

# **JOB DESIGN AND WORK ORGANIZATION**

**Matching people  
and technology  
for productivity and  
employee involvement**

**JOHN BAILEY**

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Matching people and technology for  
productivity and employee involvement

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**To my wife Rosemary and to our  
children Mark, Anna and Victoria for  
their patience, interest and  
encouragement.**

# Preface

This book is designed to appeal to the wide range of people interested in the problem of organizing people and work. Over the last two decades considerable interest and controversy has been generated from such developments as job enrichment and autonomous group working and several examples, such as those at ICI, Saab and Volvo, have attracted international interest and speculation. However, interesting though these may be, the question is how far this alternative approach to organizing people and work is practical and applicable to other situations. Are we looking at the application of a specialized technique or at a different approach to the way we organize people and work? This book (aimed both at people in industry such as managers, specialists and trade unionists, and at those studying for an industrial or commercial career) seeks to answer this question and provides a comprehensive review of newer approaches to the design of jobs and to the organization of work.

Many people in industry and those observing or studying it would acknowledge that we have not yet found the answer to gaining people's real commitment and involvement at work. Traditional approaches to organization and increased efficiency involving specialization, de-skilling and centralized management control have often failed, resulting in low productivity, lack of flexibility and alienation of people from their work. These problems are examined in Part I in relation to what we know about people and their needs at work. From this we can identify new criteria for effective job design and work organization, thus providing targets for people to work towards in practice. In the light of these criteria the book then examines how far techniques such as job rotation, job enrichment and group working meet these aims and overcome some of the problems identified.

From Part II of the book the reader will be able to establish the extent to which work restructuring has been implemented and how far it is applicable to his or her own situation and to different types of industry. While it may be easy to restructure jobs in light electronic assembly work, can the same be said for process type industries with their technological constraints? While people are aware of the problem on the shop floor, are there needs and opportunities for work structuring in office and white collar jobs? Also, how far really do these changes lead to the improvements in productivity and job satisfaction anticipated?

This book, however, is very much about application, and while it is one thing to read and talk about work restructuring it is quite another to do it. Therefore in Part III the implications of these developments are examined together with the issues involved in introducing this type of change. Thus problems like where we should start, who should be involved and how we should measure our results are examined, together with what tools and techniques are available to help the process in practice.

Finally, while the focus of the book is essentially on practice, new technology and changes in society are already influencing our approach to these problems.

Thus the final part of the book helps the reader to consider the implications of new technology on job design and work organization in the factories and offices of the future. In examining future trends it identifies the opportunities and constraints that may affect its future development and the sources and resources available to help those interested in this field.

This book is therefore not just an academic text. It seeks to combine both a thorough review of relevant theory and research with a pragmatic evaluation of work structuring in practice. Not only will it appeal to students as part of their overall education but it will also be of direct use to people in industry who are interested in improving their own effectiveness. While the book analyses past mistakes it also looks at future opportunities, examining both advantages and limitations of the techniques and how they can be applied in practice. It offers students and managers alike guidelines, checklists and tools that can be used both to aid and measure change and, through the many case studies, a wealth of practical experience.

## Acknowledgements

I am provided here with an opportunity to convey my thanks to the many people who have helped and influenced me in developing my own knowledge and experience in this field and in the process of writing the book.

Apart from my experience as a consultant my earliest encouragement came from Roger Carter, Personnel Manager and later Factory Manager at Frys Somerdale, part of Cadbury Schweppes.

I am particularly grateful to the late Prof. A.T.M. Wilson of the London Business School and to the International Council for the Quality of Working Life whose practical and financial assistance helped me visit many of the companies referred to in the book. In that respect my thanks are also extended to those who helped me in conducting my surveys. In particular Prof. Fleming Agersnap and colleagues at the Copenhagen School of Economics and Social Sciences, to Prof. Louis Davis and John Cotter at the Center for QWL, UCLA and Prof. George Strauss and Ray Miles at Berkeley University, all of whom offered much practical help and generous hospitality. Those thanks must equally be extended to the numerous people in the various firms I visited at the time. However, I am especially grateful to Dr. David Birchall and Prof. Ray Wilde of the Work Research Unit at Henley Administrative Staff College for their support and guidance at that stage.

Apart from my academic colleagues I have continued to receive practical help and encouragement from many people in industry who are interested in this field. In particular I would thank John Baker and David Hardy and their colleagues at Watney Mann and Truman Brewers for their interest and work, also Bernard Harvey for the pioneering work he has done at Clark's in Street, and Gordon MacKie, latterly Managing Director of Blackwell Bearings, for his interest and involvement.

Finally, however, apart from the very real help obtained from the reviewers some of the most useful support and assistance was provided by Jenny Blake, formerly of Tavistock Institute and Regional Secretary of the OD Network, together with Mike Beeby and Laura Heath, who have helped me run many seminars and have proved invaluable allies both to me and to job design.

Last but not least, my thanks go to Adrienne Workman who has patiently and promptly typed the many drafts and redrafts required to prepare the manuscript for publication.



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## PART I

### Concepts

The first part of this book seeks to examine some of the underlying thinking about organization and the needs of the individual. Traditional approaches to organizing people and work are examined and their effectiveness, particularly in regard to employee reactions and motivations, is explored. Current thinking on human motivation is examined, with particular regard to its implications for job design and work organization. Finally, in the first part of the book, current thinking on alternative approaches to the organization of people and work are examined with a view to determining the criteria for effective job design and work organization.





# The problem

What is the problem? Why have traditional approaches to organization and increasing efficiency failed? How far do poor organization and lack of job design contribute to the problems of alienation from work, low productivity and lack of flexibility? What has been the impact of increased specialization and centralized management control on people's sense of involvement and commitment at work? Why do we need to change?

## 1.1 THE NATURE OF THE PROBLEM

### 1.1.1 FAILURE OF THE TRADITIONAL APPROACH TO ORGANIZATION AND EFFICIENCY

Many people feel we have not yet found the answer to gaining people's involvement and commitment at work. Traditional approaches to organization and increasing efficiency often seem to fail in practice to achieve the improvements in performance and productivity anticipated. Increased specialization, the de-skilling of jobs and more centralized management control, while they are felt necessary for increased efficiency, often result in more boring and monotonous work, a lack of sense of responsibility and involvement leading, in some cases, to indifference or even positive feelings of alienation from work.

The costs of our failure to adequately match the needs of the organization from an efficiency point of view with the needs of employees on whom the organization depends can be high. While some of these costs may be reflected in relatively visible features such as poor operator performance, absenteeism, labour turnover, strikes and disputes, others are less immediately obvious but may ultimately be of greater significance. Thus factors such as lack of flexibility of labour, poor quality, late deliveries, over-manning and resistance to changes in method and technology may in the longer term incur greater costs in terms of a company's productivity and competitive position.

However, ultimately the greatest cost of our failure to effectively involve our employees is one of lost opportunity in tapping and developing the contribution that people at all levels in the organization can make to the continuing improvement and success of the organization in meeting the increasing and changing demands made upon it.