Analyze This: What Do Programmer/Analysts Really Do?

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An appropriate job title and job description may be more important than you think! They say a lot about responsibility and respect.   For an IT manager, these job descriptions can potentially prove valuable in establishing a structured definition that can be tied to salary ranges and salary categories or levels. With the shortage of technical personnel in today's market, a poorly defined job description can either understate or overstate someone's abilities. As an employee in an IT department, a defined job description allows you to know what skills you need to acquire to reach the next level in your organization. Although the IT field doesn't have standardized job descriptions, common job duties are usually consistent from company to company.

AS/400 Programmer

This title typically refers to someone with one to two years of experience in programming business applications who usually works under the close supervision of a senior programmer/analyst or project leader. Programmers' annual salaries can run from $40,000 to $50,000. Programmers typically work on new systems, usually referred to as development programming; they might also work on enhancing or modifying existing application systems. These tasks are usually referred to as maintenance programming or modification programming.

To hold the title of programmer, a person needs a specific skill set including the ability to write basic programs and modify existing application programs based on detailed job specifications. In addition, when provided with parameters by a senior programmer analyst or project leader, programmers should be able to write or create basic reports. Programmers are typically responsible for user documentation and documentation of all system changes, and they are also tasked with system testing and sign-off before putting any program changes into production. The average programmer has a reasonable grasp of RPG, CL, and the AS/400 system architecture, shows an understanding of business principles and objectives and demonstrates an attitude and aptitude to learn programming technique from other staff members.

Programmer/Analyst

As employees move up the technical food chain, they move from programmer to programmer/analyst. This title is typically reserved for someone with three to six years of experience programming business applications and who works with minimal supervision from a senior programmer/analyst or project leader. Annual salaries may run from $49,000 to $60,000. Programmer/analysts can fulfill all the duties assigned to a programmer, but they also work with users of an application to determine what features or information the user actually needs. In a typical month, programmer/analysts will write moderately complex new development programs or modify existing application programs based on either rough job specifications provided by a senior programmer/analyst or project leader or by developing their own programming specifications.

Programmer/analysts should have solid knowledge of the AS/400 architecture, its capabilities and utilities, and should know how to write interactive subfiles. In addition, they should be able to write and create reports with minimal direction. A programmer/analyst needs a solid knowledge of RPG, CL, and interactive subfiles and should have an in-depth understanding of business principles and objectives. Often programmer/analysts provide mentoring and support to a programmer.

Senior Programmer/Analyst

This title is typically given to someone with six to eight years of experience programming business applications. Salaries range from $60,000 to $75,000. A person with this title will usually report to a project leader, project manager, programming manager, or in a small IT department, the IT manager. Senior programmer/analysts often fulfill all duties performed by a programmer or programmer/analyst.   In addition, senior programmer/analysts design and develop complex application programs that may interact with other applications or modules and modify existing application programs by developing programming specifications for their own systems as well as for other programmers on a project team. Senior programmer/analysts use structured methodologies for systems development.

> ## The senior programmer/analyst obviously has a more expansive skill set.

The senior programmer/analyst obviously has a more expansive skill set than that possessed by either a programmer or a programmer/analyst. These senior programmers can readily design, write, and create reports or modify reports to meet a user's needs. They should have an in-depth understanding of RPG, CL, and interactive subfiles and an understanding of business principles and objectives. A senior programmer/analyst is often tasked with user training and has start-to-finish responsibility for projects. Junior programmers are often assigned to senior programmer/analysts for mentoring and support.

Nothing's Set in Stone

Although there may be variations and more specific responsibilities at any particular company, these basic responsibilities provide a starting point if you don't have a formalized job description. The salaries mentioned are typical of large metropolitan areas across the United States and may be higher than those in other areas. In addition, smaller IT departments may find that the IT manager is also the senior programmer/analyst and operations support staff. Whether you are the IT manager or the aspiring employee, these job descriptions can assist you in formalizing structure in the IT department at your company. MC

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