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Job and Role Design and Development

Key concepts and terms

- Intrinsic motivation
- Job design
- Job enrichment
- Job characteristics model
- Job enlargement
- Job rotation

Learning outcomes

On completing this chapter you should be able to define these key concepts. You should also know about:

- The factors affecting job design
- Task structure
- Role development
- The characteristics of jobs
- Approaches to job design

Introduction

This chapter deals with designing jobs and developing roles. Obtaining the information for this purpose may use the analytical techniques described in Chapter 26, but as organizations grow and introduce new activities or technology, different methods of working such as smart working (see Chapter 23) may have to be devised and this will affect the content of jobs and the purposes of roles. To obtain the maximum benefit from such developments, it is necessary to ensure that the structure of jobs or roles and the demands they make on job or role holders will enhance motivation, engagement and commitment. The contents, methods and relationships of jobs or roles must satisfy technological and organizational requirements, but they should also meet the personal needs of the individuals concerned. These two aims may not always be easy to reconcile, but the attempt must be made if the maximum benefits from technological and organizational change are to be obtained.

A distinction was made between jobs and roles at the beginning of Chapter 26. Essentially jobs consist of an impersonal list of tasks or duties. They are fixed entities, part of a machine that can be 'designed' like any other part of a machine. Routine or machine-controlled jobs 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 people and their interactions with one another and their customers, clients and suppliers. A role is the part people play in their work – the emphasis is on the patterns of behaviour expected of them in order to achieve agreed outcomes rather than a set of duties they have to carry out. Jobs are about tasks; roles are about people. This distinction means that while jobs may be designed to fit work requirements, roles are developed as people work flexibly, demonstrate that they can do more and take on different responsibilities.

This chapter starts with job design: what it is and the factors to be taken into account in carrying it out. The second part of the chapter covers role development, a much more flexible process, but the criteria for ensuring that roles help to motivate people and foster engagement and commitment are fundamentally the same as those related to job design.

Job design

Job design specifies the contents, methods and relationships of jobs in order to satisfy work requirements for productivity, efficiency and quality, meet the personal needs of the job holder and thus increase levels of employee engagement.

The process of job design is based on an analysis of the way in which work needs to be organized and what work therefore 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. This is where the techniques of process planning and systems analysis are used to achieve improvement in

organizational performance. They concentrate on the work to be done, not the worker. They may lead to a high degree of task specialization and assembly line processing; of paper work as well as physical products. More desirably, it can also lead to the maximization of individual responsibility and the opportunity to use personal skills.

It is necessary, however, to distinguish between efficiency and effectiveness. The most efficient method may maximize outputs in relation to inputs in the short run, but it may not be effective in the longer term in that it fails to achieve the overall objectives of the activity. The pursuit of short-term efficiency by imposing the maximum degree of task specialization may reduce longer-term effectiveness by demotivating job holders and increasing employee turnover and absenteeism.

Job design has to start from work requirements because that is why the job exists. When the tasks to be done have been determined it should then be the function of the job designer to 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'.

Factors affecting job design

Job design is fundamentally affected by 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 organization design, as described in Chapter 23, but it must also take into account the following factors.

Factors affecting job design
- The characteristics of jobs.
- The characteristics of task structure.
- The process of intrinsic motivation.
- The job characteristics model.
- The implications of group activities.

The characteristics of jobs

There are three fundamental characteristics shared by all jobs:

1. Job range – the number of operations a job holder performs to complete a task.

2. Job depth – the amount of discretion a job holder has to decide job activities and job outcomes.

3. Job relationships – the interpersonal relationships between job holders and their managers and co-workers.

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 that consists of a number of interrelated elements or functions. Alternatively, 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 (multi-tasking), 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 that 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 competencies 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.

The ideal arrangement from the point of view of motivation and engagement 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.

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 related to achievement, responsibility and the opportunity to use and develop skills that are more under the control of the worker.

