

"MANY MANAGERS STILL THINK OF JOB ENRICHMENT AS IT WAS FIVE YEARS AGO, AND THEIR MISCONCEPTION IS KEEPING THEM FROM REALIZING THE FULL POTENTIAL OF JOB DESIGN TECHNOLOGY FOR TODAY AND THE FUTURE."

# DEVELOPING A MOTIVATIONAL STRATEGY

BY ROBERT  
JANSON

Five years ago job enrichment's primary objective was job satisfaction. Today, clients want measurable productivity improvements. Five years ago they emphasized the individual job. Today they want a comprehensive strategy to change the whole organization.

Clients' demands have been paralleled in what we the practitioners can give them. As we evaluated a growing number of successful job enrichment projects, we found that they almost all had one feature in common: a systematic change that affected not only individual jobs but the way the organization actually did business.

Such considerations made it increasingly clear that job enrichment was not a simple matter of bringing a group of supervisors together, training them in basic job enrichment theory, and having them redesign jobs. Inevitably those changes would make others reasonable and even imperative.

In addition, there were numer-

ous projects where before and after surveys showed significant improvements in job satisfaction and employee attitudes, but productivity increased dramatically. Theorists have said that productivity is improved via improvements over and over again. On the other hand, productivity has been increased with no improvements in motivation by such changes as automation, systems, industrial engineering, etc. In looking at the job itself and making structural changes, we have found that in many cases the system is better, the product is produced faster and with better quality. The additional dimension of increased job satisfaction is important but not necessarily essential.

For example, we have found that a team of two people assembling an electric welder could outproduce an assembly line. The change from the assembly line approach, where as many as 15 people assembled a single product, to the team approach reduced errors by 46 per cent and increased productivity by five per cent. The fact that job satisfaction also in-

creased might be irrelevant to some managers. In short, the change patterns characteristic of job enrichment seemed to make productive sense, whether or not job enrichment actually occurred.

From one point of view these findings raised problems, because job enrichment became more complicated. From another, it created opportunities, because the techniques used originally to make individual jobs more satisfying emerged as tools of tremendous potential for immediate productivity gains and comprehensive organizational change.

The purpose of this article is to explore this potential and to suggest a comprehensive strategy of organizational change for productivity. The strategy employs many of the specific techniques of job enrichment. But in purpose and scope it goes far enough beyond it to require a new label, free of some of the associations of job enrichment. As I noted, many managers still think of job enrichment as it was five years ago, and their misconception is keeping them from realizing the full potential of job

design technology for today and the future. Perhaps a new name will help to dramatize the change that has taken place.

