



PeopleFit
Australasia

Time Span of Discretion

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The Benefits of Understanding this Concept:

- You will have a generic, apple-to-apples measure of job complexity.
- You will be able to compare the relative weights of unrelated jobs - between an organisation's departments, between competing firms, merging companies, or between jobs within completely different industries or countries.
- You will have an objective basis for structuring your compensation system
- Just as temperature provides us a universal scale for measuring any substance's degree of warmth, time span provides a scale for measuring the complexity level of any given job. Most people have an intuitive sense of this, knowing a cashier position is less complex than a bank president's role; however, an objective measurement system is not commonplace within organisations.

Until now, organisations have relied on complex, time-consuming observation techniques performed by organisational psychologists and consultants to gauge the complexity level of jobs. Unfortunately, these assessments still suffer from a degree of subjectivity and must be performed on each individual role which proves to be an overwhelming and costly proposition for most companies.

Using time span measurements, PeopleFit can train you to determine the complexity level of roles easily and consistently. This knowledge is invaluable to those charged with selection, organisational design, compensation, employee development or succession planning.

Time span measurements are not only objective, but relatively simple and straightforward. It's so uncomplicated that many doubt its validity. However, the concept is backed by decades of research including extensive validation studies conducted by the US Army Behavioral Research Center.

Simply put, time span of discretion of the work in a role can be determined by identifying the longest task for which one is held accountable. If a role's longest task is one-month task, the role has a one-month time span of discretion. All roles with a one-month time span of discretion are equally complex regardless of whether they are in the same department, organisation or business sector. Roles with shorter time spans are less complex, and roles with longer time spans are more complex.

Time span of discretion = Length of the longest task = Complexity of work within a role

Consider this. When a manager is given tasks by his manager, he, in turn, doles out tasks to his subordinates. The tasks a manager delegates cannot span a longer time period than those for which he, himself, is responsible. If a manager's longest task takes one year, he will not be assigning 18-month tasks to his subordinates.

One usually does not question that any given manager's job is more complex than the job(s) of any of his subordinates. Given this example, it stands to reason that the longest task for which one is accountable gives a measure of the complexity of his job.

The following chart gives some job titles along with examples of the longest task that might be associated with that role.

Job Title	Typical Longest Task for this Type of Role	Time Span	Organisational Stratum Level
Bank Teller	Carry out transactions accurately so as to balance your drawer at the end of the day	1 day	1
Production Manager	Recruit, hire, and train an inexperienced employee up to a minimum acceptable standard	4 months	2
Regional Training Manager	Design and institute an On-the-Job Training program at multiple plants.	18 months	3
Director of Sales	Change the culture of an organization from one of order-taking to suggestive selling.	3 years	4
Business Unit President	Shift the focus of the company from current products to those which embrace an emerging technology.	7 years	5

Types of Work

Although time exists along a continuum, research has uncovered specific breakpoints along that continuum which separate varying kinds of work into layers or strata. To use another temperature analogy, take, for example, water or H₂O, its components are always the same, but it changes state from ice to water to steam consistently at 0 degrees and 100 degrees.

Work has also been found to exist in distinguishable states which stratify consistently at time spans of 3 months, one year and so on. Different types of increasingly complex work are called for by the jobs that fall into each stratum. Explanations for the various types of work are in the chart on the following page.

Common Job Title at This Level	Type of Work Required	Time Span	Organisational Stratum Level
Bank Teller	Carry out transactions accurately so as to balance your drawer at the end of the day	1 day	1
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Human Capability

Finally, not just anyone can work at any stratum level. Again, we all know intuitively that some people can handle more complex work than others, but we usually lack a vocabulary and measurement system to describe just how work varies and just who is capable of which kind of work.

Some people can reliably carry out procedures but do not yet have the ability to anticipate problems. Using the chart above, we could describe this person as having potential capability at a stratum 1 level.

Someone who could write a sequential plan for creating and implementing a new software package company-wide would have potential capability at least at the stratum 3 level.

Matching People to Jobs

PeopleFit® can train you to determine the capability level of your employees and potential employees so that you can match them to jobs for which they are best suited!

Talent Management

As it turns out, one's ability to handle complexity is not static. It matures with age in a predictable manner. A way to accelerate the maturation has not yet been found. Meaning, if one does not currently have the ability to handle complexity at the level required of a certain position, no amount of training, coaching, or personal will can change it. The person will simply be unable to do the work required by the job until he matures to that level over time. For reasons not yet understood, some people mature to a higher level of capability by the end of their careers. This is why some people desire to move up the corporate ladder (high potential mode), and others are content to stay within one job throughout their career (expert mode).