Work Design and Job Satisfaction

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Abstract

In this study, it is argued that job design, job enlargement, job rotation, etc and job changes, can have positive effect on motivation because they can help individuals beliefs about the probability that certain rewards will emanate from putting forth high levels of effort. The study also feels that there are good reasons to believe that enlarging jobs can lead to situation where jobs are more intrinsically motivating. The study examined earlier works of Herzberg, Hepworth, Maslow Hackman and Lawler etc, and concluded that the more satisfied a worker is on the job, the more effective he/she will be in performing the assigned tasks or works. Key words: job design, job satisfaction, employee motivation, enriched work, job re-design performance, job enrichment, productivity, job rotation.

Introduction

The evolvement of jobs in the past was not planned. The practice was for the supervisor or foreman to assign workers to tasks and to randomly group tasks into jobs. For example, like carpentry, iron bending, electrical work, etc the content of each trade evolved through tradition and by initiation. However, psychological literature on employee motivation contains claims that the design of work, its content and structure, affect both productivity and employee motivation and morale. There have therefore been many approaches and theories to the design of works.

An early reaction to the scientific management philosophy of fitting men to machines was the Endeavour of human relations advocates to meet workers' social needs in the work environment, while doing little about the nature of the work itself. However, with the increasing recognition of the complexity of human motivation, many modern theorists have argued that specialized and simplified work, leads to monotony, boredom and general dissatisfaction, which as a consequence, manifest themselves in various forms of undesirable work behavior in terms of absenteeism, lateness and frequent job changes. The application of these theories to the design of work has produced a number of measures concerned with altering the content of work and its organization, thus reversing the job specialization trend by adding more varied tasks and broader responsibilities (Hepworth 1982).

However, in an attempt to reduce boredom and therefore increase satisfaction (and it is also assumed that higher productivity will follow), some techniques of work design have been generated. These techniques include: Job Enlargement, Job Rotation, Job Enrichment etc.

- Job enlargement, e.i. a horizontal change involving the addition of more related tasks of the same level of difficulty so as to change the work cycle of an individual's job. Job enlargement is however criticized (Hepworth, 1982) on the grounds that adding more of the same dehumanizing task to an already routine job is unlikely to make it less tedious.
- Job rotation – the formal movement of worker between different jobs usually of the same degree of difficulty on either an obligatory or self-organized basis.
- Fredrick Herzberg's (1966) work advocates Job enrichment – which identifies simplified, short cycle repetitive, low discretion work as detrimental to employee well-being and motivation. The theory proposes that group or individual work should be specifically designed to:

- Require the use of a variety of skills
- Be a whole task is complete and worthwhile in its own right
- Be supported by clear feedback so that employees can assess and monitor their performance, and above all
- To involve employees in exercise of substantial autonomy and decision making in work activities.

Herzberg's work grew out of research on job attitudes, and in establishing his theory (motivation-hygiene) draws heavily upon the hierarchy of needs developed by Maslow. Herzberg stresses that the factors which truly motivate the workers are 'growth' factors, or those that give the worker a sense of personal accomplishment through the challenge of this work itself. In other words, motivation is in the content of the job and the internal dynamics that the worker experiences in completing his task. Herzberg maintains that the context or environmental factors (hygiene) which surround the job cause dissatisfaction when they are in unhealthy conditions. These dissatisfiers may be classed as 'deficit' needs in that their importance is felt only in their absence. For example, bad working conditions are frequently cited by workers as sources of dissatisfaction.

Job design and job satisfaction

The various psychological literatures on employee motivation contains may claims that changes in job design can be expected to produce better employee job performance and job satisfaction – Lawler (1969). Attention has also been drawn to the theory that the re-design of work and jobs as a strategy for organizational change is expected to enhance employee's motivation and performance. However, modern behavioural scientists like Argris, Maslow, McGregor, Likert, Herzberg and others firmly believe that work should be challenging, complex, varied and meaningful so that the higher order needs of employees are satisfied. Thus a job should be redesigned in such a way that it provides satisfaction of higher order needs. This line of thinking, refered to as 'job enrichment', emphasizes psychological growth of an individual through work itself. The job concept of job enrichment is further described as seeking to "improve both efficiency and human satisfaction by means of building into people jobs, quite specifically, a greater scope for personal achievement and recognition, more challenging and responsible work and more opportunity for individual advancement and growth" Paul, Robertson and Hersberg (1969) There are many other theories that have been put forth to explain the concept of job enrichment and to explain why enriched jobs increase one's motivation.