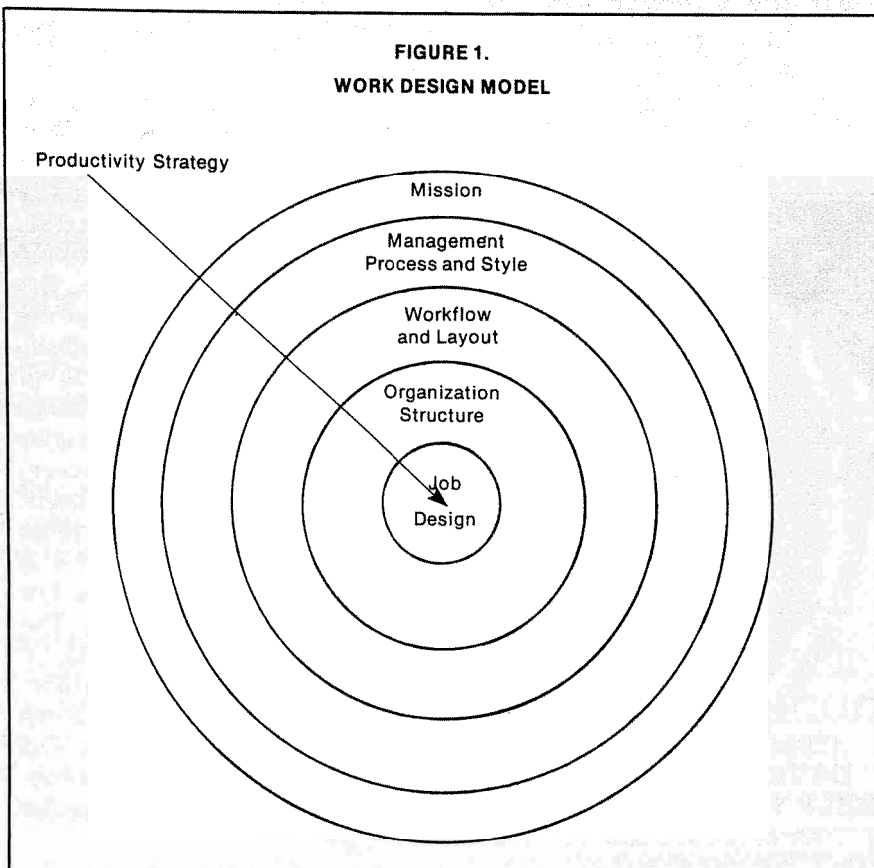
The name we have chosen is simply *Motivational Work Design*. It is a structural approach. Like job enrichment, it begins with changes in design of the job itself. But it then goes on to changes in other structural elements: physical layout and workflow; organizational relationships. These structural changes then lead to changes in the management process, which ultimately affect management's style. The end result is often a clearer sense of the organization's mission. This sequence is simply diagrammed in Figure 1.

### Motivation, Structure and Productivity

Early applications of job enrichment emphasized "motivation through the work itself." You could make jobs more satisfying by strengthening them in certain characteristics: the variety of skills used, regular feedback on performance, high autonomy and the chance for workers to get a sense of ownership. Experience in many organizations indicated that when workers found their jobs satisfying, they performed better. Theorists and practitioners might differ on several aspects of satisfaction: was it an end in itself, or should management expect a payoff in higher productivity or reduced turnover? Did satisfaction lead to the higher motivation that improved performance, or was satisfaction the result of a feeling of competence in a job well done?<sup>1</sup> Despite these differences, however, worker satisfaction was always a concern, either as an end or as an intermediate step.<sup>2</sup>

Today, if you go into the organizations where job enrichment began and start talking about "motivation through the work itself," you are likely to get hooted down as behind the times. Internal consultants, and particularly line managers, will tell you it's not the motivation that matters, it's the productivity results.

The kinds of structural change that have been proposed to improve motivation can improve pro-



ductivity. Line managers relate better to structural systems changes that are visible and easy to understand.

Why is structure so important? Anyone who has ever waited long minutes in a cafeteria line has had a firsthand demonstration. In a traditional cafeteria you assemble your lunch the way you would a car. Tray, forks and knives are at the beginning. You slide the tray along the line and reach each type of food in sequence — main dishes at the beginning; soups, bread, sandwiches and desserts along the way; beverages at the end. No matter how little or how much you want, you go through the whole line, and you are paced by the slowest chooser — or biggest eater — in the line. If you jump places in the line, chances are you bring down the wrath of others in the line.

Then one day it all changes. Your company moves to a new building with a different kind of cafeteria. In place of the long line there are several different areas or "interest islands." One island has soups and breads, another the sandwiches. There are two islands

for main dishes, and you can get most of the food yourself, rather than wait to be served. The number of cashiers varies with volume, either two or three. You pay one of them, and before you know it, you're at your table.

The new design has solved a number of problems at once. It makes customers feel better, since they can choose what they want and get out faster. It has increased throughput, the cafeteria's capacity to feed people in a given time period. And by increasing the proportion of truly self-service items, it has decreased the number of people who must work behind the counter.

The new design has accomplished all these things by giving people a new structure that calls for a new kind of behavior. The old cafeteria actually functioned to amplify its inefficiencies. Because it was slow, people had a lot of time between stations to be bored, to chat to relieve the boredom, and to be diverted from the process of picking food. But their real objective remained: to eat, not to wait in line for their food. In the new structure they go right to the food



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they want, get it fast, and save the conversation for the table.

