

JOB EVALUATION: THE PATERSON SYSTEM

The strike of Baragwanath Hospital workers in November 1985 highlighted not only the poor wages of hospital workers, but also the rigid pay categories into which they are divided.

The issue of the wage payment system used for hospital workers came up again when workers found that their jobs were being redefined and reclassified on their return to work after the strike.

Most workers in provincial hospitals in South Africa are paid according to a job evaluation system that has become known as the Paterson System. Workers in provincial hospitals generally earn less than workers in private hospitals or clinics. But even from one provincial hospital to another, wage rates are different.

This article explains how the Paterson System works and what it means for worker organisation.

What is job evaluation?

Job evaluation or job grading involves

- describing a job in the smallest detail
- grading that particular job in relation to other jobs within the same unit, branch, or industry
- laying down wages accordingly

There are a number of different job evaluation systems used in South Africa.

The Paterson System

The Paterson System grades jobs according to how many

decisions a worker has to make in his or her job, and how important these decisions are in the running of the overall unit, branch, or industry.

Paterson has laid down six levels of decision-making, which he has called Bands. Each one of these he has linked to a certain position within the branch or industry.

These levels are:

- Band A - defined decisions - unskilled workers
- Band B - automatic decisions - semi-skilled workers
- Band C - routine decisions - skilled workers
- Band D - interpretive decisions - middle management
- Band E - programming decisions - senior management
- Band F - policy making decisions - top management

Where do workers fit in?

Most workers in South Africa are restricted to the lowest levels of decision-making (in this case Band A and B). They give workers hardly any control over the work-process. A worker in Band A, for instance, has little choice; he or she is told exactly what to do and when to do it.

Further grading

Apart from this broad grading system, there is further grading within each Band.

For Band A and B, there are the following sub-grades for health service workers:

Band	Decision Level	Title	Grade	Kind of Grade
B	Automatic	Semi-skilled	5	Supervisory
			4	
			3	
			2	
			1	
A	Defined	Unskilled	3	Sec. guards (c. R324p.m.) Ward helpers, porters, mess= engers, cooks, dispensary at= tendants - R230p.m after 6 years cleaners, as= sistant cooks, laund.workers R220p.m. after 6 years
			2	
			1	

(The wages given in this table might have been reviewed and adjusted in some sections of the health service.)

Many South African employers using the Paterson System use four factors to decide which sub-grade a worker should fall under. These factors are:

- Variety of tasks: The more tasks, or the more complicated the tasks within a job, the higher the sub-grade that the worker falls under.
- Length of a task: If a task takes longer to do, or if it involves any other activities, the worker is placed in a higher sub-grade.

- Pressure of work: The higher the mental or physical stress in a job, the higher the sub-grade that the worker falls under.
- Tolerance or precision: Jobs that require a high level of precision rank in a higher sub-grade. The same goes for jobs where errors of workers would have serious effects.

In short: Sub-grading merely decides whether job x is more important than job y.

How does management go about applying the Paterson System?

If and when management decides to make a job evaluation, workers and their unions hardly have any say in the procedure. They usually have no choice in which evaluation system is to be used, and how it is to be applied. It is usually the personnel department that goes about setting up the job evaluation system. The personnel department finds out what kinds of different jobs there are. They then decide on how many job writers they have to train to write up the job descriptions. The Paterson System requires written job descriptions that should be read and signed by the workers. Usually workers have to describe their jobs, and then the supervisors are asked about the correctness of those descriptions. Once all the jobs have been described, the job descriptions go to an evaluation (grading) committee.

The Paterson System - from the workers' point of view

From the workers' point of view, there are a number of problems with the Paterson System. Band A, which most workers fall under, has got less sub-grades than Band C, D, E, and F. That means that for the bulk of workers, there are very few different types of jobs; and there is no chance of moving up the scale. Secondly, the Paterson system is mainly based on one single factor -

namely decision-making. This strengthens the existing hierarchies; it is taken for granted that supervisors and co-ordinators make higher decisions. This is what excludes workers in Band A and Band B from decisions about their work and working conditions; instead, decisions are being made from top downwards. In this way, the Paterson System fixes the channels of communication from the top of the hierarchy downwards, and strengthens that hierarchy.

This article is an excerpt from Len le Roux's Guide to Job Evaluation Systems Used in South Africa, South African Labour Bulletin, vol. 10, no. 14, January-February 1985

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