

# Job Design Factsheet

## 1. Introduction

In today's modern workplace the concept of formal job design can often be considered as passé and old-fashioned, with many employers believing that job design is simply irrelevant for their organisation.

However, there are still a number of clear advantages to job design as part of a combined approach to workforce strategy and planning. Carefully considered job design and its implementation will ensure that the organisation is equipped to deliver its current objectives whilst, at the same time, building the flexibility and responsiveness to meet changing business needs by ensuring that the workforce is well supported and engaged with the organisation's mission.

The practice of job design planning requires a careful balance between the operational requirements and flexibility of the organisation and, at the same time, consideration of the needs of the employee whilst ensuring that sustainable delivery of the desired organisational outcomes can be achieved.

The link between task and engagement is key, and it is important to ensure that this connection is recognised and that employees gain a sense meaning and fulfilment from their job.

## 2. What is job design?

The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development describe job design as the process of deciding on the contents of a job in terms of:

- its duties and responsibilities
- the methods to be used in carrying out the job
- techniques, systems and procedures
- the relationships that should exist between the job holder and his superior subordinates and colleagues.

The benefit of job design, or re-design, could include:

- reducing or overcoming [job](#) dissatisfaction and [employee alienation](#) arising from repetitive and [mechanistic tasks](#)
- improved productivity by offering challenges and [non-monetary rewards](#) such as greater [satisfaction](#) from a sense of personal achievement in [meeting](#) the increased challenge of the work
- increasing responsibility levels through job design techniques such as job enlargement, job enrichment, job rotation, job simplification and other [techniques](#) used in a job design [exercise](#)

### **3. The history and development of job design**

Job design first appeared during the industrial revolution when it was necessary to measure and sequence human inputs alongside machinery to achieve the highest possible efficiency. These methods were known as 'scientific management' and two important (but now dated) concepts emerged.

'Method study' examined the efficiency of how and why jobs are done or sequenced, and today can be found in business process re-engineering. 'Work measurement' aimed to establish the time needed to complete tasks, which is important for resource planning and cost control. However, in today's workplace there is a greater focus on output measures and less weight is given to time standards in job design.

Over time behavioural considerations began to be included within job design following the rise of theories of motivation. This approach took into account the need for jobs which keep people interested and challenged.

Gradually responsibility shifted to individuals, empowering employees with more autonomy over how to perform some aspects of their job. Eventually team working devolved responsibility for job design down to the team, giving the team control over how and who will perform certain tasks.

Finally, flexible working approaches were introduced as more and more organisations found themselves needing to respond to ever-changing business needs. These approaches to job design made sure that employers could meet changes in business demands by enabling employees to do more than one job concurrently, allowing certain tasks to be completed outside of regular working hours and providing the option for increased flexibility regarding the location where the work is carried out. In exchange employees are given greater flexibility about when and where they carry out their tasks.

### **4. What are the main factors influencing job design?**

Factors influencing job design cover three main areas:

1. organisational
2. environmental/technological
3. employee behaviours

#### **Organisational factors**

- The nature, range and volume of tasks to be performed in the job
- The workflow which reflects the sequence and relationship between tasks to reach the required outcomes
- Ergonomics which involves the modelling of the job to best fit the physical capabilities of humans. This could also include any reasonable adjustments that might be required to ensure the job can be carried out by someone with a disability

- The usual work practices of that particular organisation or sector (for example, team working) will also impact on how tasks are designed and carried out

### Environmental/technological factors

- Developments in technology which allow tasks to be performed more efficiently or in a different way (for example, automation or computerisation)
- The availability of skills
- Demand from customers (for example, the expectation for 24/7 availability)

### Employee/behavioural factors

- Employee health and well-being, which means ensuring that jobs do not damage employees either physically or mentally
- Ensuring that the job reflects the abilities, strengths and aspirations of employees
- Managing performance to ensure that employees are rewarded and recognised
- Making sure that employees achieve job satisfaction
- Designing jobs that provide meaningful, stimulating and challenging work whilst also delivering on the organisation's strategic goals
- Making certain that the resources available support the job sufficiently and also allow employees to work flexibly and achieve a work-life balance

## 5. What are the main objectives of job design?

The main objectives of job design will vary between employers depending on specific business demands and the organisation's own individual approach to job design.

