



Engage for Success Peer-Reviewed
White Paper Series

Job Design and Employee Engagement

Professor Katie Truss, University of Kent

Angela Baron, Independent HR Consultant

Doug Crawford, Cerus Consulting

Tom Debenham, People Insight

Mike Emmott, CIPD

Dr Stephen Harding, Towers Watson

Matthew Longman, Devon and Cornwall Police

Eti Murray, Civil Service Employee Policy

Professor Peter Totterdill, UKWON

Engage for Success White Paper No 2014-01

Copyright © 2014. *Truss, Baron, Crawford, Debenham, Emmott, Harding, Longman, Murray & Totterdill*. All rights reserved. Do not quote or cite without permission from the authors. The authors hereby grant permission for a free worldwide right and licence to copy and disseminate and otherwise use this White Paper in business activities. Any such dissemination activities must not be designed to bring Engage for Success into disrepute

What is Job Design?

'Job design is the process of putting together a range of tasks, duties and responsibilities to create a composite for individuals to undertake in their work and to regard as their own. It is crucial: not only is it the basis of individual satisfaction and achievement at work, it is necessary to get the job done efficiently, economically, reliably and safely.'
(Torrington et al., 2011: 84)

Ever since jobs have existed, debate has raged about the best way to design them. F.W. Taylor's 'Scientific Management' approach developed during the Industrial Revolution suggested that jobs should be broken down into simple and repetitive tasks in order to maximise productivity. This encouraged employers to create jobs that allowed individual workers very limited scope for innovation, creativity and variety, and inevitably led to boredom and dissatisfaction.

During the mid-20th Century as the Human Relations movement emerged, there was an increased realisation that individual motivational needs should be taken into account in the way work was designed, leading to an emphasis on allowing people scope within their work for social interaction, personal development, and the realisation of their own ambitions (Garg and Rastogi, 2006).

Since then, there has been a growing volume of research exploring how to bring these elements together so that jobs can be designed both to maximise the engagement and satisfaction of individual workers on the one hand, and maximise the productivity and performance of organisations on the other. There is now considerable evidence that individuals' experience of their day-to-day work directly affects their engagement levels, and also their personal effectiveness (Morgeson et al., 2011; Shantz et al., 2013). Related issues include how jobs are embedded within their broader organisational contexts, how they interrelate with one another, and the design of the wider organisation itself. As well as being important for engagement, job design has been shown to be important for the health of workers as well (Grzywacz and Dooley, 2003).

However, job design remains a topic that receives much less attention from employers and policymakers as a driver of engagement compared with other aspects of management such as leadership or management style (Truss, 2012). There is a dearth of information available for employers on the key principles of job design and the major factors that need to be taken into consideration when designing engaging jobs. This is a cause for concern, particularly in light of findings such as those from Cerus Consulting who, in a recent survey of their client group, found that 68% said that the single most important factor for high levels of engagement was 'doing a job that is challenging and varied and which makes a meaningful contribution'.

The aim of this White Paper is to outline the evidence demonstrating the impact of job design on engagement, and to provide employers with insight into how to design jobs that will maximise levels of engagement.

In doing this, we draw on research findings and best practice examples in the area of job design and focus on the following areas:

- Does job design matter for engagement?
- The content of jobs – what are the key factors that distinguish engaging jobs?

- Work environment – the setting within which work takes place.
- The role of the manager in creating engaging jobs.

Does Job Design Matter for Engagement?

Both academic and practitioner studies have shown that the design of work affects how engaged people are (Humphrey et al., 2007). For example, in an overview paper, Christian et al (2011) found that job features such as task variety, autonomy, significance and feedback had all been positively related to engagement in a wide range of research papers. The same features have been found in other studies to be linked with motivation (Fried and Ferris, 1987; Hackman and Oldham, 1980). William Kahn's (1990) seminal study of work engagement showed how the context within which work is carried out combines with features of the work itself to foster high levels of engagement.

From a theoretical perspective, one of the reasons why job design is so important for engagement is that well designed jobs that are interesting, varied and challenging can increase the resources that an individual has, and help buffer the demands placed upon them. Researchers refer to this as the *job demands-resources* framework, and studies have shown that this model is a helpful way of considering how and why people respond in different ways to their work situation (Bakker and Demerouti, 2007; Shantz et al., 2013). For instance, when people find their work monotonous and undemanding, this can lead to psychological distress and disengagement as people's resources become depleted (Morgeson and Humphrey, 2006; Work Foundation, 2009). Conversely, when people have interesting, challenging tasks to do, they feel motivated and inspired to invest their energies in their work, and it is the investment of these personal energies that researchers have found lies at the heart of engagement (Crawford et al., 2013)

Other studies corroborate these findings. For instance:

- Bond (2010), in a study of call centre workers, found that a relatively small increase in autonomy led to a significant increase in motivation, alongside a decrease in absenteeism and mental distress.
- Wrzniewski and Dutton (2001) studied hospital cleaning staff, and found that those given more autonomy to interact with patients, visitors and others were more satisfied than their counterparts, and felt they were playing a more important role.
- Humphrey et al (2007) in their meta-study, found that 14 different work characteristics explained 43% of the variance in a range of 19 different worker attitudes and behaviours.

