

## Developing Key Accountabilities for Jobs

### *Laying the foundation for successful employee selection & retention*

The success of any job in any company – large or small – depends on effectively defining why the job will exist. This “justification” for why a job exists results in well thought out and written goals or outcomes for the job – and the person(s) in it. In other words, before writing the job description, recruiting or interviewing candidates, it is critical to define what the job (and the person in it) will need to accomplish THAT WILL MOVE THE COMPANY FORWARD. Simple enough! Not really!

Actually, the failure to lay a proper foundation for jobs, before moving forward in the process of staffing for a job, is a **major** reason why candidates who are hired don’t succeed. They fail, become average or below average, become disengaged and/or quit. Rather than being a good fit for the job, candidates often seem like they’ll be a good fit for a job. This is an easy mistake for managers to make if they don’t have a very clear understanding of what – exactly – will lead to job success. The ‘*what will lead to job success*’ follows ‘*what must this job accomplish*’.

We call the goals or needed job outcomes (‘*what must this job accomplish*’) **Key Accountabilities** because the person in the job will be accountable for the accomplishment of the needed job outcomes. *Key Accountabilities* serve as a basis on which:

- **benchmarking of the job** can take place so it is easy to develop the competencies, motivators and behaviors required for great performance
- **job descriptions** can be written that truly describe the job
- **ads** can be written to attract not just candidates but qualified candidates
- **assessment** of candidates can take place to help define candidate job fit
- **selection** can take place based on job needs relative to candidate strengths
- **performance goals** can be developed so that success – or failure – can be measured
- **development goals** can be developed so the person in the job can become even better, building mainly on their strengths
- **feedback** can be given so the employee can understand how they are doing and where they can improve

The KENNA Company uses the *TTI TriMetrix® System* to help clients develop a job’s *Key Accountabilities* takes 2 – 4 hours. Given the right circumstances, a benchmark showing the hierarchy<sup>1</sup> of competencies, motivators and behaviors for the position can then be developed the same day and be presented to Stakeholders<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Twenty three competencies required by jobs are ranked in order of importance for the job being benchmarked. In addition, 6 motivators (job reward factors) and eight behaviors are ranked by importance. Individuals are then assessed and compared to the benchmark on an ‘as needed’ basis to help determine strengths and weaknesses relative to the needs of the job.

<sup>2</sup> Stakeholders are people who know the job that is benchmarked. Usually, stakeholders participate in the entire process, i.e. they help define key accountabilities, job benchmark and, at some point, interview job candidates.

The following subjects are covered in this short guide.

What are Key Accountabilities?

How are Key Accountabilities developed?

What is the process for defining Key Accountabilities?

Examples of Key Accountabilities

Summary

What are Key Accountabilities?

A position's *Key Accountabilities* are **not** the same as a job description. *Key Accountabilities* are a succinct summary of critical goals and key successes (usually 3 – 5) the job is held accountable to produce for the business. *Key Accountabilities* define the reasons why the position is necessary in the first place. They lay the groundwork for management to move forward in defining the supporting behaviors, motivators, skills, capacities and cultural rewards needed by the person doing the job that will support the employee's successful achievement of the position's accountabilities. (Note: Most people who aren't great in a job are either lacking in the soft skills required – as identified by benchmarking – or they are poorly managed.)

How are Key Accountabilities developed?

A position's *Key Accountabilities* are defined through a facilitated process. Stakeholders are usually chosen from the following:

- Employees who formerly held the position,
- Manager and/or a former manager of the position,
- Managers/staff who interact closely with the position on a regular basis, and
- Customers/clients

Ideally, three to six stakeholders with current working knowledge of the position explore, validate and quantify the job's "**reason for being.**" The goal of the group is to develop 3 – 5 *Key Accountabilities*. *Key Accountabilities* share these characteristics: *They are*

- Strategic – focusing on the job's big picture – this is the 30,000 foot view (versus tactical – things that must be done i.e. submit paperwork on a weekly basis)
- Specific – defining exactly what is expected so there is no room for misunderstanding what needs to be done.
- Measureable – developing some quantifiable benchmarks so that scope is understood and everyone knows when the goal has been achieved or exceeded
- Achievable – resisting the urge to make the job unreasonably challenging so that the reality of success is real
- Time bounded – putting time stamps on each goal so that it is understood when the specific *Key Accountability* must be accomplished

NOTE: If these sound like SMART goals they are – with one significant exception. *Key Accountabilities* must be **strategic**, i.e. long term and extensively premeditated (this is the function of the stakeholders in the development of the *Key Accountabilities*).

