

Guide to Inclusive Job Descriptions



RM RoleMapper

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The Context

Designing jobs inclusively is becoming a strategic imperative for all organisations.

There have been significant shifts in the world of work that have driven creating inclusive jobs to the top of the priority list for leading organisations.

Organisations are operating in ever-changing, volatile markets with increased legislation – particularly around pay equity and transparency.

A new generation has entered the workforce, who are expecting a more employee-centric, self-service model which helps them navigate career paths up and around an organisation.

There is more focus than ever on skills, skills-based hiring and workforce agility where the focus is on identification and rapid deployment of skills where they are needed most.

These changes mean that jobs and job descriptions now play a central role in many HR strategies, systems and processes and need up-to-date, inclusive and visible. Whether job descriptions are crafted upstream by Reward and HR teams or downstream by line managers, it is crucial to prioritise inclusivity in their creation due to their increasing significance.

These descriptions no longer solely influence recruitment; they also play a pivotal role in shaping career trajectories, ensuring pay equity, and determining necessary skills. Thus, getting them right from the outset is of utmost importance.

Without a dedicated effort to ensure inclusivity in these job descriptions, their content has the potential to detrimentally affect talent, diversity and inclusion throughout every phase of the employee lifecycle.



The process of job design sits at the heart of the organisation's ability to attract, retain, reward and progress talent.

Introduction

Creating inclusive job descriptions is more than just re-working the language and copy on a page. It is a sequence of key steps in a job design process that will enable you to create job descriptions that reflect, in an inclusive way, the work that your organisation needs done now and in the future . The outputs of this process will be debiased job descriptions that will truly make an impact at each stage of the employee lifecycle.

The process of job design sits at the heart of your ability to attract, retain, reward and progress talent across your organisation.

Inclusive job design has shown to increase hiring diversity by 125%+, increase quality of hires by 80%+, achieve 30% women in senior roles and reduced employee turnover by 80%+.

In this guide we unpick the key elements of writing inclusive job descriptions to show what conscious consideration actually means, and what debiasing and breaking down barriers looks like in the job design process.

“RoleMapper has helped us shift manager mindsets around designing jobs inclusively and flexible working”

Inclusive Job Descriptions

Job design is the way in which all the component parts of a role are brought together and configured to create a job that motivates an employee to deliver at their best or to attract applications from prospective candidates.

The aim is to create inclusive jobs that enable the organisation to achieve its goals (both now and in the future) whilst motivating and rewarding employees.

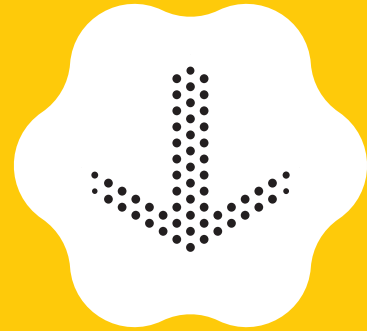
To get to a job description you go through a 'job design' process. You might not know it – you might just think you are putting your ideas down on a page – but that's what it is, you are designing a job.

The job design process helps determine the responsibilities for the role. It also helps define the requirements, any other key factors that have a key influence on the role, as well as how, where and when the job can be performed.

Inclusive job design is the process of designing a job in a way that is unbiased and reflects the actual job that needs to be done – rather than making assumptions about the job and/or job holder.

It ensures the job will appeal to the widest and most diverse pool of potential job holders.

It gives conscious consideration to designing the job in a way that opens it up to the widest pool of talent, and is also about removing any bias or barriers that might put off – or unfairly exclude – talented people either internally or externally from applying or excelling in a role.



Creating inclusive job descriptions is more than just re-working the language and copy on a page

Step 1

Simplify and Segment Responsibilities

How we define the overall responsibilities of a role, what the role holder actually has to do – and take ownership for – has a major impact on how attractive the job is for prospective candidates and how inclusive a job description is.

Complexity is a real barrier to inclusion. If a job description is simply a long list of tasks – as many of the job descriptions that we see are – people find it hard to see how their experience and skills can transfer to fulfil a manager’s long wish-list of deliverables. If there are too many responsibilities or if they are overly complex, research has shown that it will very likely put people off applying for the role.

A [study](#) found that complex and jargon filled job descriptions are a major barrier stopping applicants applying for jobs – particular early careers younger applicants.

The study found that:

33%

of all job descriptions analysed contained unclear jargon, acronyms or technical language

66%

of the young people who assessed the company’s vacancies didn’t understand the role and this put them off applying

The research found that this jargon also negatively impacted young people’s confidence, by making them feel they *“didn’t deserve”* a role or were *“not good enough”* to apply as they felt intimidated by the job descriptions or unsure of what they would be facing.

From a neurodiversity perspective, complexity and verbose sentences also adversely impacts [neurodiverse candidates](#).

For step one of your job design process, focus on identifying and describing the key “segments” of work that the role holder is responsible for and describing these in simple, jargon-free sentences. Most job descriptions contain too many responsibilities. Any job should be able to be summarised in less than five high level responsibilities or segments of work. It will completely depend on the role and the purpose of the role as to what these segments are.