Research carried out by People Insight that aimed to find out the key engagement drivers discovered that eight of the top 10 drivers of engagement were all closely correlated with job design (the correlation is shown in brackets):

1. I get a sense of achievement from working here (0.70)
2. I enjoy my work (0.63)
3. In my job I have the chance to do what I do best (0.56)
4. I am proud of the work that I do (0.54)
5. I feel valued and recognised for the work that I do (0.54)
6. My job makes the best use of the skills and abilities that I have (0.54)

7. I have the right opportunities to learn and grow at work (0.53)
8. I have the freedom I need to get on with my job (0.49).

Overall, the conclusion is that the way jobs are designed has a significant impact on engagement levels. The question for employers and managers therefore is: how can jobs be designed for optimal effect? This involves several inter-related areas: the design of the actual work itself; the setting within which work takes place; and the role of the line manager.

The Content of Jobs – What are the Key Factors that Distinguish Engaging Jobs?

Much of what we know today about job content design emanates from the seminal work of Hackman and Oldham (1980), who developed the *Job Characteristics Model*. This identifies five core motivational job features:

- **Skill variety:** the extent to which a jobholder is required to use a range of different skills.
- **Identity:** the extent to which a job involves the completion of a 'whole' piece of work with end-to-end responsibility.
- **Significance:** the amount of impact that a job has, and the contribution that the job makes.
- **Autonomy:** the amount of discretion that the jobholder has in making decisions about what to do and how to do it.
- **Feedback:** direct information about the performance requirements of the job.

According to their research, jobs with high levels of these five features are the most motivational. The reason for this is that these job characteristics give rise to the following psychological states:

- **Experienced meaningfulness**, or the ability to see your work as meaningful in some way
- **Experienced responsibility**, or feeling responsible for the outcomes of your work
- **Knowledge of results**, or the ability to see the outcome or impact of your work.

In consequence, jobs with these characteristics are most likely to lead to high levels of performance, positive attitudes towards work, and decreased negative attitudes and behaviours.

Later research has established links between these elements of job design and levels of engagement (Bakker and Bal, 2010; Christian et al., 2011; Kahn, 1990; May et al., 2004; Saks, 2006; Schaufeli and Bakker, 2004). Other studies have shown that the five characteristics are also linked with job satisfaction and internal work motivation (Fried and Ferris, 1987; Humphrey et al., 2007).

The reason why Hackman and Oldham's job design features are important for engagement can be understood within the context of psychological theory. For example, people whose jobs are varied are more likely to experience a sense of energy in relation to their work. Some studies have shown that monotonous work can lead to psychological distress and disengagement (Melamed et al, 1995). People whose work is autonomous experience a feeling of responsibility, and are then more likely to invest effort into their work, even in the face of obstacles (Shantz et al., 2013).

When someone is responsible for a 'whole piece' of meaningful work ('identity') and perceive their work as significant, then they are more likely to invest their whole self into their work and experience a sense of pride. Adam Grant (2008) conducted an interesting experiment involving lifeguards that illustrates this point. The lifeguards were divided into two groups, the first group were read stories featuring heroic lifeguards and the second group were not read any stories. One month later, those who had heard the stories reported stronger feelings of self-worth than those in the second group. Such feelings of self-worth can generate high levels of engagement. It has equally been known for a long time that feedback on performance is highly motivational for people when done in the right way.

The most complete test to date of how Hackman and Oldham's job characteristics are linked with engagement was conducted by Shantz et al (2013). Their study showed a positive relationship for four of the five features (variety, autonomy, significance and feedback), with skill variety showing the strongest relationship. The study also showed that workers who were strongly engaged were also more likely to help others out at work (undertake 'citizenship behaviours') and to perform better. Furthermore, they also found that highly engaged workers were less likely to behave in 'deviant' ways, such as coming into work late.

The theoretical framework '*social exchange theory*' can help to make sense of these findings. Social exchange theory suggests that employees and employers are in a symbiotic relationship, so that when an employee perceives themselves to have been treated well by their employer, such as through being given interesting, varied and autonomous work, then they are likely to reciprocate by investing their own energies into their work in the form of engagement.

Another framework that is useful in helping to understand why engagement is important in the context of performance is '*broaden-and-build*' theory (Frederickson, 2001). This is based on the idea within positive psychology that positive emotions expand individuals' thought-action repertoires and increase their personal resources. Thus, people who experience positive emotions and thoughts at work, such as those who find their work meaningful and are highly engaged, are more likely than their disengaged colleagues to come up with new ideas, creative solutions and to recover quickly from setbacks (Soane et al., 2013). This highlights the importance of creating positive work experiences for people.