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

SOURCE REVIEW

Intrinsic motivating characteristics of jobs, Lawler (1969)

1. 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.

2. 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.

3. 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.

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. They identified the following characteristics of jobs that need to be taken into account in job design.

Job characteristics, Hackman and Oldman (1974)

1. Variety.

2. Autonomy.

3. Required interaction.

4. Optional interaction.

5. Knowledge and skill required.

6. Responsibility.

Approaches to job design

Job design starts with an analysis of task requirements, using the job analysis techniques described in Chapter 26. These requirements will be a function of the purpose of the organization, its technology and its structure. The analysis has also to take into account the decision-making process – where and how decisions are made and the extent to which responsibility is devolved to individuals and work teams.

Approaches to job design, Robertson and Smith (1985)

1. Influence skill variety by providing opportunities for people to do several tasks and by combining tasks.

2. Influence task identity by combining tasks and forming natural work units.

3. Influence task significance by forming natural work units and informing people of the importance of their work.

4. Influence autonomy by giving people responsibility for determining their own working systems.

5. Influence feedback by establishing good relationships and opening feedback channels.

These approaches are used as the basis for the methods of job design described below.

1. Job rotation

This is the movement of employees from one task to another to reduce monotony by increasing variety.

2. Job enlargement

This means combining previously fragmented tasks into one job, again to increase the variety and meaning of repetitive work.

3. Job enrichment

This goes beyond job enlargement to add greater autonomy and responsibility to a job and is based on the job characteristics approach. 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.

As described by Herzberg (1968), job enrichment is not just increasing the number or variety of tasks; nor is it the provision of opportunities for job rotation. These approaches may relieve boredom, but they do not result in positive increases in motivation.

4. 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 but is strongly influenced by socio-technical systems theory (see Chapter 21). 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 and monitors its own performance, taking corrective action when required.

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.

5. High-performance work design

This concentrates on setting up working groups in environments where high levels of performance can be achieved. As described by Buchanan (1987), this requires management to define what it needs in the form of methods of production and the results expected from its introduction. It involves multi-skilling – job demarcation lines are eliminated as far as possible and encouragement and training are provided for employees to acquire new skills. Self-managed teams are set up with full responsibility for planning, controlling and monitoring the work.

Choice of approach

Of the five approaches described above, 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. These are best satisfied by using, as appropriate, job enrichment, autonomous work groups, or high-performance work design.

Role development

Role development is the continuous process through which roles are defined or modified as work proceeds and evolves. 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 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 have freedom 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 that takes place in the context of day-to-day work and is therefore a matter between managers and the members of their teams. It involves agreeing definitions of accountabilities, objectives 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 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.

Job and role design and development – key learning points

The factors affecting job design

- The characteristics of jobs.
- The characteristics of task structure.
- The process of intrinsic motivation.
- The job characteristics model.
- The implications of group activities.

The characteristics of jobs

- Job range – the number of operations a job holder performs to complete a task.
- Job depth – the amount of discretion a job holder has to decide job activities and job outcomes.
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Task structure

Job design requires the assembly of a number of tasks into a job or a group of jobs. Individuals may carry out a variety of connected tasks (multi-tasking), each with a number of functions, or these tasks may be allocated to a team of workers or divided between them. 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.

Approaches to job design (Robertson and Smith, 1985)

- Influence skill variety by providing opportunities for people to do several tasks and by combining tasks.
- Influence task identity by combining tasks and forming natural work units.
- Influence task significance by forming natural work units and informing people of the importance of their work.
- Influence autonomy by giving people responsibility for determining their own working systems.
- Influence feedback by establishing good relationships and opening feedback channels.

Role development

Role development is the continuous process through which roles are defined or modified as work proceeds and evolves.

Questions

1.   What is the process of job design?

2.   What are the factors affecting job design?

3.   What are the intrinsically motivating characteristics of jobs?

4.   What is the job characteristics model?

5.   How is role development carried out?

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