

5.12: Job Design Theories

Learning Outcomes

- Discuss job design theories and characteristics

There are three broad theories of good job design related to human motivation: job relevance, job enlargement, and job enrichment. In order for employees to have a sense of accomplishment in their work, “the job needs to be designed so that the tasks have a clear purpose and relate to the company mission.”^[1] After all, “good job design incorporates tasks that relate to organizational goals and values into every job description.”^[2]

Job Relevance

Significance and relevance isn’t just for high-performance individuals and senior executives. To avoid turnover and engagement issues, this factor should be designed in at every level and length of tenure, from new hire to veteran.

With a focus on specialization and standardization—“man as a machine”—scientific management yielded productivity and profit/wage gains, but at a cost. Although specialization can increase quality and productivity, it can also result in boredom and create a sense of alienation that depresses productivity and job satisfaction.

Job Enlargement



Job enlargement seeks to address this issue by expanding the number of tasks one person is responsible for. For example, instead of performing one task in a series, a worker would be responsible for a series of tasks. Job enlargement needs to be coupled with training to develop competency in performing the additional tasks. If effectively designed, job enlargement can increase satisfaction. Quality may remain high or increase, since there’s a greater understanding of dependencies. However, if job enlargement is perceived to be simply an addition of more rote tasks with no emotional return, satisfaction and productivity will not increase and may in fact decrease further.

Job Enrichment

The theory of job enrichment is attributed to Frederick Herzberg, who famously stated that “if you want people to do a good job, give them a good job to do.” Herzberg believed that “employee satisfaction can be enhanced through ‘job enrichment’—the addition of different tasks associated with a job that provides greater involvement and interaction with that job.” Specifically, he proposed that: “the job must use the full ability of the employee and provide them with sufficient challenge and any employee who demonstrates an increasing level of ability should be given correspondingly increasing levels of responsibility.”^[3]

Practice Question

<https://assessments.lumenlearning.co...essments/18150>

The Job Characteristics Theory

According to DeCenzo, et.al., Herzberg “suggests expanding the content of a job with opportunities for personal growth, advancement, responsibility, interesting work, recognition and achievement to create more opportunities for job satisfaction and motivation.” Organizational psychologists J. Richard Hackman and Greg Oldham built on Herzberg’s theories, developing a job design model (referred to as the job characteristics theory or JCT) based on the following five job characteristics:^[4]

1. **Skill Variety** or the “degree to which a job requires a variety of different activities in carrying out the work, involving the use of a number of different skills and talents of a person.”
2. **Task Identity** or the “degree to which the job requires completion of a whole, identifiable piece of work; that is, doing a job from beginning to end with visible outcome.”
3. **Task Significance** or the “degree to which the job has a substantial impact on the lives of other people, whether those people are in the immediate organization or in the world at large.”
4. **Autonomy** or the “degree to which the job provides substantial freedom, independence, and discretion to the individual in scheduling the work and in determining the procedure to be used in carrying it out.”
5. **Feedback** or the “degree to which carrying out the work activities required by the job provides the individual with direct and clear information about the effectiveness of his or her performance.”

For a reverse—bottom up—perspective on job design, watch Yale School of Management Organizational Behavior professor Dr. Amy Wrzesniewski’s “Job Crafting” presentation at Google



1. DeCenzo, David A., Stephen P. Robbins, and Susan L. Verhulst. 2016. *Fundamentals of Human Resource Management*. New York, NY: John Wiley & Sons. ↵
2. Ibid. ↵
3. Jones, DeEtta. "Want to Motivate Your Staff? Give Them a Good Job to Do." DeEtta Jones Blog. July 16, 2014. Accessed September 12, 2019. ↵
4. Martin. "[Understanding the Job Characteristics Model \(including Job Enrichment\)](#)." *Cleverism*. March 13, 2017. Accessed September 12, 2019. ↵

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