

# The effect of Job Redesign on professional identity and crafting behaviour

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## ABSTRACT

*A constant evaluation by managers and scholars regarding how job redesign affects employee's professional identity, motivation and attitudes at work is the object of the current research, however some elements seem to be forgotten. In contemporary and boundary-less organizations, HR leaders and managers play a key role in structuring and redesigning jobs and it is likely that business success might be positively related to an increase in employees' motivation and empowerment, as an entitlement to greater individual autonomy and responsibility.*

*It is noteworthy that start-up and companies managing organizational change are becoming less hierarchical, more flexible and increasingly knowledge-based, but still unable to demonstrate proper commitment by involving employees in the job redesign process. The present research aims to support the importance of redesigning jobs in fostering an individual's professional identity, and to address their career orientation with stress on empowerment and crafting behaviour, and not as an approach exclusively used to boost productivity.*

Solo di recente manager e accademici hanno riposto la loro attenzione sulla riprogettazione lavorativa quale strumento organizzativo finalizzato a influenzare positivamente l'identità professionale, la motivazione e il comportamento dei collaboratori. Tra i fattori determinanti il successo aziendale va considerato l'incremento motivazionale delle persone quando queste siano autorizzate a esercitare l'attività lavorativa con maggiore autonomia e responsabilità. Sebbene stiamo assistendo alla nascita e allo sviluppo di start-up e organizzazioni sempre più

orientate alla flessibilità e al transfer di conoscenze, si ravvisa tuttavia una certa resistenza da parte di leader e manager nel promuovere la partecipazione dei propri collaboratori in percorsi di riprogettazione lavorativa, nonché la loro autonomia.

La presente ricerca mira a qualificare la riprogettazione lavorativa come uno strumento organizzativo atto a rafforzare l'identità professionale dei collaboratori e a promuoverne l'orientamento alla carriera attraverso il comportamento proattivo, e non come approccio esclusivamente finalizzato a incrementare i livelli produttivi in ambito organizzativo/industriale.

## KEYWORDS

JOB REDESIGN;  
PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY;  
CRAFTING BEHAVIOUR;  
CAREER ORIENTATION.

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RIPROGETTAZIONE LAVORATIVA;  
IDENTITÀ PROFESSIONALE;  
COMPORTAMENTO PROATTIVO;  
ORIENTAMENTO ALLA CARRIERA.

## INTRODUCTION

An important factor affecting an individual's motivation at work is related to how a job design has been carried out. Appropriateness of job re-design has become important for employees' wellbeing, and debates around how employees can become more productive and satisfied is increasingly receiving attention from current managers and researchers.

Job redesign can be defined as the process of restructuring the elements of tasks and duties, and of re-allocating responsibilities connected with a specific job, in order to make it more encouraging and satisfying for employees, while meeting the needs of both the organization and the workforce. Conducting a job redesign aims at placing the right person in the right job, and to enhance the quality of outcomes in terms of improved productivity and job satisfaction.

The job related context once analysed and reformed through job redesign, and the new dimensions of working activities identified, may lead to an increase in the variety of assignments and functions, thus making employees feel a more important asset to the company.

The majority of research available in the literature regarding this topic highlights that how a job is redesigned has a significant impact on motivation and on an individual's psychological state, which in turn affect one's personal and professional identity and work outcomes. The main advantages attained from a proper job redesign should include improvements in the quality of work-life balance; improvements in organizational/industrial productivity; a better right person-to-job fit; and a deeper sense of belonging by an individual towards the company.

## JOB ENRICHMENT GROUNDS

According to Steers, Modway and Shapiro (2004)<sup>1</sup>, Herzberg emphasizes the importance of intrinsically challenging jobs for work mo-

1 R.M. Steers, R.T. Mowday, D.L. Shapiro, *Introduction to special topic forum: the future of work motivation theory*, *The Academy of Management Review*, 2004, 29(3), 379-387

tivation, and addresses the appropriate way for suitable redesign of jobs. In particular, job enrichment, which refers to the modification of employees' task characteristics, seems to play a significant role in the improvement of employees' potential for work motivation.<sup>2</sup>

It is commonly accepted by researchers that the main approach to job enrichment is represented by the 'Job Characteristic Model' (JCM), developed by Hackman and Oldham (1976)<sup>3</sup>, however this is also criticized as being mostly focused on enriched tasks, while disregarding the role played by interpersonal relationships as a basis for prosocial motivation. The JCM advanced by Hackman and Oldham represents one of the theories that best exemplifies a framework for enriching jobs in a way that enhances work effectiveness.