Parker et al (2001) extend Hackman and Oldham's original model by proposing the addition of further job characteristics relevant to the modern era:

- Opportunity for skill acquisition, growth and development, especially transferable skills.
- Minimisation of role conflict, which is important particularly for front-line workers who often have to play multiple roles.
- Cognitive characteristics: it has been predicted that increased attention and increased problem-solving are required.
- Emotional characteristics: work in the modern era increasingly demands emotional labour eg service work.
- Group-level characteristics: such as team cohesion, team composition, group norms and interdependence. These are likely to interact with individual-level factors in various ways.

Parker and colleagues suggested that different work characteristics will be particularly salient in different settings and job roles. Some workers, such as management consultants, might already experience high levels of autonomy, whilst others, such as teleworkers, might be more tightly controlled and therefore benefit from increased autonomy. In her wider work on job design, Sharon Parker argues that increasing autonomy is a particularly important mechanism for job redesign, raising levels of motivation and self-efficacy. Bond (2010) also showed how a relatively small increase in the autonomy of call centre workers in a UK bank (eg by allowing them a greater say in the planning of their work) led to a significant increase in motivation, a decrease in absenteeism and mental distress. A recent Work Foundation report (2012) demonstrated that levels of autonomy at work vary considerably between countries.

Finally, a key factor in engaging jobs is job-ability fit. A recent study by the Work Foundation (2009) found that 44% of workers overall, and 36% of knowledge workers, say that their skills are under-used in their current roles. It is generally known that workers who feel they are well suited to their roles are more engaged than their peers (Truss et al., 2006). This is an important point, since some studies have shown rising levels of worker dissatisfaction with the mismatch between their skills and the work they are asked to do (Green, 2006). The CIPD further found in 2008 that perceived skill utilisation is one of the strongest predictors of job related wellbeing.

Case Study: WL Gore

(Source: Adapted from CIPD, 2008: 25-26)

WL Gore was founded in 1958 and is best known for its GORE-TEX® fabrics. Its fluoropolymer products are also used in the medical and automotive industries; the company employs around 8,000 associates in over 45 locations around the world. The company was founded on a set of four guiding principles:

- Fairness to each other and everyone with whom we come into contact
- Freedom to encourage, help and allow other associates to grow in knowledge, skill and scope of responsibility
- The ability to make one's own commitments and keep them
- Ability to make decisions without reference to others, but in consultation with other associates before undertaking actions that could seriously negatively impact the success of the company

Gore is organised in a flat, non-hierarchical structure (a 'lattice'), with no traditional organisation charts, ranks or job titles, or chains of command. People are recruited on the basis of cultural fit with the company. There are no rigid job descriptions, instead, associates commit to contribute individually and collectively to work areas or projects according to their skills. Individuals are encouraged to take an interest in a wide variety of job areas of projects. Providing their core responsibilities are carried out, an associate can then stretch and build on their role to suit their interests, aspirations and the business needs. The 'lattice' structure gives associates the opportunity to use their own judgement, take ownership of work areas and access the resources they need. Additions or stretch to roles may be one-off activities or longer-term activities that add onto existing roles. Associates choose another associate to act as their sponsor; the sponsor coaches individuals to help them maximise their contribution to the company and chart a course through the organisation to fulfil their personal objectives whilst maximising business performance.

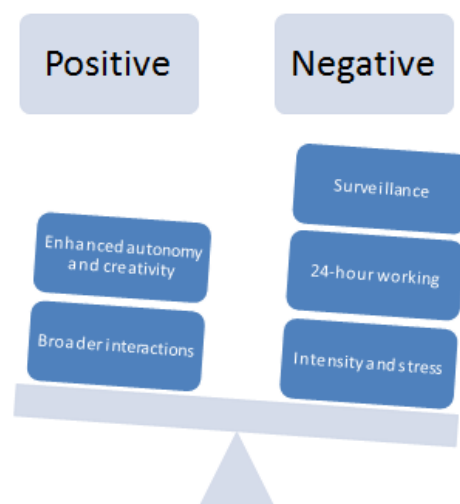
When someone leaves, a replacement is not automatically hired. The position is re-evaluated to see if it is still relevant, enabling work and job design to be constantly re-evaluated and refreshed. Associates are encouraged to take an interest in ensuring their role is enabling them to maximise their contribution. Leaders often emerge naturally through demonstrating special knowledge, skills or experience that advance business objectives. However, lateral communication is encouraged within multidisciplinary teams.

The Work Environment

A recent report by the Work Foundation (2012) showed how our working environment is going through a period of profound change in the wake of the economic crisis, a series of high-profile environmental disasters, technological advancements, and ongoing industrial restructuring. Whilst efforts to redesign jobs to include greater autonomy and skill use are to be welcomed, the Work Foundation also notes that these trends can be linked with harmful developments given the current environment, such as work intensification. It goes without saying that when jobholders become significantly overloaded, whether their jobs are 'well-designed' or not, the likely outcomes are stress, ill-health, absenteeism and turnover.