### What is the process for defining Key Accountabilities

It is always best to start from scratch in establishing Key Accountabilities although having the existing job description can be helpful. Also, do not make the mistake of assuming that one predefined set of Key Accountabilities for a similar job will fit the job you are focused on. Different jobs – at different times in their life cycles – have different needs. And job requirements and accountabilities from the past will not fit a changing future.

Using a neutral facilitator is very helpful when developing Key Accountabilities. This is because – as the stakeholders discuss the job - there will emerge differences in opinion on why the job exists. This is one of the healthiest conversations that will take place about the job because it will lead to clearer expectations and a clear definition of the job. This has three great benefits:

- Stakeholders and others will be on the same page about the job before an employee is hired to take on the challenges and opportunities of the position. Too often the job is viewed from a task perspective and what the job really will be accountable for is fuzzy at best.
- Identifying the skills – soft and hard – of the person who can succeed at the position becomes much easier. When the skills required for success are identified clearly, advertising for the job, interviewing, etc. becomes much more effective.
- Describing the job to candidates you are serious about becomes easy and accurate (40% of new employees state after one month that the job they accepted is nothing like what they were led to believe it would be)

Often it is helpful to brainstorm the tasks that will need to be accomplished by this position. After brainstorming discuss what is realistic and important and what is not. As the list shortens it will become pretty easy to start seeing the major themes of the strategic goals required by the position.

### Examples of Key Accountabilities<sup>3</sup>

#### **EXAMPLE 1: KEY ACCOUNTABILITIES – NATIONAL SALES MANAGER**

1. Increase total annual corporate sales by a minimum of 15% **(40%)**
2. Consistently achieve a minimum of 3% monthly regional sales increases **(30%)**
3. Demonstrate sales leadership, measured by favorable staff feedback **(15%)**
4. Recruit, retain and develop top sales talent while maintaining an average annual employee turnover rate of less than 10% **(15%)**

#### **EXAMPLE 2: KEY ACCOUNTABILITIES – OPERATIONS MANAGER**

1. Assure reliable and up-to-date operational systems 24x7 with 99% availability **(30%)**
2. Administer the operations budget to no more than 100% of allotted funds **(25%)**
3. Establish, quantify and maintain quality vendor services within allotted budget **(15%)**
4. Proactively test, analyze benefits, recommend and implement quality enhancements to operational systems, measured by a continued decrease in time, manpower and costs needed to process client orders and product shipping **(15%)**
5. Demonstrate leadership in managing operations staff, measured by favorable staff feedback and performance **(15%)**

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<sup>3</sup> The last step in developing Key Accountabilities is ranking them in order of importance to the company and assigning a % of the job holder's time it is thought the individual Key Accountability will take (in a given month).

Summary

The process hiring 'filling a position' seems onerous to many. If systematized, it can flow very smoothly and the selection process itself can become much more successful – yielding employees who like and are good at their jobs (good job fit). The process starts with defining a job's Key Accountabilities provides value to the organization above and beyond outcomes such as hiring the right people and designing performance plans for employees. It focuses management attention on assuring that the organization's key success factors are supported by the Key Accountabilities of the positions they create, which in turn assures maximum return on investment for the organization as well as retention of key employees who like their jobs and their compan

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12203 Wyandotte Court  
Kansas City, MO 64145

Voice: 816-943-0868  
Fax: 816-943-0808

[joe@kennacompany.com](mailto:joe@kennacompany.com)  
[www.kennacompany.com](http://www.kennacompany.com)

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