possible in order to ensure transparency and to enable staff to feel that the Career Path system is applied in a fair way.

This Guide is meant to replace the Job Catalogue, which has been used until now as a principal tool in the job analysis and evaluation process. It will greatly increase the efficiency of supervisors' work in the field of managing their human resources by providing a better tool which, however, needs to be subject to regular consultation by the supervisors with HR division and in cooperation with the HR Coordinator.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

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- [3] Annex RA 10 of the SR&R.
- [4] Job Catalogue (September 1988).