The authors maintain that five core job dimensions determine a job's motivational potential:

- *skill variety*: the degree to which a job involves a variety of different activities, and the number of different skills used to perform it;
- *task identity*: the degree to which the job requires completion of a whole and identifiable

<sup>2</sup>The literature highlights that an organization chooses among three main strategies in order to redesign a job: (1) *Job enrichment*, which provides an employee with more tasks to do as part of their job, as well as the responsibility and authority needed to complete those tasks; (2) *Job enlargement*, which may be defined as a vehicle employers use to put additional workload on employees. Mainly as a consequence of downsizing, an employee might feel lucky to have a job at all, despite the fact that duties and responsibilities have increased; (3) *Job rotation*, by which employees are shifted between two or more assignments or jobs at regular intervals of time. This management approach reduces the monotony and repetitiveness involved in a job, while motivating an individual to perform well at each stage of job replacement. In synthesis, Job enlargement and Job enrichment are both useful to motivating an employee to perform their tasks enthusiastically. However, they possess some distinct features that differentiate them, such as motivation and the allocation of duties and responsibilities. Job enrichment means in some way improvement, or development, whereas job enlargement is related to add more duties and increased workload.

<sup>3</sup> J.R., Hackman, G.R. Oldham, *Motivation through the design of work. Test of a theory*, *Organizational Behavior & Human Performance*, 1976, 16(2), 250-279

piece of work, with a recognizable beginning and a visible outcome;

- *task significance*: the degree to which the job is perceived as important, and has a substantial impact on the lives or work of other people, within the organization or in the external environment;

- *autonomy*: the extent to which a job provides substantial freedom, independence, discretion, and self-determination on the part of the individual when planning work activities, implementing the procedures to be used in carrying them out;

- *feedback*: the extent to which carrying out the work activities required by the job provides clear information back to the employee about the effectiveness of his or her performance.

Certainly, the JCM appears to work best when certain conditions are met. Employees should have the psychological desire for autonomy, variety, responsibility, and challenge given by enriched jobs. Furthermore, it is likely that the more the five core characteristics are effectively designed into the job, the more the employees will be motivated, and the higher will be the quality of performance and job satisfaction. In contrast, when these characteristics are absent, it is more likely that employees will resist the job redesign effort. Even though a manager is able to redesign a job that is supposed to motivate employees, some workers may not find the job to be motivational. Nevertheless, in certain circumstances, it may be possible to increase an employee's motivation by supporting the individual in changing their perspective towards the job.

In this regard, an interesting component of the research findings concerns how cross-cultural differences impact on job characteristics. Intrinsic factors such as autonomy have been regarded as highly motivating in countries such as the U.S. On the other hand, it has been found that they might contribute little to enhance individuals' motivation and job satisfaction in economically disadvantaged countries with poor governmental social welfare systems. However, the discourse regarding intrinsic and extrinsic factors as motivational

drivers of individual's behaviour at work in relation to the different cross-cultural contexts is not the object of the present research, and as such will not be discussed further.

Analysing the JCM more in-depth, it clearly emerges that in identifying the five core job characteristics, Hackman and Oldham (1976)<sup>4</sup> highlight that autonomy and feedback are the most relevant, and that it is likely that people with high growth need strength and a strong desire for challenging work, hence will be more willing to accept, and be more committed and motivated towards enriched jobs.

Given that being able to achieve individual objectives promotes adequate levels of self-efficacy, self-esteem and personal job satisfaction, while moving an individual to perform better, according to Locke and Latham (2002), "people with high self-efficacy are more likely than those with low self-efficacy to develop effective task strategies".<sup>5</sup>

The relevance attributed to autonomy is sustained by Deci and Ryan (2000)<sup>6</sup>, who argue that together with competence and relatedness, it increases the level of intrinsic motivation for challenging, but achievable tasks. That autonomy is recognized as a potential resource is also highlighted by Rigotti et al. (2014)<sup>7</sup>, whereas Frese and Zapf (1994)<sup>8</sup> maintain that autonomy is positively related to attitudes, job satisfaction, health and wellbeing.