An improvement in job content may stimulate growth needs and the individual would be motivated to satisfy these needs. On the other hand, an improvement in the physical environment or job context factors would only remove dissatisfaction but not increase motivation. Job enrichment has been suggested as a possible answer to the question of motivation of employees. According to Herzberg a job can be enriched by making it more interesting and meaningful. Any improvement in working conditions, interpersonal relations, work methods, financial benefits, job security, etc. will not, motivate employees as these factors are only capable of sustaining and maintaining the achieved level of motivation and performance. What really emerge from Herzberg's theory as action programme for management to improve employee motivation are as follows:

(i)   Recognition and appreciation of work has tremendous capacity to motivate a person to work.
Thus any good performance should not go unnoticed and without a word of praise. There are, however, several ways of appreciating performance, such as verbal praise, assigning higher order tasks or promotion.
(ii)   Outstanding achievements which are desired by many, create problem solving situations, and entrust the responsibility of solving problems to employees.
In addition, these give employees more challenging and complicated assignments which eventually will result into feeling of accomplishment and achievement.
(iii)   Advancement in terms of achieving a higher designation or promotion can be remarkably motivating.
This implies that before filling a vacancy, consideration should be given to the existing staff. If possible, the vacancy should be filled up by internal promotion. The structure of the organization should be such that there is a scope for moving up in the hierarchy.
(iv)   Possibility for the growth and development of skills, abilities, talents and knowledge of employees should be given considerable attention. People, who are more talented than others, could be identified and trained for higher positions. This will give them a chance to be more creative and to develop them. Maximum use of available skills and potentials could be achieved by properly assigning work and by putting the right man at the right place. If workers are to come out with new ideas innovation and creativities it will help in the psychological development.
(v)   Increased responsibility suggests a more complex task. This entrusts more responsibility to capable persons and makes them accountable for completing the assignment, and additionally make them feel more identified and responsible for results.
(vi)   Work itself should be perceived and made challenging, varied, complex and interesting.

This theory provides opportunity to understand the characteristics of different jobs and make improvements accordingly. If a person basically dislikes the contents of his job, no matter how much you try, he may not be motivated. Job content in such cases need to be changed.

Obviously, no job can provide all these ingredients. However, if attempts are made to provide some of these, they may further employee motivation. Considerable evidence is reported in support of positive behavioral and attitudinal change achieved by following the dual factor theory of Herzberg (1968). Another systematic and comprehensive theory of work motivation was developed by Hackman and Lawler. This theory follows earlier works in this area by Herzberg, Mausner and Snyderman (1959) and Lawrence (1965). The empirical work of the Hackman group identifies five core job dimensions and asserts that certain psychological states are achieved through these job dimensions. The core job dimensions of Hackman are:

Skill Variety: The degree to which the performance of a job requires a variety of activities which involve the skills and talents of the person.

Task Identification: The degree to which a job requires completion of a 'whole' and identifiable piece of work – doing a job from beginning to end with a visible outcome.

Task significance: The degree to which a job has substantial and perceivable impact on the lives of people of the organization or society at large.

Autonomy: The degree of independence an employee has for doing his work.

Feedback: The degree to which an employee gets information about how well he is performing his work

This theory emphasizes the job content and suggests that jobs should have certain inherent characteristics. The Herzberg theory revolves around motivators and the Hackman theory around core job dimensions. The Hackman theory throws light on the issue of whether everyone would like enriched work or whether only some people would welcome it.

The specific actions for job enrichment as suggested by the Hackman theory are:

- Forming natural work unit: Distributing work in a logical way is an obvious part of the design of any job. If possible, a job should be assigned to one person or group of persons from the beginning to the end. Thus, the first imperative is to identify the basic work items and to cluster them into natural work units. Work should be assigned naturally rather than randomly. By this, the job holder can clearly see his contribution and this eventually leads to task identity and task significance. Others are:
- Combining tasks.
- Establishing relationships with client.
- Vertical loading, which is one of the most crucial principles of job design, when other changes are not possible or feasible, vertical loading alone can bring remarkable effects on motivation.

Does enriched work lead to job satisfaction?

