

National Safety Month: Job Function Matching by Steve Barnett, PT, CMTPT

With medical costs increasing annually, the question is, are companies able to influence the monetary loss, and loss of productivity associated with employee injury? The answer is a resounding "Yes!"

A modern concept in work injury management and prevention is Job Function Matching. Job Function Matching is a work injury prevention and management system. As an employer or person who oversees such situations at a company, our goal is to have control and be able to influence costs and loss time. This can be done with Job Function Matching.

Job Function Matching is the comparison of the functional demands of the job with the functional capabilities of the worker. Work accomplished productively and a worker not at risk of musculoskeletal injury or injuring others due to their inability to perform their work safely will result in reduced loss of valued workers and related financial cost, lost time, and disability. This is the purpose of Job Function Matching, which is a win-win for both the employer and the employee.

There are two main components to Job Function Matching. The first is the Job Function description. Traditional job descriptions point out only essential tasks. As an example, pre-trip and wash truck, drive truck from left or right side of unit in a safe manner, lift red Bins and dump them in the side bins on the truck are examples for a refuse truck driver.

A desired job function description contains essential tasks plus physical demands of the job. For example, the third task above would now be - with a bilateral grip of 30 lbs at two handles, lift an 18 gallon bin weighting 10 to 50 lbs from a height of 26", dump refuse into side bins of truck at a height of 35". Having such information in a job description gives potential employees and the employer knowledge of what the job demands.

The second component of the job function match is the job function test. The job function test is used for post offer exams and for post-injury/fit for duty testing. A post offer exam measures a perspective worker's ability to perform the specific requirements as laid out by the functional job description. This is used for both new hires as well as current employees who desire to transfer to a new position within the company. For example, if the peak physical demands for our refuse truck driver is that they must be able to bilaterally grip 25 lbs., lift 50lbs. to a height of 35," and walk 30 feet, a post offer exam will be developed to test the perspective worker on his or her abilities to perform such tasks. This exam is a pass or fail. The perspective worker must be able to safely perform all test measures to be considered a candidate for the position.

The second reason for having a job function test is to facilitate post-injury/fit for duty testing. Having the test takes the guesswork out of return to work programs. An injured worker must be able to pass items on the test to be allowed to return to work safely. It assists in directing rehabilitation. The rehab specialist

knows specifically what needs to be achieved for the injured worker to go back to work. Having the injured worker pass the test before returning to work also reduces the chance of re-injury by sending back too soon.

In short, job function testing identifies individuals that are a direct threat to their own health or safety, or to the health and safety of others at the worksite. It identifies pre-existing injuries. It ensures fairness in screening procedures and fairness in the job placement. And lastly, it ensures that all candidates are measured against the same standardized criteria.

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