A basic assumption of traditional approaches to organization change is that it starts with changes in knowledge or attitude, usually through training or communication programs. Such an approach would have had little effect on the cafeteria we described, and we find that it has little lasting effect, by itself, on other aspects of organizational behavior. Unless new knowledge, skills or attitudes are supported by the structure, the improvements are short-lived.

Accordingly, we concentrate on changes in job structure. This is not only for lower level jobs but everyone in the organization. The kinds of changes we make do, in fact, increase the variety, autonomy, feedback and other factors associated with enriched jobs. But it is less important that job enrichment take place than that behavior is changed.

### Motivational Work Design

With Motivational Job Design we look at the structural aspects of jobs and the organization and see how they can become a more productive and job satisfying operation. In order to do this we must look at the workflow and layout, the job design, organization structure and the mission and management style.

The lesson of the past five years is that successful efforts to change organizations and increase their productivity involve structural change. Although the results are best when the structural change is comprehensive, even limited change can bring immediate alterations in behavior. Furthermore, the change can start with any of three elements of structure.

A new, small organization usually has a clear idea of its mission, what it is in business to accomplish. But that mission often becomes less and less clear as an organization grows, diversifies, adopts new technology and in general becomes larger and more bureaucratic.

The small organization generally has a high percentage of its people working on a job that is closely identified with the organization's

mission. As the organization grows, the "core job" remains, but it becomes weakened, mainly through the increasing specialization of work. Eventually so many parts of the core job are given to support specialists that the specialists may actually outnumber those in the core job.<sup>3</sup>

This situation does not make sense from any viewpoint. It means fewer people are directly involved in the main business of the organization. It means that fewer have any firsthand experience of what that business is, or how it affects them. It means the organization is constantly in danger of losing sight of what its mission is.

An illustration of this kind of deterioration is the clerical job that starts as one person totally processing a form on a customer account, and ends with large groups of people who do nothing but their specialty: opening mail, inputting data to a computer, checking, researching, handling complaints and inquiries — and for a few, actually doing what is left of the processing task.

Recently, in a job redesign project in the accounting-policyholder service department of a medium-size insurance company, there were 75 people handling a variety of billing and accounting tasks for policyholder statements. They were divided into a change coding group and a payment recording department — each with a manager and two senior technicians — plus a number of special clerks. The work was divided as follows:

- Change coding: Review, purify and code incoming documents; mail bills.
- Payment recording: Review, record, balance and check policyholders' payments.
- Special clerks: Review, lapse unpaid accounts, handle phone and letter inquiries and problems.

It was obvious that the core job of the work group was to service policyholders, just as its name indicated, and the main components of service were to bill policyholders, record their payments and see that policy changes

were implemented. So, the consultants collapsed the separate functions into a single new job module, which they called "account analyst." Instead of performing part of the service mission on a large number of policies, employees now are accountable for the whole service mission on a smaller number of accounts.

The change has been good for productivity. The average case load per person has increased from 221 to 275. In addition, the service interval has been reduced and quality, as measured by error rates, has improved.

Interviews with the employees show that they feel better about their jobs, and this attitude may be the source of at least part of the productivity improvement. Besides job satisfaction increases, the system is clearly better. Note, for example, that redundant steps such as the formerly separate review functions for each of the three major stages are no longer necessary. The analyst can do all necessary reviews in the course of

normal processing. There are also no delays while work passes from one stage to the next.

#### Workflow and Layout

Most organizations really want to keep workflow and layout as simple as possible, but you would never know that from the way workflow is usually designed. An assembly line is not the only efficient workflow design, but far too often the numerous alternatives are overlooked. The criteria of good layout and workflow are:

1. Make it as simple and understandable as possible.
2. Have as few people as possible handling a given job, so as to maximize accountability and ownership.
3. Set it up so that you can measure performance easily.
4. Organize around identifiable services, products or sub-products.
5. Make the products or perform the services in such a way as to support the overall organizational mission.
6. Create job satisfaction.