In an earlier report, the Work Foundation (2009) highlighted how some of the countervailing forces that the current rapid technological advancements, such as wireless technologies and social media, are impacting on the core features of job design:

Figure 1 Positive and Negative Effects from Technological Advancements



The increased flexibility, scope for wider involvement and creativity offered by new media need to be balanced against the potential for increased stress and feelings of surveillance.

Equally, as Oldham and Hackman (2010) noted when they recently revisited their work on job design, the significant increase in semi-permanent, contractual and temporary work relationships will inevitably affect how jobs are designed and how people experience them. They suggest that these changes mean that the social dimension of work requires greater consideration than before. In particular, job design in relation to team functioning needs to be considered, alongside organisational structures and processes. Rather than considering job design in isolation, which may have been possible during previous eras, we now have to think about jobs in their social context of teams, leaders and climate (Parker et al., 2001). The CIPD (2008) refer to this as 'smart working', which they define as: 'an approach to organising work that aims to drive greater efficiency and

effectiveness in achieving job outcomes through a combination of flexibility, autonomy and collaboration, in parallel with optimising tools and working environments for employers' (p. 4).

As Parker et al (2001) note, when jobs are technically inter-dependent, job design needs to take place at the group, rather than the individual level. This leads us into the domain of organisation design and development; as the CIPD (2008) argue, there is a need for a 'whole systems' approach to designing jobs and organisations, since the work context will influence the relationship between job design and outcomes in either positive or negative ways (Morgeson et al., 2010). For instance, in a recent study of knowledge workers, the Work Foundation (2008) found that 65% say that their organisation is 'rule and policy bound', but that only 5% actually prefer to work in an environment like this.

Factors beyond the individual job that need to be considered in relation to job design can include:

- Climate: ie the shared perceptions held within the organisation
- Technical systems: including design and usage
- Organisational structure: including work flow, degree of centralisation and degree of formalisation
- Organisation and individual development: ie how jobs allow people to use and develop their own skills and careers, as well as the overall design and development of the organisation
- Physical work environment, including ergonomic factors
- Team and group working including team cohesion, team composition and interdependency
- Flexible working practices and the boundary between 'work' and 'non-work'
- Work processes and work flow.

(CIPD, 2008; Garg and Rastogi, 2005; Morgeson et al., 2010; Parker et al., 2001).

Case Study: Centrica

(Source: Adapted from CIPD, 2008: 21-23)

Centrica is an international energy organisation based in the UK and employing around 29,000 people in the UK and a further 4,000 overseas. In 2005, the company decided to consolidate its five West London sites into three and, at the same time, change ways of working. 'Project Martini' was set up to identify and implement new working practices that took advantage of the new and upgraded working facilities and investment in IT. The project strapline was: 'work is something you do, not somewhere you go'. Changes included hotdesking, team 'footprints' ie areas of hot desks allocated to teams; 'touch down zones' for printing and checking email and collaborative work zones. Break out areas were created for informal conversations with an increased number of dedicated meeting rooms. Lockers replaced individual filing cabinets and a clear desk policy was implemented. Laptops and home printers were introduced across employee groups with new phones with email capabilities. The intranet was upgraded to enable employees to collaborate and share documents on the web. Flexible working policies were introduced to encourage working hours and location flexibility and staff were given the freedom to choose their work location to best achieve work outcomes together with their line manager.

To help prepare for the changes, managers were given extensive training and empowered to role-model the changes. A set of interventions was introduced to help employees prepare for the change, including roadshows, manager coaching, team-building workshops, one-to-one consultations and technical training. Centrica regarded the changes as a core element of their employee proposition; overall, the business benefits included travel savings of the equivalent of 13 trips to the moon; work-life balance improved by 38%; engagement improved by 4%.

The Role of the Manager in Creating Engaging Jobs

The line manager has a significant role to play in creating an environment where workers can find their work engaging, through shaping job content, treatment of the role holder, and levels of trust (Clegg and Spencer, 2007). The redesign of workers' jobs therefore needs to be linked with a consideration of the role of the line manager as well. If jobs are redesigned to increase worker autonomy, for instance, then in some settings this might be perceived as the line manager 'passing the buck' and interpreted in negative, rather than positive ways.

This is particularly important when the intent of the job redesign is to impact levels of employee engagement, given the close relationship between manager behaviour and employee performance. We also need to consider the experience of line managers themselves, and how they are rewarded and incentivised for their behaviours at work. When considering the role of the line manager in relation to employee engagement, it is worth noting the importance of the leadership role that both senior leaders and line managers themselves play in this context. Emma Soane (2013) shows how positive and transformational forms of leadership can enhance employees' level of engagement with their work through 'idealised influence', instilling a sense of pride and willingness to go beyond self-interest; through 'inspirational motivation' by talking optimistically and positively about the future; through 'intellectual stimulation' whereby leaders encourage followers to seek alternative viewpoints; and through 'individualised' consideration' as they teach and coach their employees.