The relevance of feedback is recognized in the extent to which it gives evidence about which areas need to be corrected, developed, or improved. Regardless of the fact that it can

4 Already cited.

5 E.A. Locke, G.P. Latham, *Building a practically useful theory of goal setting and task motivation: a 35-year odyssey*, *American Psychologist*, 2002, 57(9), 705-717

6 R.M. Ryan, E.L. Deci, *Self-determination theory and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation, social development, and well-being*, *American Psychologist*, 2000, 55(1), 68-78

7 T. Rigotti, S. Korek, K. Otto, *Gains and losses related to career transitions within organizations*, *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 2014, 84(2), 177-187

8 M. Frese, D. Zapf, *Action as the core of work psychology: A German approach*, 1994. In H.C. Triandis, M.D. Dunnette, L.M. Hough (Eds.), *Handbook of industrial and organizational psychology* (271-340). Consulting Psychologists Press.

be positive or negative, feedback should be seen as an opportunity for learning and not as a failure in any case. For this reason, managers should not blame individuals for their errors, but try to involve them in solving problems, and finding appropriate solutions.

#### JOB REDESIGN FOCUSED ON EMPOWERING EMPLOYEES

The concept of empowering people extends the idea of autonomy. According to Spreitzer's (1995)<sup>9</sup> research on empowerment in the workplace, and to Parker et al. (2001) which define it as "a motivational state involving an assessment of meaning, impact, competence, and choice (or self-determination)"<sup>10</sup>, psychological empowerment can be considered an HR strategy based on power sharing and delegation of authority to collaborators within an organization.

The idea behind empowerment is that employees have the ability to make decisions and to perform their jobs effectively if managers and supervisors remove certain organizational barriers (physical and/or psychological). Empowerment does not focus on the objective features of the job, but rather encourages employees to become innovators and 'managers' of their own work by involving them in task accomplishment in ways that give them more control, and autonomous decision-making capabilities.

The basic assumption is that increasing employee's power intensifies motivation for task achievement. People improve their own performance effectiveness by choosing how to do a task, and using their creativity without close supervision or other interference thereby enhancing their level of self-efficacy, and their commitment towards the organization.

9 G.M. Spreitzer, *Psychological empowerment in the workplace: Dimensions, measurement, and validation*, Academy of Management Journal, 1995, 38(5), 1442-1465.

10 S. K. Parker, T.D. Wall, J. L. Cordery, *Future work design research and practice: Towards an elaborated model of work design*, Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology, 2001, 74, 413-440

In order for empowerment to grow and thrive, organizations should encourage four main conditions, summarized as follows:

- *participation*: employees should be encouraged to autonomously improve their interpersonal and team work relationships as well as to take control of their individual work tasks;

- *innovation*: leaders and supervisors should encourage people to explore new paths, and to take reasonable risks (depending on cost) to stimulate innovative and creative thinking;

- *access to information*: employees should have access to a wide range of information that might affect their work. They need to feel free to decide what kind of information they require to perform their jobs, and to understand goals, priorities and organizational strategies;

- *accountability*: empowered employees should be held accountable for their behaviour towards others, which in turn increases their credibility from the evidence of valid results.

It is likely that employee empowerment will succeed when the culture of an organization is open and receptive to innovation and change. Nevertheless, just a few organizations consider human capital as being their main asset, are inclined to lead them to success or, if not properly managed, to cause failure. Employee empowerment is about the contribution of employees in administration and decision-making regarding policies, objectives, and organizational strategies. Thus, if jobs are rigidly controlled by organizational procedures, or if every minor decision needs to be approved by a superior, employees are unlikely to feel empowered.

Nowadays, a growing number of startup companies, and innovative organizations implementing empowerment programs empower people to different degrees. Given that employees may feel worried about the increased levels of responsibility and accountability, it is likely that selecting, training and developing people promote the success of empowerment interventions. Some managers believe that empowerment should encourage workers' ideas while they retain a final authority for decisions. For others, empowerment means giving employees more freedom and power to make decisions, and to exercise solutions

with initiative capacity and creativity. In other words, the continuum runs from a situation in which front-line workers have almost no discretion, towards full empowerment, where workers even participate in formulating organizational strategies, and feel considered as core members within the organization.

#### PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY ENHANCEMENT THROUGH INDIVIDUAL'S AGENCY

The nature of work is gradually changing over time together with individuals' professional roles and identity construction. By reviewing the existing studies it is worth noting that Ashfort (Ashfort Kreiner, 1999)<sup>11</sup> highlights the importance of organizational identification in affecting individual's emotions and behaviour, such as employee job satisfaction and task commitment, and other central aspects of organizational life. According to Slay & Smith (2011)<sup>12</sup>, professional identity is "an individual image of who they are as a professional", which is "based on attributes, beliefs, values, motives and experiences" (Shein, 1978; Ibarra, 1999).

Given that professional identity may be influenced by the relationships that a person has with others regarding their work, according to Ashforth (2008)<sup>13</sup>, an individual draws from "personal attributes, social group relationships and professional roles to assign meaning to who they are, and what they do in the workplace", thus shaping their professional growth and career development.

Moreover, a fundamental assumption is that self-knowledge is to some extent important for making satisfying progress in contemporary careers. With the increasing

11 B.E. Ashfort, G.E. Kreiner, "How can You do it?": Dirty Work and the challenge of constructing a Positive Identity, *The Academy of Management Review*, Jul., 1999, Vol. 24, 413-434

12 H.S. Slay, D.A. Smith, *Professional identity construction: using narrative to understand the negotiation of professional and stigmatized cultural identities*, *Human Relations*, 2011, 64(1), 85-107

13 B.E. Ashfort, S.H. Harrison, K.G. Corley, *Identification in Organizations: an Examination of four fundamental questions*, *Journal of Management*, 2008, 34:325

labour market flexibility, more and more people proactively develop and update their know-how and skills over time for self-directed career management. According to Arthur and Rousseau (1996)<sup>14</sup>, this proactive behaviour highlights a shift in responsibilities from the organization to the employee, in that an individual's independent professional learning and development, and then their subjectivity, flexibility orientation, and adaptivity become crucial factors for personal growth, professional identity and career path. Nevertheless, taking into account an individual's vulnerability and environmental insecurity, it emerges that career dynamics and choices are not free from challenges and potential risks for personal outcomes, assuming that high levels of commitment, responsibility and self-efficacy do not ensure *a-priori* successful self-management careers.

#### FOSTERING CRAFTING BEHAVIOUR IN CONTEMPORARY ORGANIZATIONS

Despite the evidence that job enrichment principles related to job design theory may be considered strong elements for practice, it appears that the importance of the employee's agency may be underestimated.

Wrzewsniowski and Dutton (2001)<sup>15</sup> highlight that job crafting differs from job design in that the former may be considered a dynamic process which emphasizes individual's agency role, whereas the second is characterized by more static elements.

From the existing literature it emerges, for instance, that Parker and Sprigg (1988) sustain that one's "proactive personality moderates the interactive effect of job autonomy and demands on strain" (Parker and Sprigg, in Parker

14 M.B. Arthur, D.M. Rousseau, *The Boundaryless Career: a new employment principle for a New Organizational Era*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1996

15 A. Wrzewsniowski, J.E. Dutton, *Crafting a job: revisioning employees as active crafters of their work*, *Academy of Management Review*, 2001, Vol. 26, No. 2, 179-201

et al., 2001)<sup>16</sup>, “challenging the status quo rather than passively adapting present conditions”<sup>17</sup>, whereas Ng et al. (2005)<sup>18</sup> identify proactive personality as one of the main factors that predict success.

According to the Job Demands - Resources Model (developed by Bakker and Demerouti, 2014)<sup>19</sup>, it is likely that managers who ensure workplaces that provide proper working conditions to their employees, enhancing their involvement in decision making processes regarding the organizational life, attain more motivated and satisfied employees, and thereby improvements in the quality of outcomes.

In identifying the main factors that can affect how a proper job redesign leads to desired performance outcomes, and goal attainment, Cummings and Blumberg (1987)<sup>20</sup> emphasize the crucial role played by interdependence and uncertainty. In particular, according to Milliken (1987) uncertainty can be defined as an “individual’s inability to understand the direction in which an environment might be changing, the potential impact of those changes on that individual’s organization, and whether or not specific responses to the environment might be successful”<sup>21</sup>.

With the increasing labour market complexity, a growing number of individuals of-

ten change job. In these circumstances, feedback can be considered a coping mechanism for uncertainty. As argued by Lawler et al. (2000)<sup>22</sup>, social exchange and feedback become increasingly important for the acquisition and transfer of new knowledge and skills, the attainment of goals, the promotion of error management, and retention of employees and talents in the workplace.