In a large textile finishing plant where the dye department was experiencing quality problems and low morale, a consulting firm was called in to try and discover the cause of the problem.

In talking to the workers, it was found that they considered their supervisors inaccessible. They considered the supervisors "them," and felt there was no communication about what was going on in the organization.

It was observed that the supervisors spent most of their time in their shade booths — specially lighted booths where they checked swatches from each dye lot against color quality standards. Since the booths were all located together at the far end of the department, the supervisors spent most of their time talking to one another.

The consultants suggested breaking up the cluster of booths and moving each one closer to the two dye ranges it served. Within a very short time there was a notice-

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able change in the climate of the dye department. The supervisors were talking and conferring more with their workers, who suddenly felt as if they had team leaders. The workers took more interest in the continuing quality feedback they could easily get from the nearby booths. The supervisors started including the workers in the shading responsibilities.

Although the change was to be part of a comprehensive organization improvement plan, for three months nothing else was done, so that the consultants could observe the effect of this one change. Result: it increased quality 25 per cent, and productivity 18 per cent, by giving structural support for behavior that was good for productivity.

In other organizations the structural change cannot be so straightforward. For example, many clerical service organizations operate with an "assembly line" workflow pattern characterized by the following steps:<sup>4</sup>

- **Screening:** Source data to be entered or otherwise processed are batched, scanned for obvious errors or legibility problems, and assigned to a worker.

- **Processing:** The central task of disposition of the task goes on.

- **Typing or input:** The documents needed to implement the processor's disposition internally and/or notify the client or customer are prepared.

- **Checking:** All workflow to this point is examined for inaccuracies or other problems.

- **Research:** At some point in this sequence, usually in the processing, the processor draws on a separate staff handling historical material or other files of information needed for disposition.

- **Customer contact:** The customer — possibly within the organization as well as outside — gets notice of the results of processing. Often a back and forth dialogue is required to respond to customer inquiries, problems or complaints.

It is always considered hard to increase the productivity of clerical services. Since they are labor intensive, management has gen-

erally concluded that the way to improve productivity is to upgrade the quality of equipment and use it, as much as possible to replace people; or to upgrade the quality of people with the simplistic assumption that better educated, higher caliber people will be more concerned about high quality service. Both of these options are costly, and many mistakes are made with their application.

The revolution in this field, of course, has been the growth of electronic data processing. More recently we have seen the rise of word processing, the use of sophisticated dictation, transcription, and typing/editing equipment to make document production as nearly as possible an automated process.

In theory these electronic and mechanical wonders have tremendous power to raise productivity. In practice they have often fallen short of their potential. The main reason is that while they represent the most advanced technology, they are often introduced into

organizations still dominated by old traditions and a failure to acknowledge human factors in productivity.

One of the biggest opportunities for change has been the advent of the cathode-ray terminal (CRT). Since it can both enter and retrieve data from any number of locations, it gives endless possibilities for varied, flexible work design. Unfortunately we take this very sophisticated piece of equipment and proceed to do the same thing that we did with the key-punch machine: create a functionalized operation with all its inherent problems coupled with boring jobs of terminal pounders.

Under the traditional method, terminals would be placed exactly where our previous equipment or function was and we would continue to have separate departments and functions. The number of people wouldn't change very much, and we would carry on our operation in basically the same way.

Under the Work Design Model, we would use this opportunity to

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rethink our organization completely in terms of its current and future mission, the individual needs of our people, the workflow and layout. Our objective would be to have fewer people doing more tasks so as to increase production and quality and to increase job satisfaction. We would try to build our organization around its total work design, not around a CRT terminal.

Our model might be a work station that combined the individual functions of screener, processor, typist (now CRT entry) and checker. This work would be done by one person. The individual departments would be designed according to a whole subproduct or service, so that a manager can be held accountable for an identifiable set of results.

