DESIGNING JOBS: UNIVERSAL PRINCIPLES OR STRATEGIC CHOICE?

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ABSTRACT

The latter half of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first century have seen significant interest in redesigning jobs to stimulate employee motivation and job satisfaction. It has been argued that employees will perform better if they can utilise a variety of skills in performing tasks which have meaning and significance for both the employees and for those who consume the end product, and where the employees have considerable autonomy in carrying out these tasks. This paper examines the literature on job redesign and considers the question as to whether these principles should apply in all cases, or whether other factors such as business strategy and managerial choice should be considered in determining the applicability of job redesign principles.

INTRODUCTION

Job redesign strategies were part of the employer initiatives centred around the concept of employee participation that first became popular in Australia in the late 1960s and early 1970s. It was around that time that Australia enjoyed near full employment and a buoyant economy when it was easy to change jobs. It was also an era of social protest and challenge to authority. In the United States, faced by the Vietnam protest movement, the "counter culture" movement and a drop in labour force participation rates, the government commissioned a major study, Work in America, from the Department of Health, Education and Welfare (1973). This study concluded that the work ethic was still a strong motivating influence in American society but workers were disillusioned by highly structured and rigidly organised jobs which gave the average workers little or no chance of self-fulfilment. A similar Australian study for the federal government by Emery and Phillips, *Living at Work* (1974) reached the same conclusions. People who work in situations where they work

independently, feel "isolated", feel themselves to be easily replaceable by management and have little influence to exert to change the situation (ie highly structured jobs) were four times as likely to be dissatisfied as those in jobs with low levels of control.

Following the increasing globalisation of world economies from the 1980s, there was a further increase in interest in job redesign. One factor was the significant growth in the sale of Japanese cars in the United States at this time, accompanied by a corresponding decline in the US automobile industry. Similar declines were experienced in other areas of US manufacturing, such as televisions, computers and machine tools. The decline was attributed to the superior use of workforce management and production processes. A decline in trade union membership and collectivism and the growth in importance of knowledge workers, also prompted interest in alternative methods of communication and ways of involving employees in order to ensure that firms benefited from their tacit, as well as explicit, knowledge (Millmore et. al., 2007). There was also a further influential public report in the US, "America's Choice: High Skill or Low Wages!" (Commission on the Skills of the American Workforce, 1990). This report echoed back to the original 1973 Work in America report.

This paper will review various approaches to designing jobs to address these issues. It will consider the job enrichment models of Maslow and Herzberg, the socio-technical systems and social action models which consider broader social aspects of work, and finally the contemporary best practice or best fit debate and the implications for job design. The paper argues that there is no universal panacea for job design solutions to issues of employee motivation. Instead practices vary according to different business strategies and the particular strategic choices made by managers.

JOB REDESIGN TO ENRICH WORK — MASLOW AND HERZBERG

Various studies of job design have identified a group of factors and characteristics which go to make up a "good" job (Dunphy, 1981, 154-155). These include meaningful activities leading to pride and responsibility, a good working environment, employee autonomy and control, and reinforcement including recognition by superiors, mutually supportive relationships and opportunities for personal development. According to Dunphy, job enrichment is the most viable form of job redesign, as it meets all of the requirements of a satisfying job.

The theoretical basis underpinning job redesign strategies comes from the school known as the "Neo-Human Relationsists". Elton Mayo's (Lupton 1972 ;

Pugh et. al 1973) research had encouraged a view which saw management's role as developing "good human relations" between management and workers and among co-workers — a situation that motivates workers to work together productively, co-operatively and with economic, psychological and social satisfactions. Human relations, however, stopped at the conditions under which the work was done and the relationships between people at work. While not denying that this was important, during the 1950s and 60s researchers from the developing area of behavioural science began to extend the psychological dimension of human relations. Psychological wellbeing required not only good conditions but also a meaningful job over which the individual worker had control. Abraham Maslow's pattern of human needs provides the basis for this school (Lupton 1972; Pugh et.al. 1973; Stone 2014).