According to Wille and De Fruyt (2012), “individuals may consciously and unconsciously attempt to modify their concrete work environment in order to maximize fit with the organization”<sup>23</sup>. Job crafters may thus be considered as those employees who maximize their work environment by introducing changes in work tasks and relationships, and attribute personal meaning and professional identity to their jobs. This is why managers should create a culture which encourages employees to craft their behaviours, and first of all behaving themselves as job crafters. The point of view advanced by Grant (2007) which underlines the importance of identifying the “structural properties of work” that allow people to interact, and to foster relationships “to make a prosocial difference” while achieving “higher performance and productivity”, is worthy of note.<sup>24</sup>

## CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

When managers are concerned with redesigning jobs and tasks they should consider both employer and employees’ needs in order to reduce tensions associated with organizational interventions, minimizing errors, and maximizing the amount of employees’ motivation and commitment, while ensuring their wellbeing, health and safety. It is worth

16 S.K Parker, T.D.Wall, J.L. Cordery, *Future work design research and practice: towards an elaborated model of work design*, Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology, 2001, 74, 413-440

17 S.K. Parker, N. Turner, H.M. Williams, *Modeling the antecedents of Proactive Behavior at Work*, Journal of Applied Psychology, 2006, Vol. 91, No. 3, 636-652

18 T.W.H. Ng, L.T. Eby, K.L. Sorensen, D.C. Feldman, *Predictors of objective and subjective career success: a meta-analysis*, Personnel Psychology, 2005, 58, 367-408

19 A.B. Bakker, E. Demerouti, *Job demands-resources theory* (2014). In P.Y. Chen & C.L. Cooper (Eds.), *Wellbeing: A complete reference guide. Work and wellbeing*, Wiley Blackwell, 37-64

20 T.G. Cummings, M. Blumberg, *Advanced Manufacturing Technology and Work Design* (1987). In T.D. Wall, C.W. Clegg & N.J. Kemp (Eds), *The Human Side of Advanced Manufacturing Technology*, New York: John Wiley, p. 44

21 F.J. Milliken, *Three types of perceived uncertainty about the environment: State, Effect, and Response Uncertainty*, The Academy of Management Review, 1987, Vol. 12, No. 1 (Jan), 133-143

22 i.e. see Lawler et al., 2000. In J. DeLamater, *Handbook of Social Psychology*, Springer, 2006

23 B. Wille, F. De Fruyt, W. Beyers, *A transactional approach to person-environment fit. Reciprocal relations between personality development and career role growth across young to middle adulthood*, Journal of Vocational Behavior, 2012, 81(3): 307-321

24 A.M. Grant, *Relational Job Design and the motivation to make a prosocial difference*, Academy of Management Review, 2007, Vol.32, No. 2, 393-417

noting that researchers<sup>25</sup> highlight how important it is for managers making employees feel engaged in such interventions, in order to increase their own control over work activities, motivation, and also their perception of fairness and justice, but it looks like that this doesn't reflect the work-related realities of an amount of today's organizations.

The creation of a structured and supportive context in which all staff are actively engaged in a process of on-going job redesign may be of help to employees in accepting flexibility in relation to the changing needs of the organization. It may be that, if they are rightly placed, they will be able to increase their effort to ensure the maximum output. In doing so, supervisors should lead individuals from losing intrinsic motivation and to increase interest in their work activities, enhancing trust in themselves and towards the organization.

That flexible working practices based on employees' autonomy, empowerment and crafting behaviour are found to exert a positive impact on motivation and retention of employees is highlighted by some recent research,<sup>26</sup> and these criteria should be valued by managers when redesigning jobs so as to benefit employees' professional growth.

Last, but not least, according to Parker et al. (2001)<sup>27</sup> promoting employee autonomy may lead to safer working conditions. A number of researchers<sup>28</sup> draw attention to the proposal that managers should ensure psychological safety, especially for those employees demonstrating crafting behaviours. This might be a way to optimize work re-design processes targeted at employees engaged at different organizational levels, thus maximizing the fit of the interventions in relation to contingencies, the specificity of the organizational setting, and the wider culture.

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<sup>25</sup> i.e. see Murphy and Hurrell, 1987

<sup>26</sup> CIPD, 2006; 2019

<sup>27</sup> Already cited

<sup>28</sup> i.e. Shein and Bennis, 1965