The two theories used in re-designing of work – socio-technical systems theory of Davis and Trist (1974) and the motivation hygiene theory of Herzberg (1966/68) address the interdependencies between the work itself and the organizational context that surrounds the work. Yet neither approach identifies the specific circumstance under which the context of the work diminishes or enhances the likelihood that employees would respond positively to inherently motivating work content. Moreover, although numerous commentators like, Beer, Hackman, Katzell (1972), Katzell & Yankelovich, Sirota & Wolfson (1972), have cautioned that the health of the broader work system must be carefully examined before improvements in jobs are installed, little is presently known about what specific aspects of the job context are problematic under what circumstances.

However one contextual factor that may moderate the impact of enriched work is the degree to which the immediate work environment is satisfying to employees. Specifically, when employees are not satisfied with their pay, job security, co-workers, and /or supervisors, their ability to respond positively to a job high in objective motivating potential may be severely diminished. Implicitly, the active dissatisfaction with such contextual factors distracts the attention of employees from the work itself and orients their energy instead, towards coping with the experienced problems. Therefore, it is only when such problems are resolved (or psychologically adapted to) do employees become able to experience, appreciate and respond to the inherent 'richness' of their work.

For individuals relatively satisfied with the work context, on the other hand, more energy should be available for use in behaviourally exploring the rewards that can be gained from work on an enriched job.

It is expected, therefore that the relationship between the objectives motivating potential of a job and positive work outcomes should be stronger for individuals who are relatively satisfied with their pay, job security, co-workers and/ or supervisors than people who are actively dissatisfied with their aspects of the work context. Oldham's (1972), findings provide some support for this prediction albeit, only for satisfaction with interpersonal relationships on the job. A number of studies have shown that individual's growth need strength moderates the relationships between the motivating potential of a job and employee reactions. Brief & Aldag (1975) Hackman and Lawler (1971).

Specifically, according to Oldham et. al. (1972), individuals who have a high need for personal growth and development at work have been shown to respond more positively to enriched work than people with low growth need strength – apparently because high growth need individuals, more strongly value the internal rewards that can be obtained from good performance on a challenging task. This study provides an opportunity to replicate further these findings, while examining how employees need states and their level of satisfaction with the work context combine to affect reactions to enriched work. From Oldham's et. al. research, the following predictions are made:

(1) When employees are well satisfied with the work context and have strong needs for growth MPS- (Motivating Potential Score) outcome relationship are strong and positive.

(2) When employees are well-satisfied with the work content but have weak needs for growth, MPS outcome relationships are moderately weak. The same prediction is made for employees who are dis-satisfied with the contextual factors but have strong needs for growth. In both of these conditions the moderating variables counteract one another to prevent strong positive MPS outcomes relationships from occurring.

(3) Finally, when employees are dissatisfied with the work context, and have weak needs for growth, MPS-outcome relationships are near zero.

Under such circumstances, employees are expected to be simultaneously distracted from whatever richness exists in the work itself (because of their dissatisfaction with contextual factors) and oriented toward satisfactions other than those that can come from effective performance on enriched tasks (because of their low growth need strength).

Consequently, the level of motivating potential of the job should have no major effect on work motivation or productivity. Indeed, it is conceivable under such circumstances that, a job high in motivating potential could actually impair work motivation and productivity because employees whose needs and energies are elsewhere could find themselves psychologically overwhelmed by the demands of the work. Results of this study provide support for the proposition that growth needs and the work context (individual and in combinations) moderate relationship between job complexity and outcome measures. Individuals who are desirous of growth satisfactions at work tend to perform at higher levels when working on complex and challenging jobs than employees not desirous of growth satisfactions replicating earlier research in this area. Additionally, employees tend to respond more satisfied with various aspects of the work context than when they are dissatisfied with contextual factors. Specifically, employees who are relatively satisfied with their pay and security in the organization, because of the treatment they receive from their supervisors and their co-workers tend to perform at the highest levels when working on jobs with high motivating potentials.

What are the implications?

The implications of the above findings for change are probably obvious. They suggest that prior to the design of work; practitioners will have to carefully assess both individual differences in need and contextual sources of dissatisfaction. If employees lack desire for growth, need satisfaction and/ or are found to be substantially dissatisfied with pay, security, co-workers, or supervisors, then, implementation of jobs changes should be done with caution and perhaps, should be delayed until the contextual dissatisfaction can be remedied – Oldham, et. al. (1976).