Although a job design in which one employee performs all the activities needed for the mission or subproduct appears ideal motivationally, it is not always feasible. Needs for special expertise, costs of training and heavy capital investment impose their limits. Still, it is usually possible to achieve most of the effects of the theoretical ideal in any of several other ways. The secret is to be flexible, rather than approach job design with a rigid idea that there is only one way.

### For Example . . .

For example, recently a maker of computer peripheral equipment designed a plant to produce a new video terminal. Because the terminal was forecast to have many times the sales volume of any product the company had produced up to the present, management wanted maximum control over the entire manufacturing process, and decided to include in the plant fabrication of the printed circuit boards and other steps that would have been contracted out. The end product was thus far too complex for a one-man, one-terminal work design. However, they were able to avoid the conventional assembly line.

The approach was to identify those points where there was a complete subassembly — preferably something that could be test-



ed. On this basis they set up five different shops, designed a different kind of workflow and layout for each one, and made them all self-managing to the greatest possible degree.

For example, in the shop fabricating the circuit boards, a pair of men operated a shear, drill press, punch press and sander. They changed off on the equipment as they wanted, and scheduled their work as they wanted, so long as they supplied the required number of boards per week.

In the silk screen shop there were four pairs of men, each pair moving with a batch through all steps of the printing process. For accountability and feedback, each batch was identified with the pair who had made it.

It was sometimes necessary to violate the strict orthodoxy of job enrichment, sometimes at the request of the workers, who took great interest in finding the best design for their jobs. For example, in the hand assembly area, the workers wanted a one person, one board setup for the less complex modules. But they felt that the more complex ones were too hard on the eyes and concentration, and preferred to break the process up. (From a motivational viewpoint it was felt that if a worker completed one of the more complex boards alone, he would be waiting too long for the reinforcement that goes with a completion.)

Where support functions cannot be integrated into a core job or team module, physical arrangements alone can sometimes produce the same effects. Robert N. Ford has given an instance from Southwestern Bell Telephone of what he calls "nesting" of related jobs. Briefly, the jobs of service representatives had been enriched by creating several groups, each responsible for a given set of customers. The new job modules were reflected in a new physical layout, with each group in a circular "wagon train."

At the same time, a switch from hot, noisy TWX equipment to CRTs made it possible to move the service order typists, who had been located separately. The ser-

vice reps were happy with the new arrangement, but six of the eight typists quit within a few months. Management had a hunch about the reason: the typists were off in one corner of the room, and they got random orders from any service representative.

Management's solution: first, eliminate the distinction between service order typists and reviewers, who had been located with them, and checked each order before typing began. Second, assign certain typists to each team of service reps. Third, move those typists and their CRTs into the center of the "wagon train" they served.

The step was not only good for morale, but also for productivity. Instead of 10 people putting their hands on a service order, there are now only three. Before the typists were integrated with the service reps, they were getting out only 27 per cent of their orders on time. Within three months of integration the figure had climbed to 90 per cent. Yet during this time workload increased 21 per cent.<sup>5</sup>

In another company the CRT installation gave management an opportunity to completely change branch sales organization. Prior to the CRT system all administrative work was done by a special group in a separate room away from the salespeople. Although there was quite a bit of interaction between the two, there was a high degree of conflict plus a degree of "second-class citizenship" in the administrative group. It was decided to eliminate the special room and locate the administrative people with their CRTs in a team among the salespeople. This structural change made the administrative person part of the team and set up the conditions for a whole host of other changes. The administrative person could give quicker information and related closely to the sales mission. Certain administrative people went out and saw customers and handled routine queries that freed up the salespeople. The company ended up with fewer people doing a more varied job with a higher degree of job satisfaction.

In changing the structure of jobs to enrich them, and in rearranging workflows, it is a constant concern to pull accountability for results down to the lowest possible level, and to provide feedback at that level which lets employees know their results. The same downward thrust has to be applied to the organization structure as it affects middle and top management. Unfortunately, too many organizations are structured in such a way as to push accountability in the wrong direction — toward the top. As the departments grow, we create individual management in each department reporting to the plant manager.