In the section that follows, Towers Watson shows how their data can shed light on the role of the manager in employee engagement.

Towers Watson Engagement Study

Towers Watson undertook a study of the relationship between employee engagement and organisation performance across a population of 16 insurance companies. They found a strong association between increased employee engagement and significant increases in financial gains. They then analysed the data to determine whether a relationship exists between manager effectiveness and employee engagement. Working in depth with one of the insurance companies, they identified engagement survey items and a manager performance index. Using that index, they correlated the engagement and performance indices across nine major units within the company. They found a 0.63 correlation between manager performance and engagement at this company (1.0 would indicate a perfect linear relationship and zero would mean no relationship). These results suggest a connection between the manager performance and employee engagement measures, and ultimately between manager performance and financial results, (Davenport & Harding, 2012).

In similar vein, a 2010 study by the Economist Intelligence Unit found that the motivational ability of the immediate line manager is the single most important contributor to employee engagement, ahead of such factors as senior management vision, values, and charisma. Chris Bones of Manchester Business School reinforces the point: "There is no real evidence to say that leadership makes a difference. The only people that can help employees reach positive answers to those questions that directly influence engagement, such as 'do I feel valued? Or 'is my career progressing?' are their immediate managers" (Economist Intelligence Unit, 2010).

How well are managers doing in meeting up to this challenge of engaging their people, and of managing their people in general? Towers Watson asked about this and a series of other more specific questions in the 2010 Towers Watson Global Workforce Study. What this showed was that fewer than two thirds of the world’s workforce finds its immediate managers effective (just 59 per cent, average across 22 countries). They sub-analysed the results to understand better the impact of effective versus ineffective management. The table below shows some of the results.

Table 1 Effective Managers Excel at Matching Tasks with Abilities and Crafting Jobs to Individuals

My Immediate Manager:	Agree that Immediate Manager Is Effective	Disagree that Immediate Manager Is Effective
Assigns tasks suited to my skills and abilities	81%	27%
Understand the challenges I face in my job	77%	18%
Helps remove obstacles to doing my job well	74%	12%

Note: Respondents are divided into two categories: those who agree that they have an effective manager and those who disagree. Figures are per cent of respondents in each category giving favourable answers (“Agree” or “Tend to agree”) for each immediate manager item.

Why should managers be less than successful in managing people in ways that engage them? Part of the problem is the way in which manager and supervisor roles are traditionally defined to focus on tasks rather than people. Managers are often expected to spend the bulk of their time on their area of expertise, and such expertise will frequently have been the primary criterion for promotion to the managerial role in the first place. This tension of ‘managing tasks or people’ emerges regularly in qualitative studies.

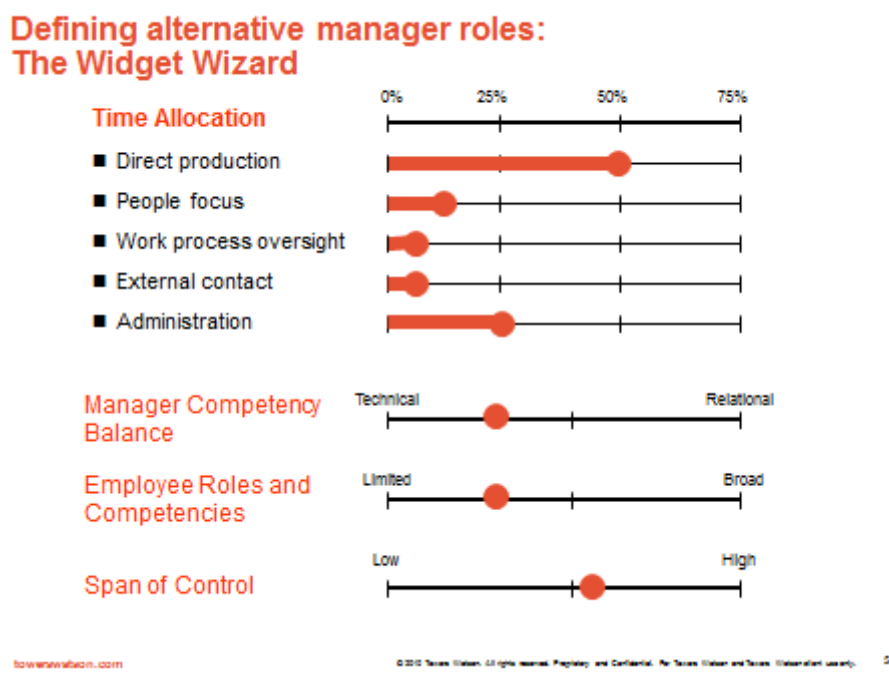
Towers Watson found in focus groups with 63 middle managers in a mid-sized commercial bank that the participants said that their greatest frustration came from having to juggle demands for hands-on work with the responsibility for leading people and managing work processes. Comparable results were obtained from a similar-sized study in a utility company. As with their bank counterparts, almost 60 per cent of the utility managers said that one of the best ways to improve their managerial effectiveness would be to reduce the time spent juggling personal production tasks and oversight responsibilities (Davenport and Harding, 2010).