Maslow developed a pattern of human needs which he considered to be a logical sequential development from "lower" needs to "higher order" needs. This pattern, which Maslow assumed applied to all individuals, is:

1. Basic physiological needs
2. Safety and security needs
3. Social acceptance needs
4. Self-esteem needs
5. Self-actualisation needs

Since the physiological needs are classified as primary, they are given first priority. If a person is starving, only food occupies their mind. However, once this need is satisfied, they become concerned with a need which was formerly of less significance, safety and security. According to Maslow, all people are motivated by unsatisfied needs: we are never completely satisfied on any need level, but a reasonable amount of gratification with basic needs must be felt before we proceed up the ladder. Maslow argued that, given growing economic security and affluence in society generally, and with educational levels rising, the workforce would increasingly be motivated only by the higher order needs of self-esteem and self-actualisation (Lupton 1972; Pugh et.al. 1973; Stone 2014).

Fredrick Herzberg (1987) takes Maslow one step further, by identifying the work itself as the substantive source of motivation. His theory grew out of research directed towards ascertaining factors that lead to greater employee satisfaction. The usual approach is one of examining a multiplicity of factors such as the work itself, pay, status, working conditions and so on. The underlying assumption is that there is a single continuum ranging from job satisfaction at one end to job dissatisfaction at the other end.

The Herzberg theory proposes that there are, in fact, two different continua, as follows:

(a) One class of factors, "hygiene" factors, makes up a continuum ranging from dissatisfaction to no dissatisfaction. Examples of these factors are pay, interpersonal relations, supervision, company policy, working conditions, pay and security. Herzberg argues that these factors do not serve to promote job satisfaction; however, their absence can create dissatisfaction. Their presence can only serve to eliminate dissatisfaction.

(b) The second class of factors, referred to as "motivation" factors, makes up a continuum leading from no satisfaction to satisfaction. Examples are the work itself, recognition, achievement, possibilities for growth and advancement. If the worker is to be truly motivated, the job itself must be the source of that motivation. All the other "hygiene" factors can do is only eliminate dissatisfaction by cleaning up the environment (Herzberg, 1987).

Herzberg's approach to employee satisfaction rises on two assumptions of the nature of mankind: the need to avoid pain and the need to grow. Hygiene factors prevent dissatisfaction and pain by providing a good environment. Motivation factors enable growth towards self-actualisation (Herzberg 1987; Lupton 1972; Pugh et.al. 1973; Stone 2014). Therefore, according to Herzberg's model, only redesigned enriched jobs which provide opportunities for the growth of self-esteem and self-actualisation can provide true motivation and job satisfaction for employees (Herzberg 1987).

Both Maslow and Herzberg believe that their models apply universally to everyone, and that the principles involved must be taken into account by management in designing jobs. In fact, Herzberg goes so far as to argue that employees who seek only hygiene factors in their work are potentially mentally ill, or at least maladjusted. Herzberg goes on to argue that his findings have major implications for staff recruitment and selection, particularly at management levels. His argument is that companies should only seek to hire those who seek positive mental health through motivation factors, because the hygiene seeker is neurotic and unhealthy, concerned only with surrounding conditions. Therefore, according to Herzberg, they are likely to let the company down in an emergency situation when the company needs everyone focussed on their jobs and cannot afford to worry about hygiene factors (Pugh et. al. 1973).

However, it can be argued that the primacy given to individual needs in both of these models reflects a predominant cultural value in the United States, rather than a universal psychological need. Arguably, individual needs may not be at

the apex of a needs hierarchy in countries where the culture reflects the primacy of the group. It also potentially overlooks the differing contexts in which work is undertaken. One example is the important role of groups in many work situations, not just in terms of social relations between workers, but also in terms of the interdependence of workers in undertaking their jobs, especially given the increasing attention to the use of work teams. Further, Herzberg's assertions about the supposed problems of hygiene seekers, fails to consider the possibility that some employees may prefer to seek self-actualisation outside the workplace. It can also be argued that Herzberg's assumption that motivated employees will care more about the company than their own job security imposes a top-down, management view of employee behaviour, and does not consider what may be rational from an employee perspective. These issues will be taken up in the next sections on socio-technical systems and the social action approach.

THE SOCIO-TECHNICAL SYSTEMS APPROACH

While the work of Maslow and Herzberg focussed attention on the individual, self-development and self-actualisation aspects of work, their work overlooked the social and cultural (or group) aspects of work, which had been the attention of the earlier work of Mayo. Linking both the individual aspects of work with the technology and the group nature of work was the focus of the Tavistock Institute of Human Relations in London and researchers such as E. Trist, K.W. Bamforth, F.E. Emery and A.K. Rice. Their work argued that organisations consisted of interdependent social and technical systems, operating in an economic environment. It was argued that organisations had a degree of choice in the way that they structured or designed work and that the best design was the one which aimed for joint optimisation of both social and technical factors (Pugh,et.al.1973;Stone 2014).