In real organizations, the number of functional departments reporting to a plant or operational manager can be as many as 15 with additional levels of management between the plant vice-president and functional manager. If you look at the way most functional departments operate you will find that they become more and more

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identified with a particular function rather than the mission of the organization. Each manager protects his function and doesn't relate to the overall product. This manager has the same structural problems with his/her job as some of the individual workers. Since he/she is not responsible for an end product and the bottom line that goes with it, he/she tends to strengthen his/her function which may or may not increase effective-

ness. Management has tried to solve this by such things as team building, profit centers, MBO and project teams, with some significant successes. But there is no substitute for an organizational structure that is designed to carry out the mission and structured to hold individual managers accountable for the success of the mission.

Consultants have been working in the trust department of a large bank which is headed by the

vice-president of operations, who has five assistant vice-presidents reporting to him. Their departments process customers' securities in a continuous, step-by-step workflow, like an assembly line. The first department screens the transaction for processing. The second codes the security. The third enters the transaction in a master file. The fourth checks and researches errors. The fifth handles customer inquiries and complaints.

Both client and consultants were aware from the start that there were serious conflicts and communication problems. When they asked the vice-president who was responsible for operating results in his organization, he said, "My AVPs are." When they pressed him further, though, he admitted that only he could really be held accountable for overall results. He could hold his AVPs accountable only for the results of their own operations. And although he tried to say he spent his time "managing," he admitted also that he was really more of a referee in conflicts among the departments than he was a manager.

This kind of conflict is a built-in hazard of organizations that are structured according to functionalization of work. As we change the content of job modules and the layout of workflows, it becomes reasonable to replace functionally structured management with alternatives. For example, in the trust department described previously, one possible solution is to put each AVP in charge of a cross-functional group handling one-fifth of the total workload, but handling the processing from start to finish. If it is not feasible to go this far, it might be possible to have four cross-functional groups, and leave some support functions separate.

### Mission, Process and Management Style

In any case, the objective should always be to create entities whose mission is clear and congruent with those of the overall organization. The managers accountable for those missions should also be able to pursue them without conflicting with other teams.

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Robert N. Ford's comment, "it is the natural history of jobs to get worse," has been quoted often. It applies equally to organizations. As we have noted earlier, organizations tend to grow away from a clear recognition of what their mission is. So it is a part of work design strategy to question present strategies, or more often, to get them formulated or clarified. Most organizations go through a major reorganization about every 10 years. The most successful are those that build on existing strengths, a process that starts with such questions as "What are we good at?" and "What are we in business to do?"

The importance of keeping the mission squarely in sight is well illustrated by comparison of McDonald's Restaurants with one of its less successful competitors. The stores of either business have the same mission: to serve a good quality hamburger and a limited number of other items as fast and efficiently as possible. They want to make customers feel good enough about the food and the service to come back again.

The food is about equal in both chains. But McDonald's has a big edge in service, strictly because it is organized to perform the mission well. When you give your order, the clerk takes it, gives you change, and packages the whole meal. Even when there are lines, they move fast.

In the competition's stores, by contrast, the setup is like the cafeteria we described earlier. A clerk takes your order, yells it to the people in the back, and hands your sales check to another clerk, who runs the register and makes change. Then you move down and wait for your order to come. It takes much longer than McDonald's.

Theodore Levitt has suggested that McDonald's success is due to heavy emphasis on technology and on minimizing discretion, which he characterizes as "the enemy of order, standardization and quality."<sup>6</sup>

I suspect, however, that the

high level of service in McDonald's is at least partly due to the design of whole jobs — not so much for their motivation content as for their ability to accomplish a clearly conceived mission in the best way.

### The Future

There have been far too many successes in the area of job enrichment to call it a fad or short-lived program. Ownership of product, feedback, client contact, fewer people doing more, are objectives that all line managers understand. What each organization must do is to make sure that the principles and what has been learned in other organizations is standard information. This knowledge should be learned and understood by all management people who can affect job and organization structure. Top-level management should be more aware since many of the issues are conceptual and if implemented will affect the entire operation.

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