However, the following objectives will feature in most cases:

- **Business purpose.** Job design should support the organisation to achieve its purpose and goals, and to be successful in what it does. For example, the organisation's purpose could be to provide a particular service, and the job design should support that purpose
- **People capability.** Jobs are designed around the requirements of the business. However, the job design is also dependent on both the capabilities of existing employees, and also the skills available in the wider job market. At the same job design should encourage people to develop their abilities
- **Quality.** Jobs should be designed to minimise the risk of errors and to ensure the highest possible quality standards. This usually means making it necessary for employees to carry out some level of self-

checking. In some cases there will also be a need for continuity of service or 24-hour availability

- **Speed.** Jobs should be designed to ensure that the timeliness of task completion is appropriate to the job. For example, the measure of performance may be the time taken to produce a product or deal with a query. In the case of an emergency, the speed and appropriateness of the response is probably the most important feature of the job
- **Health and safety.** The well-being and safety of the job holder must be of paramount importance at all times. Therefore jobs must be designed to ensure they are not putting employees, their colleagues, customers or other individuals at risk
- **Productivity.** Jobs must be designed to ensure the main focus of the employee is on matters that are important and that add value to the business
- **Sustainability.** Jobs should be designed to ensure they can be maintained over a period of time, allowing the organisation to respond flexibly to economic, social and political changes. At the same time consideration should also be given to growth of the role over time to take advantage of developing individual and organisational capabilities
- **Quality of working life.** It is vital that employees are motivated by their work, and that unnecessary and prolonged stress is avoided or kept to a minimum. Therefore job design should always incorporate flexibility, breadth and challenge. At the same time there should be an assurance of job security wherever possible. The factors influencing quality of working life are explored in further detail in Section 7 below.

## 6. What are the most important influences on individual and organisational performance?

Research has shown that task engagement is the most significant influence on organisational performance. Other studies argue the benefits of designing jobs to best fit the individual and also providing appropriate support to enable employees to cope in a variety of situations. (For example, dealing with difficult customers).

Job design has always been seen to have an influence on achieving high performance. For example, the design of a job can ensure that employees have the opportunity to use their skills and motivation. However, research has also shown that simply having the practice in place will not make a difference to performance, it is how it is applied and why that matters.

The role of the line manager is also a key influence on performance. Line management exercise control over the workflow and allocation of task and, therefore, have the power to encourage and drive engagement through job design.

However, if managers are perceived to be exercising their powers unfairly it will have significant implications as poor line management can undermine engagement, and consequently performance.

### **7. In what ways can an employee's quality of working life be improved through job design?**

The following factors should be taken into consideration when designing job roles to ensure that employees experience a high quality of working life:

1. **Variety** – Increasing variety in a job, and minimising repetition, can improve the interest, challenge and commitment of the job holder. Repetitive tasks can lead to employees becoming bored and dissatisfied. Variety doesn't just mean adding another similar duty. Instead another relevant activity could be incorporated into the job. However, employers should also be mindful that too much variety can actually be frustrating and lead to dissatisfaction. An appropriate level of variety will differ from person to person and will depend on the level of the position, and the needs of the job.
2. **Responsibility** – Employees need to feel responsible for the work they are doing. They should be able to understand the significance of the work they carry out and where it fits into the overall purpose and mission of the organisation. Each employee's work should be clearly identified so they can see that they are personally responsible for the outcomes – both the successes and failures
3. **Autonomy** – Autonomy means giving more scope to individuals to control their own work within the limitations set for the job. The role holder will need to have some areas of decision-making within the overall framework of their job.
4. **Task identity** – Employees usually receive more satisfaction from doing a 'whole' piece of work which has a clear beginning and end point. Employees get a sense of achievement when they can see the end results of the work they have produced.
5. **Feedback** – Everyone benefits from feedback on how they are doing, and this increases motivation and contributes to employee development. Providing feedback is mainly the responsibility of the line manager, and can be delivered during regular one-to-one supervision meetings. As well as information on the standard of their performance, the role holder will need to know what their personal targets are and

how they relate to the overall operation of the organisation. Colleagues and customers should also be encouraged to give appropriate feedback and recognition to members of staff.