How might this change? Consider the two jobs depicted in the two tables below. Table 2 shows the job of a manager who has a strong technical focus. Call her the Widget Wizard. She is the most skilled producer on the team, and spends her time accordingly. Half of her working hours go to directly producing output. The biggest part of the rest (30 per cent) goes to administrative activities.

She allocates what's left to focusing on people (10 per cent), overseeing work processes and maintaining some external contact (5 per cent each).

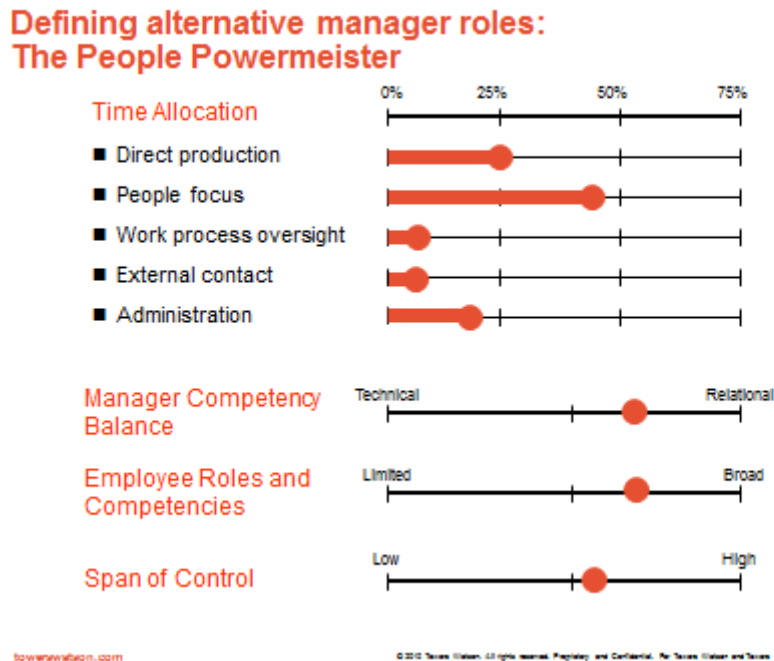
Her span of control is moderate and her competencies lean clearly to the technical side. Because so little time investment goes to people (with, say, eight direct reports, an average of only 30 minutes each during a 40-hour week) and work processes, the employees in the unit perceive limits to their roles and their ability to improve their competencies and performance. This manager will seem successful, especially if her goals and rewards focus chiefly on what she herself produces. But the people in the unit will suffer. In effect, she has traded her productivity for that of her work group. It is unlikely that this job profile will maximize net revenue; it certainly will not do much to build human capital or enhance employee engagement. Increasing the span of control would only make things worse. At some point, the dilution of manager attention to employee needs ultimately diminishes individual productivity and overall group output falls.

Table 2 Defining Alternative Manager Roles



In contrast to the Widget Wizard, the People Powermeister spends one-fifth of her time on direct personal production, enough to keep technically current and professionally credible. A full 40 per cent goes to people focus. This allocation yields a generous two hour allotment of development time per week for each of eight direct reports. Not all of this time goes to one-on-one coaching; some could be invested group discussions of goals, team learning sessions and quiet time to plan development strategies for each individual. Equal 10 per cent allotments go to improving the work systems used by the group and to building network contacts outside the unit. What chiefly distinguishes this manager role is the 60 per cent time allocation to activities (people focus, work process oversight and external contact) that add to individual and group productivity

Table 3 Defining Alternative Manager Roles



Organisations are moving towards the creation of more people-centric manager roles. One example (Davenport, 2013 forthcoming) is with a major airline where there is a desire to improve employee engagement and alongside it greater customer focus and operational discipline. A root cause analysis revealed several of the problems of the ‘Widget Wizard’ example above, ie supervisors with a heavy administrative burden and a consequent de-emphasis of the people leadership elements of the role. Currently, roles are being restructured to focus more on people leadership and development, and with a revised approach to competencies and learning for those entering such positions.

A Personal View

Matthew Longman, Devon & Cornwall Police

The simplest and biggest issue for me is whether a member of staff can give an 'elevator pitch' on what their role is, ie, sum up in 30 seconds what their role is and what they add to where the organisation wants to go. Equally important is whether a line manager can do this for each of their direct reports. As organisations have shrunk, roles have been combined and lines of management blurred. Although the matrix structure is popular at present, it can lead to a lack of clarity around what an individual's role actually is. It then becomes hard to measure performance, offer feedback or develop someone. Therefore, it is important that individual employees and their line managers understand what the priorities of the role are, the skills required for the role, the boundaries of decision-making and how performance will be measured.

