

A Note on the Measurement of Knowledge in UCS Work Descriptions

The purpose of this note is to, hopefully, bring some clarity, or a different perspective, on the issue of measurement of knowledge requirements in UCS work descriptions.

Much of the commenting I have seen in recent weeks, and months, about whether CS's have one or two areas of knowledge reflects the broader perception about whether any position (professional or non-professional) requires more than one area of knowledge.

This debate is simply off the mark, and reflect a basic reason why work descriptions are rating so low, that is, why ES1's and CS1's have earned roughly the same rating as CR4's. If this debate is off the mark, what is an appropriate way to measure knowledge?

There are five keys which provide a basis on which to evaluate knowledge under the UCS Standard, version 2.0.

1. In all academic areas of knowledge, one gains greater and greater knowledge in narrower and narrower fields of knowledge. For instance, my doctorate (redefining concepts) in the Optimal Allocation of Human Resources – not for the entire discipline of economics or business administration. But I also needed a sufficient knowledge of the economic theory of optimality if not to redefine the theory at least to add to its concepts, as well as a sufficient knowledge of the theory of organization analysis if not to redefine then to add to its concepts, and a sufficient knowledge of the theories of strategic planning – among other areas of knowledge to add to or redefine their concepts to be able to complete the doctorate. So using the UCS, if that were my job, i.e. looking at new ways to determine the optimal allocation of human resources (typical of a number of jobs in the Public Service), I should earn a level 8 for the Optimality of human resources contribution, and levels 8 or 7 for each of the areas for which I required a knowledge sufficient to redefine or add to those theories to do the job – and mastery of a few other fields (a 6). This kind of analysis would be appropriate for looking at someone responsible for identifying, redefining the enterprise architecture of a Department, or for identifying new approaches to measurement in evaluation theory.
2. While the work may require an extremely high degree of capability in one field, it is more than likely that the work will also require a relatively high level of knowledge in a number of complementary fields. Most government jobs require the application of knowledge, and in order to be effective in applying knowledge in a primary area, the work requires significant knowledge in complementary areas. The evidence in support of this proposal is the knowledge requirements a manager will require when staffing the position. So, if one wants to know what knowledge is required for a “unit of work”, do not look at classification practices, but ask the manager what he or she will require when staffing the position.
3. The statement of qualifications a manager may ask for when staffing a position can be less than that stated as required in the work description, but it cannot be greater than that stated in the work description – this is a basic principle of staffing (see the appeals

literature). The reason for this is that one can ask for a little less than truly required on the expectation that the individual hired can grow into the full knowledge capabilities of the position. If we write work descriptions with a low level of knowledge requirement (say one area, low rating), the hands of the manager will be tied in what she or he can ask for in the statement of qualifications.

4. The UCS is the next step in the direction of human resource management in the Public Service being competency based. Attempting to write work descriptions with one or two broad areas of knowledge are not a sufficient basis on which to determine the true competency required by a unit of work – only a detailed, and accurate reflection of as many of the key areas of knowledge as possible will suffice. Will four do it? Maybe or maybe not, but four accurately calibrated areas is far more likely to serve competency management purposes, than one or two very broad areas of knowledge – which by definition cannot be finely calibrated.
5. As we shift the basis of evaluating work from duties and tasks or any other basis, to one of evaluating work based on knowledge and how it is used (e.g. for responsibility and effort required), there is no inherent reason why the current hierarchical arrangement will remain in place, and there is no reason why current relativities should remain true. When you shift the basis on which work is valued, then the valuation of individual work units may be significantly different relative to other work units than they had been heretofore. There will be a general tendency for knowledge requirements to reflect a progression in rank, but that is no guarantee that two positions in a hierarchical relationship to each other will retain that relationship. Therefore to try and reflect an existing hierarchy in the ratings of work units evaluated on a knowledge basis can only lead to undervaluing knowledge. The result we are getting all too often.

Putting these five keys together, what does it yield?

1. Managers must be looking at what a fully qualified individual doing a unit of work really requires to do that work optimally – not the performance of the incumbent (and not dumbed down to accommodate an individual)
2. Job Content Knowledge Application must reflect at least what is asked for by the manager in a statement of qualifications for staffing that work unit
3. There is no inherent reason why positions currently at different levels will remain at different levels when rated for knowledge and its application rather than duties and tasks.
4. Rewrite or revise work descriptions to reflect the knowledge profile required to do the work in a way that can be accurately calibrated using the UCS Version 2.0 and/or academic and/or competency understanding of knowledge and knowledge application.
5. Too many work descriptions, too many writers, too many evaluators, and too many managers still are operating under perceptions they learned under UCS version 1.0, and it is time to move on to Version 2.0 – if not, the failure to accurately reflect knowledge in these work descriptions will not be reversed.

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