This approach was first developed in the context of a study by Trist and Bamforth (1951) of the effects of mechanisation in British coal mining. The advent of coal-cutters and mechanical conveyors had made possible the working of a single long face in place of a series of short coal faces, and had changed the nature of the work in the process. In short wall working, the focus was on a small group of skilled man and his mate, assisted by several labourers. The new long wall method was organised around a coal face group of forty to fifty men with task specialisation according to shift, very specific job roles and different methods of payment per shift. It therefore took on the characteristics of a small factory system which broke down the previous system of autonomous small groups.

This breakdown led to manifestations of the miners' isolation and frustration, such as different shifts blaming each other for failures, petty deceptions with regard to timekeeping and reporting for work, informal cliques developing across small parts of the workplace, which left some workers isolated. The reduced autonomy involved in the new process also made it virtually impossible for management to pinpoint the source of the problem (Trist & Bamforth 1951).

Trist and Bamforth found that an alternative system, known as the ''composite long wall method" was possible within the same technological and economic constraints. This involved the reintroduction of workgroups responsible for the whole task. Within each group, members allocate themselves to shifts and to jobs and are paid according to a group bonus. Instead of perpetuating blame across shifts, the new system led to situations where members of a group who finished their tasks early, stayed on to undertake the next activity in the sequence to help the members of their group who were on the next shift. This system was better geared to the workers' social needs and psychological needs for greater job autonomy and close working relationships and therefore led to greater productivity, job satisfaction and reduced absenteeism. (Trist & Bamforth 1951; Pugh, et.al. 1973). Trist and Bamforth's study showed the importance of the group aspects of work, as well as viewing the role of work from the perspective of those actually undertaking it, rather than on the basis of an imposed perspective, such as that of Maslow and Herzberg.

The socio-technical systems approach and the associated concept of semi-autonomous work groups provided the basis for a number of job redesign experiments in Australia in the 1970s. One example was that of ICI at its Botany plant in Sydney. The Botany plant was a large petro-chemical manufacturing site. Commencing in 1971-72 and extending over several years, discussions took place between works management and unions initially with the aim of developing a new bonus scheme, and of providing a point of entry for subsequent developments in participative management. The proposals also involved a higher degree of involvement from shop-floor workers in setting their work goals as well as greater flexibility in task variety and learning and greater responsibility.

The work was based on studies carried out by the Tavistock Institute and Dr. Fred Emery (formerly of the Institute) acted as a consultant to the company. The Botany work was part of a broader ICI involvement in job redesign. Pahlow (1982) reports that at ICI's alkaline factory at Osborne in South Australia, for example, all 350 workers participated in an extensive survey- feedback program in 1970, which focussed on issues such as general aspects of how participants viewed people, how they saw their job, their supervisor, their

effort, their skills and the characteristics needed for success in their job. They were also asked biographical data and their views about the plant in general. The company carefully prepared the ground for acceptance of the survey, and its findings were subsequently used as the input for a series of meetings between, initially, the Works Manager and the next two levels of management down and subsequently by the members of this group in their own departments. The company reported good results from this method, but at Botany did not want to take the time required to progress a survey feedback program from the top down through the organisation. Management attempted a more direct approach (Pahlow 1982, 33-34).

In 1972 at Botany, a series of three-day seminars where held involving groups of about seven people from supervision to shop floor employees, including shop stewards. A Job Design Steering Committee was set up in one section of the plant, comprising the plant superintendent, a shift foreman and two union representatives; four shift sub-committees were also formed. The committees explored ways of improving work patterns and relationships as well as "hygiene" factors.

From the perspective of management, the process had many positive outcomes, including the introduction of 1.5 hour per month training sessions, a team building program to improve team functioning on one shift, better communication and greater delegation of responsibility to each shift team, including, for example, preparing their own holiday rosters and recommending to the foreman when the plant should be shut down for maintenance. Foremen also became managers of a shift, rather than supervisors of men (Macintosh, in Lansbury, 1980).

However, from the union's perspective, the experiments were not a success. It was concerned about the lack of participation of workers in the redesign process. It was critical of the series of three-day seminars mentioned earlier, as leaving the workers wined and dined, and completely bewildered (Hull, in Lansbury, 1980). Union members also advised the union of requests from foremen for them to learn higher graded jobs to assist in the job redesign process, but on the basis that they would only be paid at the higher rate when they were required to use that skill, on an occasional basis.

