

# Job design and role development

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## JOBS AND ROLES

A *job* consists of a related set of tasks that are carried out by a person to fulfil a purpose. It can be regarded as a unit in an organization structure that remains unchanged whoever is in the job. A job in this sense is a fixed entity, part of a machine that can be 'designed' like any other part of a machine. Routine or machine-controlled jobs do indeed exist in most organizations but, increasingly, the work carried out by people is not mechanistic. What is done, how it is done and the results achieved depend more and more on the capabilities and motivation of individuals and their interactions with one another and their customers or suppliers.

The rigidity inherent in the notion of a job is not in accord with the realities of organizational life for many people. A flexible approach is often required to use and develop their skills in order to respond swiftly to the new demands they face every day.

The concept of a *role* conveys these realities more than that of a *job*. Essentially, a role is the part people play in carrying out their work. *Individual roles* are those carried out by one person. *Generic roles* are those in which essentially similar activities are carried out by a number of people. They may cover a whole occupation. A role can be described in behavioural terms – given certain expectations, this is how the person needs to behave to meet them. A role profile will not spell out the tasks to be carried out but will instead indicate expectations in the form of outputs and outcomes

and competency requirements in the shape of the inputs of skill and behaviours required to fulfil these expectations. The definition may be broad. It will not be prescriptive. Scope will be allowed for people to use their skills in accordance with their interpretation of the situation. Encouragement will be given for them both to grow in their roles and to grow their roles by developing their competencies and by extending the range of their responsibilities so that their contributions exceed expectations. The need for flexibility will also be recognised.

Roles are therefore more about people than jobs and this means that the extent to which a role can be 'designed' may be limited or even non-existent where flexibility and growth are important. This may apply particularly to knowledge workers.

There are, however, certain considerations that affect the ways in which roles can be developed in order to increase satisfaction with the work and to encourage growth. These considerations can also apply to jobs and this chapter therefore starts with a general review of the factors that affect job design and that are also relevant to role building. Attention is then directed to approaches to job design, which include the notion of job enrichment. Consideration is next given to the characteristics of team roles and what can be done to set up and maintain effective self-managed teams and high-performance work design. Finally, the focus is on roles and how they can be *developed* rather than designed in today's flexible organizations on the basis of an understanding of what role holders are expected to achieve, the scope they have to go beyond these basic expectations and the capabilities they need to carry out and extend their role.

## FACTORS AFFECTING JOB DESIGN

The content of jobs is affected by the purpose of the organization or the organizational unit, the particular demands that achieving that purpose makes on the people involved, the structure of the organization, the processes and activities carried out in the organization, the technology of the organization, the changes that are taking place in that technology and the environment in which the organization operates. Job design has therefore to be considered within the context of organizational design, as described in Chapter 22, but it must also take into account the following factors:

- the process of intrinsic motivation;
- the characteristics of task structure;
- the motivating characteristics of jobs;
- the significance of the job characteristics model;
- providing intrinsic motivation.

### *The process of intrinsic motivation*

The case for using job design techniques is based on the premise that effective performance and genuine satisfaction in work follow mainly from the intrinsic content of the job. This is related to the fundamental concept that people are motivated when they are provided with the means to achieve their goals. Work provides the means to earn money, which as an extrinsic reward satisfies basic needs and is instrumental in providing ways of satisfying higher-level needs. But work also provides intrinsic rewards, which are under the direct control of the worker.

### *Characteristics of task structure*

Job design requires the assembly of a number of tasks into a job or a group of jobs. An individual may carry out one main task, which consists of a number of interrelated elements or functions. Or task functions may be allocated to a team working closely together in a manufacturing 'cell' or customer service unit, or strung along an assembly line. In more complex jobs, individuals may carry out a variety of connected tasks, each with a number of functions, or these tasks may be allocated to a team of workers or divided between them. In the latter case, the tasks may require a variety of skills, which have to be possessed by all members of the team (multi-skilling) in order to work flexibly.

Complexity in a job may be a reflection of the number and variety of tasks to be carried out, the different skills or competences to be used, the range and scope of the decisions that have to be made, or the difficulty of predicting the outcome of decisions.

The internal structure of each task consists of three elements: planning (deciding on the course of action, its timing and the resources required), executing (carrying out the plan), and controlling (monitoring performance and progress and taking corrective action when required). A completely integrated job includes all these elements for each of the tasks involved. The worker, or group of workers, having been given objectives in terms of output, quality and cost targets, decides on how the work is to be done, assembles the resources, performs the work, and monitors output, quality and cost standards. Responsibility in a job is measured by the amount of authority someone has to do all these things.

