

What is Job Design?

While job analysis focuses on a businesses expectations regarding a specific job, job design is concerned with ensuring that employees are satisfied in their work and that they experience a good quality of life when at work. However, emphasis is still placed on each employee achieving the goals of the business.

How are jobs designed?

Industrial engineering and human engineering are a starting point... and what exactly does those terms mean?

Industrial Engineering

In brief, this is about analysing work methods and establishing time standards. This is achieved by working out how long it takes to do each job function in a series of activities and determining the overall time to achieve a given task.

Once the total time for a 'work cycle' is deduced, it is then adjusted to take into account the skill and effort of the employee(s) performing the task and any interruptions which may affect performance.

The adjusted time for the work cycle provides an objective basis for evaluating an employee's performance.

The benefits to an industrial engineering approach are that it helps determine costs associated with production and it can improve efficiencies and ways of working. It also provides objective data on which to base incentives.

However, this type of approach is not suitable for all jobs and if not handled carefully, it can lead to employee dissatisfaction, which leads on to an increase in absenteeism and turnover. This of course can be heightened if an employee can't achieve the performance expected of them because of unrealistic targets and/or due to poorly maintained, unreliable or outdated equipment.

Human Engineering

Here, we are aiming to identify what the needs of our employees are, helping them to fit into the work environment and indeed adapting the environment to suit them – For example, think how work stations can be designed for comfort and keyboards designed to prevent repetitive strain injury. Human engineering is about improving quality of life in the workplace and just as importantly, making the experience of working more psychologically rewarding.

Back in 1976 Hackman and Oldman did studies which focused on motivation in the workplace and they tied their theories to job design. They proposed that there are three psychological states that be satisfied by 'core job dimensions.' These states were meaningfulness, responsibility and results. The more of these states that an employee experiences at work, the more likely it was believed that they would be motivated in their role. This increased motivation can lead to greater satisfaction, lower turnover and absenteeism and increased productivity. So when looking at job design, we need to consider five 'core job dimensions,':

1. **Skill variety** – the extent to which the requirements of a job utilise the employees skills and abilities:
 - Employees become not only responsible for the complete product/service, but also the quality of the product/ service perhaps including making decisions on materials and processes, identifying what training they require to achieve optimal results and even who should be recruited to their team
2. **Task identity** – the extent to which an employee is responsible for the completion of a whole and identifiable piece of work:
 - Employees may be responsible for the complete assembly of the product or provision of a service within their work team
3. **Task significance** – the extent to which a job impacts on the lives or work of others:
 - The diverse responsibility of each employee may impact on the team they work within or all employees within a business, which may influence the success of the business itself

4. **Autonomy** – the degree to which employees are given the freedom and independence make decisions about and perform their work, as they feel is most appropriate:
 - Employees may be completely responsible for all aspects of their work, they may no longer require a supervisor to control product or service quality, leading to potentially removing supervisory levels within the organisation and reducing overhead costs

5. **Feedback** – the extent to which doing the work activities results in the employee receiving direct feedback regarding their performance:
 - Employees should receive feedback and see the results of their performance through increased quality of the product/service and output efficiency

Job Design Strategies

The most common methods of changing the design of a job are:

- **Enlargement** – increasing the number of responsibilities. Though whilst some may thrive on additional duties, it may be that an employee is not necessarily given more challenging jobs, just more of the same mundane tasks, which can negatively affect job satisfaction and performance
- **Rotation** – this is where employees are moved around, experiencing different job functions and gaining varying experiences. Whilst this can be good in terms of providing variety and ensuring that knowledge is shared, it can be quite a costly exercise for management who have to continually re-train people to perform different functions
- **Enrichment** – this method focuses on making work more rewarding and satisfying, which can ultimately result in job satisfaction and improved performance. Enrichment can be seen in terms of supporting an employee to achieve, gain recognition, take on responsibility, plan, organise or make decisions regarding their work. Though we mustn't think that by enriching a role that it will make up for poor pay or poor working conditions

What adjustments can be introduced to address personal needs?

These are a few ideas and methods that are used in many businesses, though what works will depend on your specific business, industry and the role itself. However, making small changes to job design and to the work schedule can do a lot to help you select and retain the best employees that are essential for driving your business forward.

- Shortened weeks
- Flexible working hours
- Job sharing
- Working from home/hot desking
- Shift work

Reference: Nankervis, A., Crompton, R., & Baird, M. (2002). *Strategic Human Resource Management* (4th ed.). Cincinnati, Ohio: South-Western Publishing Co.