In particular, it is vital that the deliverables of a role are clearly defined. Research in the Police in 2010 showed a direct correlation between lack of training, guidance, engagement and consultation, with a lack of alignment with organisational goals. Analysis of our regular officer and staff surveys shows that those whose roles are clearly defined give consistently more positive responses.

There have been some cases when lack of role clarity, coupled with the pressures on staffing numbers, have meant that officers have been trying to perform multiple roles with a consequent strain on individual wellbeing and performance. As a consequence, the organisation is addressing these concerns through widespread consultation with staff and engagement in future design.

Case Study: Unipart

Peter Rose, HR Director

The Unipart Group is a leading logistics provider, manufacturer and consultant operating globally across a wide range of market sectors.

Unipart's approach is to build a culture which inspires and enables people to go the extra mile and actively seek opportunities for continuous improvement in all that they do. They believe that this approach has benefits for employees, the organisation and its customers.

Unipart has developed capability in lean working and continuous improvement over the last 25 years which combines tools and techniques with a culture that encourages personal ownership of work.

Unipart uses continuous improvement principles and techniques in its approach to how work is designed, critically amongst these principles is the approach that decision making is devolved to the lowest level, and that standardised processes are used to ensure that there is 'one best way' of working. How does Unipart resolve this apparent contradiction? How can people be engaged when they work in standardised ways?

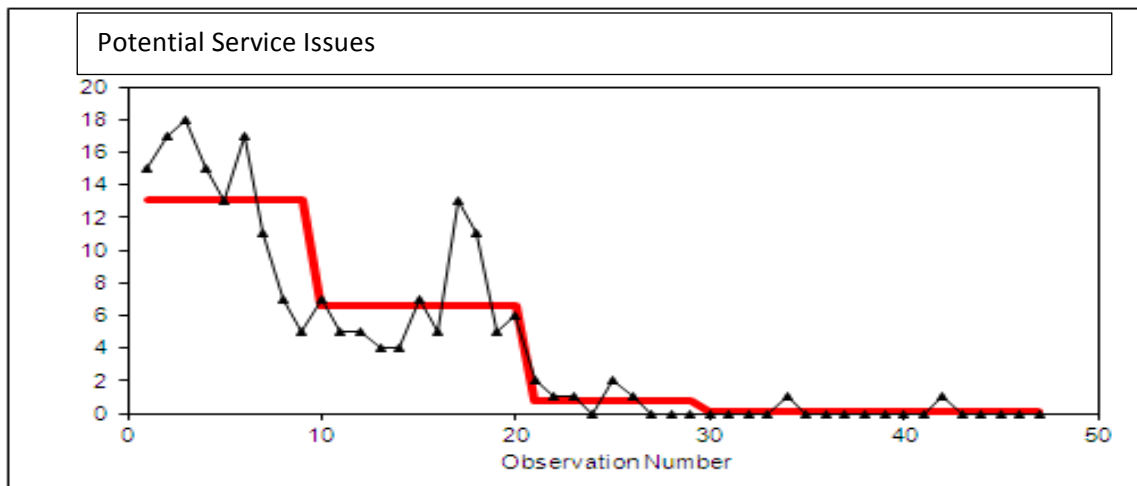
The answer is deceptively easy. People themselves own the standardised best way of working; they design it, measure it and are enabled and expected to improve it, for the benefit of themselves and their customers. Thus whilst the tasks themselves become simpler, people are given more responsibility, variety and control over what they do. This approach is used to generate improvements, both on a day-to-day basis, and also to manage major changes in the business.

Unipart's site in Baginton, Coventry demonstrates good examples of how continuous improvement tools and techniques are used to improve work design to either achieve daily improvements or large step change improvements. This site which services major automotive clients has in recent years faced major challenges including reconfiguring its existing operations and workforce to provide radically different services, managing new technology introductions, and adapting to complex new customer needs.

One of the key continuous improvement tools used in work design is 'Value Stream Mapping'. A good recent example of this tool was demonstrated when a new business opportunity was introduced. This made it necessary to dramatically re-organise the layout of the warehouse, change ways of working and achieve significant process improvements over a matter of 8 weeks. In order to do this, a group of people who actually undertook the work initially used value stream mapping. This involved the identification of all the processes involved in their work, and re-designing them in order to eliminate waste wherever possible. Then working with the rest of the team in the warehouse, they decided upon the optimum design of the processes and the physical layout of the workplace, they then took responsibility for implementing and sustaining the improvements.

Not only were the necessary changes implemented, the service level achieved following the sustainment activity also improved dramatically. Unipart's belief is that sustainment of improvements is only really possible if the people that do the work themselves have been involved in the design and implementation of the solution.