6. **Participation in decision making** – Most employees want to be involved in decision making about matters that directly affect their work. Effective involvement and exchange of ideas can be extremely motivating, and people are far more likely to act upon and own decisions that they have had a part in making. A lack of participation in decision making can lead to low levels of job satisfaction and decreased motivation, meaning an employee may fail contribute to their full potential.
7. **Recognition and support** – People usually aspire to have jobs that contribute to a feeling of self-worth, particularly through acceptance and recognition by colleagues and managers. Jobs should encourage positive working relationships between individuals, provide clearly defined areas of responsibility and support team working where possible. This can reduce an individual's feeling of isolation, which may result in negative feelings about work and the workplace.
8. **Working environment** – As well as health and safety considerations (as above), employers should also ensure that the working environment is inclusive, non-discriminatory and free from harassment.

#### 8. What are the different approaches to job design?

The approach taken to job design will have a significant impact on the outcomes. There are many different approaches to job design which can generally be described under three main headings:

1. mechanistic
2. motivational
3. job characteristics

#### Mechanistic

The mechanistic approach assumed that all jobs could be broken down into a series of sequenced tasks to assist productivity and efficiency, with workers closely supervised in terms of task allocation and time allowances. However, the production line model resulted in repetitive tasks with little independence or autonomy for workers, although this situation was improved slightly through job rotation provided some variety and job enrichment.

#### Motivational

Research demonstrated the human need for work to be meaningful, and give the employee a sense of self-worth over and above the satisfaction of the basic needs for shelter, food and security.



This approach argues that employees will only be fulfilled, satisfied and productive when the job content includes recognition, advancement and personal growth. This approach encourages employees to take more responsibility for how they perform their roles to provide further job enrichment.

### **Job characteristics**

The job characteristics approach to job design is largely based on the theory that employees will perform well when they are rewarded for the work they do and when that work provides fulfilment and satisfaction.

This suggests that:

- the job characteristics themselves should be fundamentally motivating
- employees should have sufficient variety in the tasks carried out
- employees should have a level of autonomy over how and what task they do
- there is clarity on the required outcomes
- timely and constructive feedback on performance should be provided

(Also see Section 7 above)

In some roles job standardisation is inevitable (for example, on a production line). However, employers should ensure that jobs are not over-standardisation to the point that the needs of the individual are not considered in the job design.

### **9. Summary – questions to consider when designing a job**

The University of Cambridge suggest that the following questions may be useful to consider when designing a job:

- How suitable is the amount of variety in the position?
- How much responsibility is there in the position?
- How much opportunity does the position give for autonomy?
- To what extent are the duties and tasks to be performed 'whole' tasks?
- How much feedback is provided about performance?
- How much opportunity is provided for participating in decisions?
- To what extent does the position provide for support and recognition?
- Is there a safe and healthy work environment?

The following checklist may also be helpful in the process of job design. Does the position:

- Carry out tasks using a range of knowledge and skills?
- Have clear objectives?

- Combine a variety of tasks which together form a coherent whole?
- Constitute a significant contribution to the total function of the organisation, which can be readily communicated to the staff member?
- Provide problem solving opportunities, appropriate developmental growth potential and a reasonable degree of challenge?
- Allow for an appropriate level of discretion and decision making by the roleholder?
- Optimise the utilisation of existing skills?
- Optimise potential for the acquisition of new skills which improve opportunities for career development?
- Incorporate working arrangements that provide for tasks covering a variety of subject matter, pace and method of work, experience and training?
- Ensure in its design, the job is directly responsive to the needs of the organisation?
- Assure occupational health and safety and the well-being of the role holder within the design of the job?
- Achieve physical and social integration with other positions and staff in the workplace?
- Achieve neutrality in relation to assumptions about the sex, race or other possible discriminatory factors unless this is needed by a particular job?

**Notes compiled by Clare Cooper with information from the following sources:**

- 1. CIPD**
- 2. University of Cambridge – Principle of Job Design**
- 3. The Business Dictionary**

**March 2014**