For example, you might have responsibilities / segments around:



Leadership – maybe managing or leading a team
Managing the delivery of a service
Managing P&L budgets or financial elements
Collaborating across departments

Each responsibility needs to be separate from the others and capable of being carried out independently of the other responsibilities. Each responsibility might require different capabilities, skills, knowledge and experience.

The responsibilities should be described in one sentence, ideally no longer than 17 words. If your sentences are too long, science shows us that people find it difficult to read and won't engage (*more on this in Step 4 – Making Your Writing Inclusive*)

On the other hand, if the responsibilities are not defined enough, and are very broad, it is difficult for candidates to understand fully what the job involves.

Best practice job design principles show us that there is no role that cannot be segmented and summarised in just 4 – 5 simple bullet points.

Make sure responsibilities are concise enough to be easy to read, but detailed enough to make responsibilities clear.

You could do this manually, or use technology like RoleMapper. RoleMapper has intelligent job description templates which help drive inclusive job design at every step.

Machine learning drives the content that is pulled through into the template – so when you are writing a job description and crafting the key responsibilities for a role, the template will suggest job content and ways in which this content can be categorised into 4-5 segments of work.

RoleMapper also has inclusion flags which will make sure that the responsibilities on your job description are bias and jargon-free.

Step 2

Design Requirements Inclusively

One of the most important parts of writing an inclusive job description is defining what is required to deliver successfully in the role, i.e. the requirements for the role. Requirements can include many different categories including soft skills, technical skills, knowledge, experience and qualifications.

Requirements determine how people can forge their career paths within an organisation and which candidates will come through the recruitment process.

There are three key areas to focus on to ensure your requirements are inclusive. First, which of the requirements are truly essential? Research conducted by RoleMapper found that, on average, 60% of the requirements listed on a job description aren't actually essential to be successful in the role. Furthermore [research shows](#) that women will not put themselves forward for a role if they don't meet 80-100% of the criteria.

Having non-essential requirements listed on a job description will potentially exclude high quality candidates and have a negative impact on the diversity of candidates. To ensure job descriptions are inclusive, only focus on requirements that are absolutely essential for the role from day one.

Second, be aware of the bias of "Educationism" which is where there is bias around the level educational qualifications required for a role. Degrees, for example, can exclude large numbers of candidates. A degree is not necessarily an indicator of candidate ability or success in many roles, yet we tend to include them. Only 34% of the U.S. population have a college/university degree – so by asking for a degree, organisations are excluding nearly 70% of the U.S. candidate market who may well have worked their way up and be a great fit for the role but don't have a degree. Consider whether a degree is really an essential requirement for your role.

Finally make sure you have a good mix of soft skills as well as technical skills. Managers tend to over-specify technical skills requirements on job descriptions – it acts as a comfort blanket to help screen candidates. But the reality is two-fold – firstly women favour job adverts that bring out the soft skills in a role and will be put off by roles that only major on technical skills. Secondly, when asked, "What does high performance look like in this role?" 92% of Hiring Managers say soft skills are more important than hard skills.

Rigorously challenge the essential criteria on a job description.

What does high-performance really look like?

Have you included any unnecessary requirements?

Is there a good balance of soft skills vs. technical skills?

The RoleMapper platform helps you categorise the requirements on a job description in whatever way works for your organisation. The system uses drop-down boxes (e.g. capabilities, qualifications, knowledge) so that each requirement is associated with a skills category. This enables you to look at quickly see what skills are needed for individual jobs but also what the skills requirements are across your organisation.

RoleMapper also rigorously reviews the requirements on each job descriptions to make sure that they are bias-free and inclusive.

The system will highlight when education requirements are included and challenge whether these are necessary for the role. It will flag when *“years of experience”* is included as a requirement and suggest alternatives that are more inclusive. It will ensure that each requirement is categorised as either *“essential”* or *“desirable”* and flag when too many requirements are being included.

Step 3

Design with Flexible and Hybrid Working in Mind

12.7%

of full-time employees work from home

28.2%

[work a hybrid model](#)

76%

of employees would actively look for a new job or be willing to consider one if their company's flexible working policies were to be reversed

STATS AS OF 2023

Flexible working is a big driver of inclusion and diversity in many different employee and candidate segments:

1. Flexible working is the number 1 strategy for increasing female talent and closing the gender gap
2. 40% of those nearing retirement age are re-thinking work and looking to part-time
3. 50% of people would prefer flexible working over a salary increase
4. 60% of working fathers would prefer to work part-time
5. 92% of millennials identify flexibility as a top priority when job hunting
6. For those with disabilities, participation in work has decreased, part-time working has shown to remove barriers to work

Flexible and hybrid working remain an extremely important consideration for both job holders and job seekers so if you are not considering flexible and/or hybrid working when designing roles, now is the time to start.

Make it a mandatory step in your job design process to assess which flexible and hybrid working options will work for a role and challenge yourself to consider options that have not been tried before. Make sure that the flexible working options available for the role are fully explained in the job description. If it is decided that a role is not suitable for some options, document the reasons why to ensure that they can be justified.