### *Motivating characteristics of jobs*

The ideal arrangement from the point of view of intrinsic motivation is to provide for fully integrated jobs containing all three task elements. In practice, management and team leaders are often entirely responsible for planning and control, leaving the

worker responsible for execution. To a degree, this is inevitable, but one of the aims of job design is often to extend the responsibility of workers into the functions of planning and control. This can involve empowerment – giving individuals and teams more responsibility for decision making and ensuring that they have the training, support and guidance to exercise that responsibility properly.

### *The job characteristics model*

A useful perspective on the factors affecting job design and motivation is provided by Hackman and Oldham's (1974) job characteristics model. They suggest that the 'critical psychological states' of 'experienced meaningfulness of work, experienced responsibility for outcomes of work and knowledge of the actual outcomes of work' strongly influence motivation, job satisfaction and performance.

As Robertson *et al* (1992) point out: 'This element of the model is based on the notion of personal reward and reinforcement... Reinforcement is obtained when a person becomes aware (knowledge of results) that he or she has been responsible for (experienced responsibility) and good performance on a task that he or she cares about (experienced meaningfulness).'

### *Providing intrinsic motivation*

Three characteristics have been distinguished by Lawler (1969) as being required in jobs if they are to be intrinsically motivating:

- *Feedback* – individuals must receive meaningful feedback about their performance, preferably by evaluating their own performance and defining the feedback. This implies that they should ideally work on a complete product, or a significant part of it that can be seen as a whole.
- *Use of abilities* – the job must be perceived by individuals as requiring them to use abilities they value in order to perform the job effectively.
- *Self-control* – individuals must feel that they have a high degree of self-control over setting their own goals and over defining the paths to these goals.

## JOB DESIGN

Job design has been defined by Davis (1966) as: 'The specification of the contents, methods, and relationships of jobs in order to satisfy technological and organizational requirements as well as the social and personal requirements of the job holder'.

Job design has two aims: first, to satisfy the requirements of the organization for productivity, operational efficiency and quality of product or service, and second, to satisfy the needs of the individual for interest, challenge and accomplishment, thus providing for 'job engagement' – commitment to carrying out the job well. Clearly, these aims are interrelated and the overall objective of job design is to integrate the needs of the individual with those of the organization.

The process of job design starts, as described in Chapter 13, from an analysis of what work needs to be done – the tasks that have to be carried out if the purpose of the organization or an organizational unit is to be achieved. The job designer can then consider how the jobs can be set up to provide the maximum degree of intrinsic motivation for those who have to carry them out with a view to improving performance and productivity. Consideration has also to be given to another important aim of job design: to fulfil the social responsibilities of the organization to the people who work in it by improving the quality of working life, an aim which, as stated in Wilson's (1973) report on this subject, 'depends upon both efficiency of performance and satisfaction of the worker'. The outcome of job design may be a job description, as explained in Chapter 13, although as noted in that chapter, the emphasis today is more on roles and the development of role profiles.

### *Principles of job design*

Robertson and Smith (1985) suggest the following five principles of job design:

- To influence skill variety, provide opportunities for people to do several tasks and combine tasks.
- To influence task identity, combine tasks and form natural work units.
- To influence task significance, form natural work units and inform people of the importance of their work.
- To influence autonomy, give people responsibility for determining their own working systems.
- To influence feedback, establish good relationships and open feedback channels.

Turner and Lawrence (1965) identified six important characteristics, which they called 'requisite task characteristics', namely: variety, autonomy, required interactions, optional interactions, knowledge and skill, and responsibility. And Cooper (1973) outlined four conceptually distinct job dimensions: variety, discretion, contribution and goal characteristics.

An integrated view suggests that the following motivating characteristics are of prime importance in job design:

- autonomy, discretion, self-control and responsibility;
- variety;
- use of abilities;
- feedback;
- belief that the task is significant.

These are the bases of the approach used in job enrichment, as described later in this chapter.

### *Approaches to job design*

The main job design approaches are:

- *Job rotation*, which comprises the movement of employees from one task to another to reduce monotony by increasing variety.
- *Job enlargement*, which means combining previously fragmented tasks into one job, again to increase the variety and meaning of repetitive work.
- *Job enrichment*, which goes beyond job enlargement to add greater autonomy and responsibility to a job and is based on the job characteristics approach.
- *Self-managing teams (autonomous work groups)* – these are self-regulating teams who work largely without direct supervision. The philosophy on which this technique is based is a logical extension of job enrichment.
- *High-performance work design*, which concentrates on setting up working groups in environments where high levels of performance are required.

