

have information on the tasks, duties, and responsibilities of the job as well as the corresponding KSAOs. While such information can be helpful, the changing nature of work suggests that all older information should be considered carefully and evaluated relative to the current set of requirements. In fact, organizations that rely excessively on old information can get into legal trouble if there is a discrepancy between the job on record and the job as it is actually performed.

O*NET, which we discussed in detail earlier, is another starting point for job analysis information. Obvious advantages of O*NET are its flexibility (it can be applied to many different types of jobs) and its ease of use.¹⁹ Because the data were collected by professionals across a wide variety of locations, it is also considered to be of high quality. The chief disadvantage of O*NET is that it describes occupations and not jobs. Occupational information indicates what individuals performing a certain job title do across a wide variety of organizational contexts, whereas job information reflects the unique characteristics of how work is done in a specific company. In other words, while O*NET has a very well-developed description of what marketing managers do, it cannot say anything about the specific nature of a marketing manager job at Apple.

The ready availability of prior job information needs to be balanced with its limitations. Existing information within the organization may be out of date, and information from O*NET does not take the organization's unique context into account. While prior information should be the starting point for job analysis, it should not be the stopping point.

Observation. Simply observing job incumbents performing the job is an excellent way to learn about tasks, KSAOs, and context. It provides a thoroughness and richness of information unmatched by any other method. It is also the most direct form of gathering information because it does not rely on intermediary information sources, as would be the case with other methods (e.g., interviewing job incumbents and supervisors).

The following potential limitations to observation should be kept in mind. First, observation is most appropriate for jobs with physical (as opposed to mental) components and ones with relatively short job cycles (i.e., amount of time required to complete job tasks before repeating them). Second, the method may involve substantial time and cost. Third, the ability of the observer to do a thorough and accurate analysis is open to question; it may be necessary to train observers prior to the job analysis. Fourth, the method will require coordination with, and approval from, many people (e.g., supervisors and incumbents). Finally, the incumbents being observed may distort their behavior during observation in self-serving ways, such as making tasks appear more difficult or time-consuming than they really are.

Interviews. Interviewing job incumbents and others, such as their managers, has many potential advantages. It respects the interviewee's vast source of information. The interview format allows the interviewer to explain the purpose of the job