However such implications are reminiscent of the socio-technical systems approach to work redesign, in that it argues that work systems must be substantially in congruence with one another for job improvements to have their intended beneficial effects. The findings of Oldham, et. al., extend and add specificity to the general implications of the socio-technical systems approach in two ways.

First they identify a number of specific aspects of the work context for which employee dissatisfaction is demonstrably important if job improvements are to lead to improved work outcomes.

Secondly, they point out the importance of individual differences in needs as a factor that interacts with job characteristics and with the rest of the social system in determining the eventual impact of work redesign. The study suggests, therefore, that socio-technical theory might be usefully expanded to encompass a full socio-technical personal approach to the redesign of work.

Possible failure/ limitations of job re-design

The possible limitations of job enrichment programmes have been given much less attention than the benefits. A careful study of certain limitations of job enrichment would enable managements to know in advance where it is likely to work and where it is likely to fail. For example, by widening the duties and extending the responsibilities of staff, one can fall into the trap of creating too wide a variety of tasks and inducing frustration. Most employees will accept that, there is a lot of satisfaction to be derived from keeping several balls in the air simultaneously, but there is a point beyond which another ball becomes an irritation, bearable only if some other tasks can be delegated. This problem becomes particularly acute if arrears of work accumulate due to holidays or sickness. Experience has shown that not everyone responds to the challenge of an enriched job: some people are dismayed by more responsibility, wider and more rounded jobs. They like routine and formally structured work; shun responsibility and reserve their energies for out of work pursuits.

Training for increased responsibility can be an overwhelming problem. If the enriched jobs have variety, scope and responsibility, someone's leaving can be disastrous, especially in small sections. One must, therefore, allow time for the adequate training of the whole section and monitor its progress carefully. However, apart from improper implementation which includes a lack of careful diagnosis, a lack of training of personnel involved, poor planning and lack of top management commitment, job enrichment might fail due to many other reasons. Blue-collar employees, for example, are generally more concerned with extrinsic factors than with intrinsic aspects of their job. This implies that job enrichment would be more appealing to white collar employees than to blue collar employees.

Quite often, changes do take place but interfere with surrounding work systems. It is also quite possible that, employees may not be ready to accept changes in their jobs and may react negatively to other aspects of work. At times, too many changes are brought about simultaneously such as on-the-job training, job enrichment, human relations training, and renovation of departments to improve working conditions, redistribution of duties and responsibilities, a new system of performance appraisal, etc. as a result, achievements of job enrichment may clash with failures of other programmes or vice versa. Thus, in practice, job enrichment involves a great deal of careful diagnosis, planning and implementation.

Conclusion

It will seem reasonable to expect that the more satisfied workers are on their job the more effective they will be in performing their assigned task. If the happy worker is the more productive worker, productivity should be enhanced by eliminating negative job attitudes. It could be argued, therefore, that an important component of the modern effort to improve productivity and the quality of work life has been to emphasize job design that contains some or all of the following features:

(1) Autonomy, individual and group decision making for planning and carrying out the work activities
(2) Opportunities for social interaction.
(3) Whole units of work so that employee can experience a sense of accomplishment.
(4) Utilization of a variety of skills and abilities.
(5) Feedback on results achieved permitting self-evaluation of performance.

Although there has been many successful outcomes from work (design) re-design experiments in industry incorporating the foregoing principles, there have also been failures. There is no simple formula that can guarantee success to management in its work design effort. A great many forces are interacting simultaneously in any job-employee-origination-management system. Job content and structure are only part of the system. There are many factors that may influence the success of any particular design strategy. These include the fact that, people are different.

Not every employee wants a challenging job with variety and decision-making responsibility. Some people are contented to work on jobs of simple routine natures people also vary in their need for social interaction. Some prefer to work along while others do better working as part of a group.

Many times, management places people on jobs for which they are either under qualified or overqualified. Consequently, the under qualified worker is frustrated because he lacks the skills to meet the job demands. And the overqualified worker is also frustrated because he finds his job dull and boring.

A major role of work design is in the improvement to quality of working life (QWL) of the employee. In some organizations, significant improvements to QWL could occur when such features as job enlargement and job enrichment are put into practice and the employee's adjustment with the changes may result in his satisfaction with the job.

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