The union became concerned about the legitimacy of the company's actions, employed an external consultant and attempted to negotiate an acceptable "company philosophy" with ICI to underpin the redesign. However, this approach was opposed by the company. The company responded with its own document which gave limited authority to the Job Redesign Steering Committee and which limited worker involvement to defined areas. It also

reinforced its underlying approach of satisfying basic psychological needs of workers and encouraging development of each individual's potential. The dialogue with the union collapsed in 1974 and from its point of view, no significant change occurred (Hull, in Lansbury 1980).

The clearly mixed results from this early experiment in job redesign at ICI Botany reflect the lack of extensive participation and involvement by workers in the design of the program. This would appear, in part at least, to follow from management's certainty that it knew what the workers wanted, based on its acceptance of the theoretical frameworks of Maslow, McGregor and Herzberg, and of the prescriptive use of the socio- technical systems concept and of the perception that small group work was desired by all workers, which was a feature of later Tavistock work. As a former Industrial Relations Officer at the Botany plant indicated, it was a top-down management initiated experiment in which the workers perceived no job ownership (interview: Kevin Sempter, September 1990).

THE SOCIAL ACTION APPROACH

We have so far reviewed the theoretical basis for the interest in job enrichment schemes in the 1960s and 1970s and found its focus on universally held human needs which are applicable in all situation to be too simplistic. These approaches remain popular with managers for two reasons: firstly, it allows management to feel as if they are acting with certainty from firm general principles; secondly, it places the relationship between manager and employee on an individual psychological basis and so avoids having to come to terms with interest groups or bargaining over conflicting interests (such as management's desire for greater job flexibility and workers' desire for more pay at ICI).

An alternative approach to understanding behaviour in the workplace is known as the "Social Action" or "Orientations to Work" model, developed initially from the research of Goldthorpe, Lockwood et. al. relating to a study of workers at a new industrial estate in London (Goldthorpe, Lockwood, Bechofer & Platt 1968).

The basis of the social action approach is the proposition that the analysis of employee attitudes and behaviour should be formed using an approach which uses the realities of a particular social situation, derived from the employees' own definition of things and not from a preconceived, a priori, definition of what the realities should be. The distinction is drawn here between 'needs' and 'wants'.

'Needs' appears in the general motivational models of the self-actualising school as inbuilt universal attributes of all individuals which require satisfaction. If they have been suppressed by a particular cultural environment, (such as the need for self-actualisation in relation to blue collar workers) we may not be aware of them, but given the opportunity and the 'right conditioning' we can all fulfil our basic needs. 'Wants' refers to the ways in which individual desires are converted into behaviour patterns through the socio-cultural environment.

There are therefore, two possible approaches to understanding motivation and behaviour:

1. There are basic inbuilt universal needs which are simply modified by the socio-cultural environment to form wants through which behaviour is expressed;
   or
2. wants, which are basically a product of the interaction between various individuals and their socio-cultural environment, are the sole determinants of behaviour with the concept of 'needs' being irrelevant.

Whereas the self-actualising school focuses on the satisfaction of universal needs, the social action approach focuses on the way in which behaviour is oriented by different patterns of wants.

Goldthorpe (1968) argued from his studies of workers in industrial plants in Luton, an industrial centre to the north of London, that wants and expectations are culturally determined variables, not psychological constants. In the Luton studies, the researchers were confronted with a group of skilled workers who gained no intrinsic or social satisfaction from their jobs, but who claimed to be perfectly satisfied. The researchers were confronted with the prospect of explaining this situation away in terms of deviant behaviour, as the model of self-actualising would suggest.

However, they decided to examine the priorities that the workers had subjectively defined for themselves and found that in terms of the individuals' wants and ordering of priorities relative to work, the situation resulted from workers giving priority to self-actualisation in the area of their leisure activities, for the social aspect of their life to the family situation, and those areas; so that as long as the pay was right, they were happy (Goldthorpe et. al. 1968, Daniel 2012).