This is particularly important in the U.K. as new legislation from 2024 will allow employees to request flexible working from day one and will require employers to consult with their employees, as a means of exploring the available options, before rejecting a flexible working request.

Design flexibility into your roles and job descriptions

RoleMapper's Flexible Working functionality helps you embed flexible working into job design and job descriptions, bridging the gap between strategy and real life at work. Our proprietary Flexible Working Algorithm is built into the job creation workflow, assessing suitability for flexible or hybrid working. The assessment output shows in all the different flexible working options that will work for the role and incorporates these into the job description.

Your job descriptions can also be designed to include a specific section on your organisation's flexible working policy and options.

Step 4

Make Your Writing Inclusive

Every day, there are hundreds of thousands of job descriptions available online; however, research indicates that, on average, people spend less than 6 seconds reviewing each one.

Usability expert Jakob Nielsen found that the [average user reads at most 20%](#) of what's on a page. People tend to scan information that they see online, rather than read it. It's therefore crucial that you convey the key information about the role in a way that is easy to understand. Long drawn-out job descriptions will put a lot of people off.

Scientists have found that when you write more, people understand less.

To increase the readability of your job description, focus on these factors:

Consider Sentence Length

Research suggests that when sentences average between 14–17 words, readers comprehend over 90% of the content. However, when sentences reach 43 words, comprehension drops to below 10%.

Aim to keep your sentences under 17 words for better understanding

Reduce Jargon

As mentioned previously in this guide, 33% of job descriptions analysed in one study contained unclear jargon, acronyms, or technical language.

Review your job description and remove any jargon or unnecessary complexity

Increase Feminine-Coded Words

Studies show gender-themed words impact women more. Masculine terms in job descriptions can reduce women's interest, implying they don't fit those roles.

Feminine-coded words don't deter men. Thus, use an online gender decoder for your job descriptions.

Make sure you watch the language you use and the way you craft your sentences.

RoleMapper can provide a comprehensive check of the “readability” of job documents to make sure the language used is inclusive, easy to follow and allows potential candidates to fully understand what the job involves.

RoleMapper's built-in bias flags include checking for masculine and feminine-coded words (and making sure the balance between the two is optimal) and flagging long sentences, jargon, and other readability issues. Each job document is assigned a Document Inclusivity Score, with best-practice guidelines available to whoever in your organisation is involved in writing job descriptions.

Step 5

Embedding Systemic Change

The final step is something most organisations find the hardest to do, and that is to systematically embed the principles of inclusive job design into the way that jobs are designed and the way in which job descriptions are written.

The challenge many organisations face is that a process for designing jobs doesn't actually exist. Or if it does, it's inconsistent between different areas of the business.

Sometimes, on the journey to create inclusive job descriptions, companies go straight to the end product, the job advert, and try to improve the language and copy. While this is definitely helpful, it is only putting a sticking plaster on the problem and solving a small part of what needs to be addressed.

Getting to the core of how the job is designed is the only way that you will see significant change.

Without systematic guidance, it's extremely hard to be naturally inclusive in how we design jobs. We all have our own biases and personal preferences about what we are looking for and how we want our jobs to work.

Create a process and guidance for anyone to use in your organisation who is involved in job design and writing job descriptions. Put governance in place to make sure that inclusive job design principles are being followed.

Embed systemic change around how you design jobs and create job descriptions.

The RoleMapper platform is designed to embed inclusion throughout the job design process in a systematic and sustained way.

RoleMapper helps you introduce a consistent process across your organisation to ensure that all job descriptions are created using the same format and are written with inclusion prompts at each step. Our “review group” functionality ensures that there is governance in place for job description sign off – content review and the sign off of job descriptions are automated within the system.

Overall the RoleMapper platform automates many processes and provides inclusion prompts to encourage HR and hiring managers to make better decisions about how they create, manage and govern job descriptions. Streamlined and automated processes ensure inclusion is built in whilst at the same time speeding up job creation and providing ongoing management.

About RoleMapper

RoleMapper is an AI-powered job description management solution, built with inclusion at the core.

Our proprietary AI and advanced Natural Language Processing allow our customers to transform and digitise their job data into best-in-class, inclusive job descriptions and a robust, future-focused job architecture and job titling framework.

How RoleMapper helps organisations design jobs inclusively

The RoleMapper platform empowers Reward and HR teams, enabling them to:

- Create, consolidate, or harmonise job architecture, grading and levels
 - Streamline and automate the creation, editing and governance of job descriptions
 - De-bias and design inclusion into all jobs
 - Manage varying compliance and pay transparency requirements
 - Easily manage and adapt job architecture and job descriptions
 - Extract and map the skills across jobs
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Our team of experts works with you to design an AI-enabled solution or service that best suits your business requirements.

Control the chaos



Talk to one of the team at
RoleMapper to learn more
or to arrange a demo.

Contact:

Ruth Evans

M: +44 7904 984304

E: ruth.evans@rolemapper.tech

www.rolemapper.tech



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