

Summary of Discussions with Focus Groups from the Business & Administrative Occupational Group MSA & RA Series

Overview of Findings

Agencies utilize the classes within the MSA & RA series a variety of ways. There also appears to be a stretching of the use of these two series, possibly to classify employees at a higher pay grade. The overlap in the type of work the MSA and RA series performs lends itself to some blurring of the line between these two series. In both series skills can be brought from the outside to facilitate the learning process, but in most cases, the expertise an employee gains through longevity within an agency is valued more.

A typical use of the MSA series (based on the focus group participants) is to fill the bridge between business and IT. Many of the MSA positions have various levels of programming responsibilities (e.g. Sequel, SAS, EML, DBA). Other responsibilities of the participating MSAs involve system testing, budget, fleet and lease management, and data analysis. Overall these positions have a high degree of latitude in decision making. Supervisors typically are hands off and tend to be more involved in the management of the agency than in supervising the work of incumbents. The difference between the MSA I & II levels is more related to experience and expertise than the scope of the work. But scope is a factor in distinguishing the work of the MSA III from MSA I & II. Feedback from the focus group did not indicate that the levels within the MSA series are being used as a career ladder. The classification is tied closer to the actual work performed. Often times the knowledge required to do the job could only be learned on the job. Skill sets could be brought to the job to facilitate the technical aspect of the positions, but since these positions typically dealt with organizational and system issues, the learning curve for an external candidate would be much longer than for an internal candidate.

A typical use of the RA series is to analyze data and in some instances, some programming knowledge is required to do this task. Other duties of participating RAs include legal assistant duties, customer service research, tabulating survey responses, accounting, trend analysis, data base maintenance, program management, collections, coding and website maintenance.

Excluding the work that does not fit well within the RA series, the work could be grouped as follows. First of all there is data/information maintenance. This work involves gathering data, putting the data into the appropriate format (e.g. covert information to a predetermined coding system) maintaining files and reports, validating data or simply going out and finding the data then assembling it in a logical manner. Secondly, there is data/information analysis. This work involves statistical analysis on the data, data manipulations, trend analysis, more "complex" data validation, analytical write-ups and knowledge of statistical principles becomes more important. Thirdly, there is data management. These duties involve responsibility for a published product with a broad reaching impact (not a small newsletter), responding to legislative requests (including

the interpretation), interpreting the data analysis, oversight or responsibility for a statewide data related program with statewide implications. Examples of data base develop exists in all three bodies of work, but the complexity of the databases tending to evolve as the responsibility level increased.

In some cases progression within the RA series is used as a career ladder. Since many of the RA positions are program driven, value is placed with longevity within an agency and a longer learning curve would exist for individuals hired externally.

Distinction Between Management Systems Analysts and Research Analysts

The work of both groups is technical in nature. As previously mentioned, there is overlap in the type of work done in these two series; both are responsible for dealing with and analyzing data. However the work of employees in the MSA series is directed toward the business systems, organizational structure or extremely complex data set management. In many situations the MSA is the liaison between IT and the business unit.

The employees in the RA series tend to focus on the data itself or researching information. Not all the RAs deal with strictly numeric or labeled data, some review or analyze information or situations. There is little to no focus on the organizational structure or business systems.

EDI (Electronic Data Interface) work overlaps the MSA/RA series the most. The responsibility of these positions seems to be for both the data coming in (RA type work) and the EDI system (MSA type work).

Minimum Qualifications

The majority of the participants agree that the current minimum qualifications are sufficient with the exception of adding administrative oversight experience to the MSA III. Some of the other comments from the participants are as follows:

MSA

- Organizational management background is important
- Specialized knowledge of the agency or program is beneficial
- Degrees are not always relevant or beneficial
- MSA III MQ should reflect the broadening scope of responsibility

RA

- Some discrepancy if 1 year of experience is more appropriate than 6 months
- AA degree might give a good background
- Experience often times is more relevant than education
- Communication skills are necessary for positions with a customer service aspect

Full Performance

Amount of Time to Reach Full Performance

Depending on the classification level, the time range to reach full performance is from six months on the RA I to three years on the RA IV and MSA III. Internal agency or program knowledge (depending on the position) will shorten the time it takes an individual to reach full performance. The specialized duties and/or work of a cyclical nature contribute to a longer time to reach full performance.

SUPERVISION

Type of Supervision Received & Type of Work Done

The MSAs in the focus group typically report to a manager whose responsibility is more organizational than supervisory. Therefore, the MSAs are given latitude to make the day-to-day decisions, and contact is typically through weekly meetings or status reports.

The RAs indicate the direct supervision they receive is minimal, and typically the supervisor does different work. However, often times the work of the RA is a contribution toward a larger goal or project which the supervisory has ultimate responsibility for.

Teams & collaboration were repeated themes during the supervisory portion of the discussion.

COMPENSATION

What Criteria Should Compensation be Based?

There seems to be a consensus that performance and other personal characteristics that the employee brings to the job (such as initiative, ability to work well with others, taking on more tasks etc.) should be one of, if not the primary criteria for the basis of compensation. Longevity has its place in a compensation system, but longevity alone is not always of benefit to an organization. Skills and what an employee contributes are more important for the sake of compensation than longevity.

Others thought that education (related to the job) should be recognized and position management or change management roles deserved extra. Diversity in an individual's job specific knowledge should also be recognized.

There is also some concern about the ability/desire of supervisors to administer a non-longevity based system equitably and not play favorites. For those who just did status quo type work, job security should be ample reward.

The group differed in opinion on whether a differential for a given responsibility (e.g. supervising) should be removed when that individual is no longer performing that responsibility.