Thus, a display of apparently deviant behaviour in terms of an assumed response to a universal need becomes a perfectly rational activity when the subjective ordering of priorities and subsequent meanings attached to actions are considered. The majority of workers were young and recently married, attracted to the new and relatively isolated industrial estate at Luton by high wages. Most intended to return to their former cities or towns later to pursue their careers at that stage. Goldthorpe argued that expectations are generated as a result of an individual's social experience and relationships outside work. So not only may there by legitimate differences between workers as to their priorities, but these priorities may change in different contexts, rather than being static. The Luton study grouped these expectations into three broad categories of "orientations to work" or ideal types, which they used to explain differences in patterns of job choice, job satisfaction, attachment to the employing organisation, and so on (Goldthorpe et. al. 1969; Daniel 2012).

The three types are:

> **Instrumental** — workers with an instrumental orientation see work almost exclusively as a means of acquiring income necessary to support a valued way of life, have a calculative relationship to the employing organisation and are not "involved" in their jobs.
>
> **Bureaucratic** — involves service to an organisation in return for a career, and positive involvement in work and with the organisation.
>
> **Solidaristic** — experience work as a group activity, social relationships at work are found rewarding. Work relationships sometimes lead to occupational communities outside work. A workgroup may either identify with the organisation, or be used as a source of power against it (Goldthorpe et. al 1968; Daniel 2012).

It can be seen that these types have obvious similarities with the traditional models considered earlier. The difference that must be emphasised is that the traditional models are based on the assumption that workers have innate psychological needs which apply to workers of all types and levels. Most recent work on this line (Maslow, Herzberg) indicates that the higher order needs are of major importance in contemporary society. To quote from W.W. Daniel, "If the higher order needs are satisfied, then they will be motivated, involved, committed, integrated. If they are not satisfied, then all sorts of pathological consequences ... will follow .... The second major type of approach, that via 'orientations to work', certainly avoids two of the major weaknesses of this analysis. First, it allows the possibility of variations between different types

and levels of worker and ... for the possibility of intrinsic conflict between the goals of workers and the enterprise" (Daniel, 2012: 41).

The orientations to work approach has been extended to include, for example, the influence of experience in work as well as experience outside work in the shaping of expectations. Further, Daniel has suggested that the context in which behaviour is analysed is also important. For example, in a bargaining situation, workers may adopt an instrumental approach, to get the best for themselves in a negotiating situation. However, in a non-bargaining situation, what is important is the content and meaning of day-to-day activities and relationships at work. As a result, a bureaucratic or solidaristic orientation may be adopted (Daniel 2012).

The social action perspective has some clear implications for the design of jobs. Firstly, it cannot be assumed that all employers wish to participate in job redesign, despite the views of Herzberg. Secondly, there is need for the participation of employees in deciding whether job redesign is needed, and if so, what form it will take. Thirdly, if an organisation seeks to foster a bureaucratic (career-oriented) approach to work, then job redesign would need to be accompanied by significant training and career opportunities. This last point is often overlooked in the traditional job design literature. The ICI experiment discussed earlier, for example, seemed to focus only slightly on training, and then more as a means of enhancing job flexibility, rather than considering also the availability of career progression. This has indeed been a general feature of the traditional distinction between salaried staff and wages employees (or white collar/blue collar) in Australia. Traditionally, career paths were provided only for white collar and professional staff and corporate training and development programs have been directed only at this group. Job redesign programs for blue collar workers normally only focussed on immediate, day-to-day relationships and skills, and as a consequence must be of limited value.

An example of how organisations and management may draw on the implications of the social action perspective in developing job redesign strategies that are appropriate to the needs of their workforce, can be found in a subsequent and much more successful attempt by ICI to redesign jobs at its Botany plant in the late 1980s.

In 1986, with tariff protection being reduced, ICI started to reassess its whole nature of operations in order to develop ways of becoming more competitive. ICI had been a fairly paternalistic company with a top-down approach to managing the organisation and a rigid division between management and workforce (for whom there was no career path). Its first reaction, in common

with many other companies at the time, was to introduce a process of cost cutting to eliminate what the management believed to be negative conditions and work practices. This approach resulted in ongoing disputes and a reassessment of direction by management.

Management considered what it believed the company needed to compete more effectively in the marketplace. It decided that its competitive advantage was not technology, because everyone had access to that, but how it utilised its technology. In other words, it identified people as the company's competitive advantage. Instead of acting unilaterally, management communicated its vision to the workforce and asked for feedback; they asked the workforce to challenge management's assumptions and to help flesh them out (Groves a& Mellor 1990).

