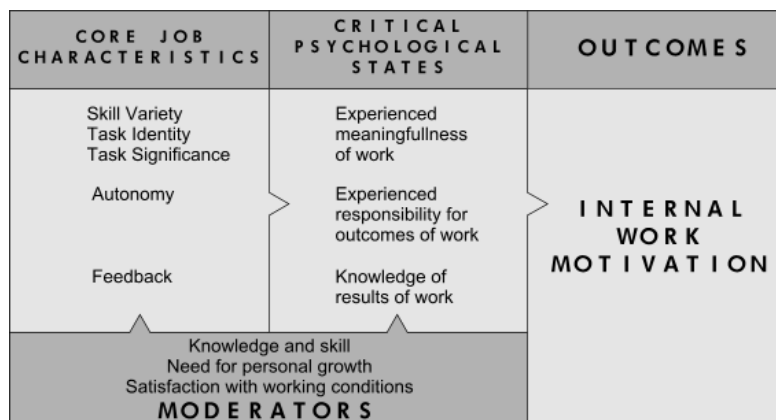




Job Design

Job design was an attempt to influence motivation through work. In Herzberg's motivation-hygiene theory, a distinction is made between work factors that are motivators and hygiene factors. Motivators are thought to be key sources of motivation and to include recognition, achievement, responsibility and personal competence. Hygiene factors company policies, supervisory practices, pay and working conditions. Herzberg proposes that jobs enriched to include motivators will enhance work motivation.

Hackman and Oldham's Job Characteristics model was developed from Herzberg's work on job enrichment. Job characteristics theory claims that an individual will be motivated to work when jobs are designed to satisfy three critical psychological states. These include:



Job Characteristics Model (Hackman and Oldham, 1980)

- the need for meaningful work
- the need to be responsible for work outcomes
- the need for performance feedback.

Task identity is the extent to which a job has an identified outcome, reflecting satisfaction with a sense of completeness or contribution to a task. Task significance reflects the degree to which there are consequences for poor task performance. The motivating potential of a job is thought to be modified by personal characteristics and fit with a job.

Job design has not had the practical impact that it might have had. Blackler et al. (1978) cite a major review of the job design literature, which was criticised for its 'missionary zeal'. It was claimed that only positive results were published and that poor research designs were characteristic of the job design literature. Dean and Snell commented in an influential academic paper in 1991 that job design theory is underdeveloped.

This underdevelopment and lack of widespread practical impact continues today. CIPD recently carried out a detailed review of the job design literature, particularly evaluating Hackman and Oldham's Job Characteristics model. They propose that the model and its more recent developments, carefully implemented, remains valid. However, despite a large body of academic and practitioner literature, a survey of CIPD members indicated a lack of

practitioner interest in deliberately designing job roles. The research report concluded that “while organisations have an ambition to build autonomy and innovation formally into job roles, this is still an aspiration rather than reality” (CIPD, 2008).

Businesses are missing a real trick in their lack of commitment to job design. One of the current workplace trends is that workplaces are fragmenting and becoming more distributed. This has real implications for inter-connectedness and process integration. The UK Work Organisation Network, a network of academics, practitioners and companies, have been researching and collecting case studies on implementing new forms of work organisation for at least a decade (www.ukwon.net).

Two examples summarised from UK WON case studies show how effective job design can be in integrating action and learning across global functions, and across companies working in partnership within supply networks.

Example 1

A European car manufacturer, responding to communication challenges among supply chain companies, developed a range of organisational ‘instruments’ to influence cross-functional and cross-company communication, cooperation and problem-solving. One of the main tactics was the creation of a supplier ‘round table’, a learning network for participants from the manufacturer’s functions (assembly, R&D and finance) and similar personnel from supplier companies. Their remit was to avoid looking backwards and focus on developing ideas for the future. Deadlines and clear responsibilities were allocated, which developed relationships and trust.

Other tactics for exchanging process experience included temporary placement of personnel from the suppliers in the manufacturer’s plant, and creating the position of ‘commuter’. Commuters travel among all companies involved in the supply chain, diagnosing and anticipating problems, initiating dialogues, building trust and mutual understanding.

Example 2

A manufacturer of mobile telephone handsets was designing a new model for the Japanese market. There were two parameters that could potentially cause problems for the company: the handset was to be crammed full of new functionality and over-runs would not be tolerated. Normally, elements of the design process were allocated to separate teams, located in different countries. Problems then arose at the joins, late in development, when fitting the bits together. Costs were incurred in re-work and time to market was delayed.

Applying inside-out-thinking, the company created new design teams around the usual problem areas from the start of product development. Typical product development time was halved by putting together teams of highly skilled individuals from different units, with different specialist knowledge and perspectives, giving them joint responsibility for overcoming problems and integrating functionality as the project developed.

A by-product of this joint, cross-boundary job design within very tight time-scales was there was little opportunity for politics and functional isolationism. Instead, the teams worked together to maximise the learning opportunities from the situation.

While agreeing with the CIPD that the Job Characteristics Model remains valid, it does need to be re-considered to include other workplace dimensions. Recent international research on employee engagement and other research on what young people (so-called Generation Y) consider as a priority when looking for an employer, consistently report that people value meaningful work and the opportunity for learning and development as priority considerations (Towers Perrin, 2007; Gensler, 2008; www.Oxygenz.com forthcoming).

The Job Characteristics Model, as originally developed, focuses on the relationship between the individual person and job content. People in organisations connect within informal networks of relationships. This tendency is becoming much more overt as Generation Y come to work permanently connected to their social networks. We already knew from the Hawthorne studies back in the 1930's that informal networks influence performance. It is now time to reintegrate into job design our understanding of formal and informal networks, our deep need to connect and create self-determining relationships, and our desire for meaning into our understanding of what people find satisfying in work.