Of these five approaches, it is generally recognized that, although job rotation and job enlargement have their uses in developing skills and relieving monotony, they do not go to the root of the requirements for intrinsic motivation and for meeting the various motivating characteristics of jobs as described above. These are best satisfied by using, as appropriate, job enrichment, autonomous work groups or high-performance work design.

## JOB ENRICHMENT

Job enrichment aims to maximize the interest and challenge of work by providing the employee with a job that has these characteristics:

- It is a complete piece of work in the sense that the worker can identify a series of tasks or activities that end in a recognizable and definable product.

- It affords the employee as much variety, decision-making responsibility and control as possible in carrying out the work.
- It provides direct feedback through the work itself on how well the employee is doing his or her job.

Job enrichment as proposed by Herzberg (1968) is not just increasing the number or variety of tasks; nor is it the provision of opportunities for job rotation. It is claimed by supporters of job enrichment that these approaches may relieve boredom, but they do not result in positive increases in motivation.

## SELF-MANAGING TEAMS

A self-managing team or autonomous work group is allocated an overall task and given discretion over how the work is done. This provides for intrinsic motivation by giving people autonomy and the means to control their work, which will include feedback information. The basis of the autonomous work group approach to job design is socio-technical systems theory, which suggests that the best results are obtained if grouping is such that workers are primarily related to each other by way of task performance and task interdependence. As Emery (1980) has stated:

In designing a social system to efficiently operate a modern capital-intensive plant the key problem is that of creating self-managing groups to man the interface with the technical system.

A self-managing team:

- enlarges individual jobs to include a wider range of operative skills (multi-skilling);
- decides on methods of work and the planning, scheduling and control of work;
- distributes tasks itself among its members.

The advocates of self-managing teams or autonomous work groups claim that this approach offers a more comprehensive view of organizations than the rather simplistic individual motivation theories that underpin job rotation, enlargement and enrichment. Be that as it may, the strength of this system is that it does take account of the social or group factors and the technology as well as the individual motivators.

## HIGH-PERFORMANCE WORK DESIGN

High-performance work design, as described by Buchanan (1987), requires the following steps:

- Management clearly defines what it needs in the form of new technology or methods of production and the results expected from its introduction.
- Multi-skilling is encouraged – that is, job demarcation lines are eliminated as far as possible and encouragement and training are provided for employees to acquire new skills.
- Equipment that can be used flexibly is selected and is laid out to allow freedom of movement and vision.
- Self-managed teams or autonomous working groups are established, each with around a dozen members and with full ‘back-to-back’ responsibility for product assembly and testing, fault-finding and some maintenance.
- Managers and team leaders adopt a supportive rather than an autocratic style (this is the most difficult part of the system to introduce).
- Support systems are provided for kit-marshalling and material supply, which help the teams to function effectively as productive units.
- Management sets goals and standards for success.
- The new system is introduced with great care by means of involvement and communication programmes.
- Thorough training is carried out on the basis of an assessment of training needs.
- The payment system is specially designed with employee participation to fit their needs as well as those of management.
- Payment may be related to team performance (team pay), but with skill-based pay for individuals.
- In some cases, a ‘peer performance review’ process may be used which involves team members assessing one another’s performance as well as the performance of the team as a whole.

## ROLE DEVELOPMENT

Job design as described above takes place when a new job is created or an existing job is substantially changed, often following a reorganization. But the part people play in carrying out their jobs – their roles – can evolve over time as people grow into them and grow with them, and as incremental changes take place in the scope of the work and the degree to which individuals are free to act (their autonomy). Roles will be



developed as people develop in them, responding to opportunities and changing demands, acquiring new skills and developing competencies.

Role development is a continuous process which takes place in the context of day to day work, and it is therefore a matter between managers and the members of their teams. It involves agreeing definitions of key results areas and competency requirements as they evolve. When these change – as they probably will in all except the most routine jobs – it is desirable to achieve mutual understanding of new expectations. The forces should be on role flexibility – giving people the chance to develop their roles by making better and extended use of their skills and capabilities.

The process of understanding how roles are developing and agreeing the implications can take place within the framework of performance management as described in Part VII, where the performance agreement, which is updated regularly, spells out the outcomes (key result areas) and the competency requirements. It is necessary to ensure that managers, team leaders and employees generally acquire the skills necessary to define roles within the performance management framework, taking into account the principles of job design set out earlier in this chapter. Ways in which role profiles can be set out are described in Chapter 13.