The need for a multi-skilled workforce was identified, and then began a lengthy process of consultation and negotiation. The first twelve months alone was concerned with developing and consolidating trust. The specific ideas about restructuring jobs and career development came from the shop floor workers and were developed in consultation with management. More than half the chemical workers on site and all of the steam and power plant workers participated in drawing up new skills profiles. Working parties generated options, based on different modes operating elsewhere in the community.

As an example of what was done, the steam and power plant workers took advantage of computerised control to eliminate demarcations and redesign the job in the most logical way, on the basis that they were the ones who best knew how to run the plant. As a consequence, they were able to introduce an extra shift which gave workers up to six days off at a time, compared to the previous roster of one weekend off per month. Quality of life from the workers' point of view increased considerably. A career path into middle management was also designed. In consultation with the unions involved, the the company developed a range of new career paths, new work organisations and supportive training programs, including the introduction of a TAFE college annex on site, to ensure that the changes actually took place. These developments took place over a two year period (Groves & Mellor 1990).

Pay was also an important part of the process. New skills were paid for, and instead of the old system of overtime, penalties and allowances for blue collar workers, a new annualised salary was developed with all of these allowances built in.

The result was a change of culture from a control or adversarial climate to a commitment-based organisation, through a reinvigorated concept of self-

managing work teams. First line supervision was removed and its accountabilities devolved to the workforce. Workers reacted favourably to the changes. For example, absenteeism dropped by 8% due to better quality of social life and poor pressure not to take unnecessary time off. Sick leave fell from a mean of 36 hours in 1988 to 8.9 hours in 1990 and overtime fell from a mean of 48.1 hours in 1988 to 9.7 hours in 1990 (Groves & Mellor 1990).

It can be seen that the process differed from earlier experiments in terms of the nature and extent of consultation, allowing workers to identify their own objectives and preferred job structures, career paths and more detailed training, in new payment methods and payment for skills, and of course in the nature of union consultation.

BEST PRACTICE AND BEST FIT

In the 1980s and 1990s, following the increasing globalisation of the world economy and the growing competition that followed, attention turned again to the issue of how to motivate the workforce, especially in economies where there was an increasing focus on quality of production, and a growth of 'knowledge workers'. With the rise of HRM as both an increasingly important management function and as an academic discipline, the focus has increasingly moved from sociological approaches, such as the social action model which discussed motivation in a 'disinterested' academic way, towards a focus on business strategies and on job design in relation to its ability to create corporate advantage. The ICI case discussed above is an example of an early response by management to the renewed concern for job redesign at that time. As noted in the discussion, a key reason for engaging in the job redesign process was the company's acceptance that its competitive advantage came not from its technology, but from its people and how it structured its jobs and decision-making to allow its people to utilise the technology better than its competitors.

One line of argument in the more contemporary literature builds on the traditions of Maslow/Herzberg and the socio-technical approach. This argues for the adoption of a set of 'Best Practice' principles in relation to job design, suggesting that designing meaningful enriched jobs for employees is the way to increase corporate profits. Examples of this approach can be found in Jeffrey Pfeffer's Seven Principles model and the Hackman-Oldham Job Characteristics model (Boxall & Purcell 2011; Stone, 2008; Millmore et. al. 2007).

Jeffrey Pfeffer's high profile model argues that successful organisations need to recruit and retain highly qualified and motivated employees. His seven

practices for success are employee security, selective hiring, self-managed teams or teamworking, high pay contingent on company performance, extensive training, reduction of status differences, and sharing of information (Boxall & Purcell 2011; Millmore et. al. 2007).

The Hackman-Oldham Job Characteristics model argues that employees perform better when they perceive their work as being meaningful, have responsibility for outcomes and receive feedback on the results of their activities. It identifies five core characteristics of job design. These are skills variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy and the provision of feedback. Skills variety is the degree to which a job holder must carry out a variety of different activities and use a number of different personal skills in performing the job. Task identity refers to the degree to which performing a job results in the completion of a whole and identifiable piece of work and produces a visible outcome that can be recognised as the result of personal performance. Task significance is the degree to which a job has a significant impact on the lives of other people, whether those people are co-workers in the same organisation or individuals outside the organisation. Autonomy relates to the degree to which the job holder has the freedom, independence and discretion necessary to schedule work and to decide which procedures to use in carrying it out. Finally, feedback is the degree to which performing the activities required by the job provides the employee with direct and clear information about the effectiveness of his or her performance (Stone 2008).

In practice, however, the application of these models is limited. In relation to Pfeffer, for example, research shows that firms adopting his seven practices are in the minority. However, despite this, the proponents of the best practice approach argue that the value of the model lies in what organisations should do, rather than what they might actually do. The best practice approach has led to significant literature promoting the adoption of concepts including 'high commitment management', 'high involvement work systems' and 'high performance work systems'. In essence, they all argue for jobs to be redesigned based on the principles identified above, rather than the old Taylorist system of highly specialised jobs (Boxall & Purcell 2011).

The other popular contemporary approach to job redesign is based on the 'best fit' approach. This approach argues that HR practices (including job design), need to fit with the specific context of each organisation. Fit usually means that HR practices and jobs are designed to fit within the context of the nature of the industry and the specific strategies of individual organisations. Boxall and Purcell (2011) note the differences between sectors in manufacturing, where some have extensive investment in training (and by implication, broader design of jobs), compared to others where the technology

is low tech and labour intensive, where there will be pressure to outsource (and by implication, little interest in job redesign). They also note the differences between working in a law firm, employing highly qualified and paid professionals, to working in a discount retailer.

In relation to organisational fit, Schuler and Jackson's (1987) well known model provides an example of this. They build on the earlier work of Michael Porter (1980), which suggests that firms should choose a business strategy based on one of cost leadership (low cost model), differentiation (either a focus on quality or innovation) or a market niche. According to Schuler and Jackson (1987), the strategy chosen will have implications for the HR practices (including job design) that firms should adopt. For example, firms choosing a cost leadership strategy would have little interest in redesigning jobs, as this would add to its cost structure. On the other hand, companies choosing a differentiation strategy should emphasise 'selecting highly skilled individuals, giving employees more discretion, using minimal controls…' (Schuler & Jackson 1987: 210).

In other words, following this line of argument, the best fit approach suggests that the job design principles associated with best practice are not suitable for all organisations. Job redesign along the lines suggested by Hackman and Oldham would be appropriate for organisations pursuing a differentiation strategy, but would not work for organisations with a cost leadership strategy. Furthermore, the choice of business strategy is heavily influenced by (or contingent upon) industry factors, such as the level of technology, and/or the skills required by the workforce in the industry. So if we accept the explanatory power of the best fit approach, and Boxall and Purcell (2011) note the evidence in support of this approach over the best practice model, then the issue of job redesign is not a matter of universal principles applicable to every organisation, but is contingent upon industry and firm specific factors such as the type of technology and the skills required by employees.

THE ROLE OF STRATEGIC CHOICE

The best fit approach, as outlined above, implies that management's choices in relation to job redesign (as well as other HR practices), are limited and 'determined' by contingencies such as technology, industry context, organisational size or employee skills. However, as long ago as 1972, John Child argued that HR strategies are the result of strategic choices made by managers and are not determined by such contingencies (Child 1972). Building on this work, Watson argues that while, to varying extents, managers will take these contingencies into account when developing HR strategies and practices, these factors will only be one influence. He argues that '... it is an influence which is

always mediated by managerial interpretation and political manoeuvring.' (Watson 2009, in Leopold and Harris 2009: 27).

One case study showing the importance of managerial strategic choices can be seen in the supermarket industry. The supermarket industry is characterised by competition and external scrutiny, technology which simplifies work processes, and a low overall skill requirement for the majority of employees. In terms of the best fit model, the contingent factors would suggest that supermarket companies would need to pursue a cost leadership market strategy, and that, as a consequence, job redesign strategies would not be developed, with jobs being kept as simple as possible in order to keep training costs low. However, Mortimer (2001) cites the case of Woolworths. Woolworths is the largest Australian supermarket chain. Its management, at least in the period of the case study, took the view that its employees and their ability to serve customers and respond to their needs, was a significant factor in distinguishing them from other supermarkets. Its then CEO, Roger Corbett, told audiences that he regularly shopped in different Woolworths stores, and would ask staff at the deli counter, for example, to explain to him what particular choice of produce, such as types of fish or cheese, would be best for his particular needs. He stated that he would almost always get a knowledgeable and courteous answer. This, he claimed, was due to Woolworth's approach to the training of their staff, and gave them a competitive advantage (interviews, Joe De Gabrielle, 1999 and Brian O'Neill, 2013).

The case study refers specifically to the period in the early 1990s, when extended retail trading hours, especially in relation to supermarket trading, posed new challenges for supermarket management. This had resulted in a shift in shopping patterns to a situation where the peak supermarket trading period was 5.00–8.00 pm on weekdays. Apart from the challenges posed by the fact that there were few full time employees then working at night, there were also some specific challenges in relation to some specialty areas in supermarkets, including bread and pastry-making. At that time, the work was divided into two separate jobs, that of bread-makers (who made bread products), and that of pastry-cooks (who made specialist cakes and pastries). Both jobs were underpinned by specialist TAFE qualifications in New South Wales. Strict demarcation between the two trades had prevented each from doing the other's work, even though it was quite similar. It was also argued that this had resulted in both some overstaffing on the one hand and a restriction in career possibilities and reduced job satisfaction on the other hand. The shift in shopping patterns brought matters to a head. Until this time, bakers had worked overnight, finishing at 6.00 am. Pastry cooks started at 6.00 am and worked until 3.00 pm using the same equipment as the bakers.

However, they were prevented from using this equipment to make bread, due to the craft demarcation. This meant that no bread sold at night was baked any later than 6.00 am that morning, and no pastries were baked after 3.00 pm. Woolworths management felt that they needed to address the situation in order to ensure the availability of fresh produce at times when consumers wished to purchase (Mortimer 2001).

In keeping with its existing support for training, Woolworths' management negotiated a new "Retail In-store Bakery" award with the Shop, Distributive and Allied Employees' Association. This award combined the two previously separate jobs of bread-maker and pastry-cook into one new multi-skilled job, that of 'Baker'. As Mortimer notes, "the company successfully lobbied the state government and TAFE in New South Wales to introduce a new apprenticeship course for this, which involves 800 hours of study, compared to 500 hours for each of the old trades" (Mortimer 2011: 89). This course went on to become the major qualification for other organisations throughout the state. This case study shows the significance of strategic choices made by management as a key factor in job redesign strategies of organisations. In this case, the company's strategy was influenced by the attitude of its CEO towards training, and the ability of the company to use it to obtain a competitive advantage.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

In this paper we have reviewed the literature, which has been emerging since the 1950s and 1960s, urging organisations to redesign their jobs away from the extreme specialisation and lack of discretion that characterised the Taylorist approach to job design. The Taylorist model dominated job design principles in the first half of the twentieth century, but rising education levels in the post-war period began to challenge the underlying assumption that employees would accept highly specialised jobs if they were paid well enough. Beginning with the models of Maslow and Herzberg, this view was challenged, as a more educated workforce were seen to want more from their jobs. The concept of socio-technical systems showed the link between the obvious, technical aspects of work, and the social nature and impact of jobs. The social action model, developed from a sociological perspective to broaden the limitations of the psychological underpinnings of Maslow and Herzberg, further develops the emphasis on the social aspects of work in the socio-technical model by also considering the social aspects of outside work experiences. It acted as a useful counterpoint to the top down and universally applicable assumptions of the Maslow/Herzberg job enrichment approach to job design.

However, while various events, including the 1960s protest movement, brought job redesign issues to prominence from time to time, interest waxed and waned until the increasing globalisation of the world economy in the 1980s and 1990s created a more competitive corporate environment that forced organisations to take a more considered view. This more recent stream, building on the earlier work of Maslow and Herzberg, has resulted in two approaches. One, the best practice model, argues that all jobs need to be redesigned to provide greater skill variety, task identity, autonomy and consistent feedback on performance. The other, the best practice model, argues that HR practices (including job design) need to be consistent with business strategy, which in turn is contingent upon (or determined by) factors such as the type of technology, organisational size and employee skills needed. In this approach, only those organisations pursing a 'differentiation' strategy should focus on redesigning jobs; organisations pursing a 'cost leadership' strategy should not. However, the concept of 'strategic choice' of management in relation to business strategy, as illustrated in the case study of Woolworths discussed here, shows that even in an industry which could be assumed to warrant a cost leadership strategy, organisations can seek to successfully gain a competitive advantage by adopting a job redesign approach more generally associated with a differentiation HR strategy.

Finally, to answer the question posed in the title of this paper, it can be seen that while it might be seen as desirable from a particular value orientation to redesign and enrich the jobs of all employees in all organisations, this position is not supported by evidence in terms of a business case. The evidence suggests that organisations pursuing a differentiation strategy would generally benefit from redesigning jobs along the lines suggested by the best practice model; those that pursue a cost leadership model would not. However, even here it really comes down to a matter of the strategic choices made by individual management based on the way they interpret the significance of the contingent factors affecting their organisations.

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