Figure 2 Standard Operating Procedures



Another major tool that is used in improving work design is the use of Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs). SOPs are owned by the individuals responsible for the processes and define the approach to be taken when carrying out its constituent elements. In Baginton this approach has been extremely important in the introduction of new technologies that have automated previously manual processes. To do this effectively volunteers from the area were used to define the new processes, select the best equipment, and design the training and SOPs for their colleagues. This ensured this new introduction was effectively implemented with the engagement of those in the area. All tasks on the site have an SOP and all the SOPs are owned by those doing the jobs, reflecting the fundamental belief that those that do the job understand it the best.

An example of how day-to-day improvements are encouraged is the use of simple problem solving approaches. These are used on a daily basis across Unipart's operations to deliver incremental benefits, supported by tools such as quality circles (termed 'Our Contribution Counts Circles' in Unipart). In Baginton all employees on average get involved in 3 circles a year, delivering cost savings of around £400,000 per annum. This develops a culture in which employees are naturally encouraged to voice their ideas as to how their work is designed and delivered, which creates a culture of engagement and improved performance.

There are many other continuous improvement tools and techniques that support good work design ranging from smoothing work flow, through to ensuring that defects are eliminated, and to ensuring the organisation has the right capability. The above examples show how particular techniques have been used in different circumstances, but the real power is how the tools and techniques are used together to enable people to take ownership of their work which drives employee engagement.

Implications for Employers

The most important point arising from this White Paper is that job design matters a great deal for engagement. Academic research from a psychological perspective has suggested that engagement represents the energetic, cognitive and emotional investment of the self into work (Truss et al., 2013). As Kahn's (1990) seminal study showed, these personal investments can only take place under the conditions of meaningfulness, safety and availability. In other words, employees need to find their work meaningful, they need to feel physically and psychologically safe in performing their work, and they need to be physically and psychologically available in order to enjoy feelings of engagement with their work tasks. Work can therefore be designed in such a way as to ensure people perceive that these pre-conditions for engagement are in place. Similarly, the job demands-resources framework discussed earlier shows how employees need to perceive that they have the resources they need to perform their jobs well, and that these resources match or exceed the demands placed upon them, if they are to be engaged. These resources can be personal resources that the individual brings with them to work such as their skills and abilities, but the work context and the job itself are also important in providing resources such as training and development, well-designed jobs, tangible and physical resources such as equipment, and positive and empowering leadership.

Whilst traditional job design theories, such as Hackman and Oldham's Work Characteristics model, emphasise the importance of the design of work tasks, we also know that job design needs to take account of factors in three additional domains, as shown in Figure 3:

Figure 3 Four Elements of Job Design



- **Job Content:** the actual content of the job should be designed to enable people to find their work meaningful. In addition, people need to have a sense of responsibility, and be

able to see the link between the work they do and the end results of their work. Where possible, job content needs to allow people to use their current skills and develop new ones; see how their work contributes to a 'whole piece' of work; feel that the work they do matters and makes a difference; have a sense of autonomy; and receive regular and constructive feedback.

- **Job Context:** this includes factors such as ergonomic job design, work setting, technology, and flexible working options. When designing jobs, these contextual features all need to be taken into consideration; we know that a sense of autonomy arises in part when employees feel they have some choice and control over the context within which they work. Equally, in order to experience the 'safety' that Kahn (1990) notes to be so vital for engagement, employees need to feel their job is environmentally and ergonomically healthy.
- **Work Relationships:** studies have shown, and common-sense tells us, that people are more likely to be engaged when they are in open, trusting and harmonious work settings. Jobs in the modern economy are more likely to be inter-dependent, and so job design needs to consider not just the job itself, but also the way the job holder is intended to interact with those around them.
- **Line Manager:** the line manager has a vital role to play in bringing the individual's job design to life. Simply having a well-designed job will count for nothing with an unsupportive line manager who provides no feedback.

Taken together, these four elements will all need to be considered when determining how to design jobs optimally. The 'best' solution will vary depending on context and job type, but we have outlined some of the basic principles that underpin 'good' job design in this paper, and provided some case study examples of how other organisations have achieved this.

References

- Bakker, A. B., and Bal, M. P. (2010) 'Weekly Work Engagement and Performance: A Study among Starting Teachers,' *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*, Vol. 83, pp. 189-206.
- Bakker, A. B., and Demerouti, E. (2007) 'The Job Demands-Resources Model: State of the Art,' *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, Vol. 22, pp. 309-328.
- Bond, F. W. (2010) 'How can job design improve worker well-being and workplace performance?' Institute for Employment Studies, 40th Anniversary Conference.
- Christian, M. S., Garza, A. S., and Slaughter, J. E. (2011) 'Work Engagement: A Quantitative Review and Test of Its Relations with Task and Contextual Performance,' *Personnel Psychology*, Vol. 64, pp.89-136.
- CIPD (2008) *Smart Working: The Impact of Work Organisation and Job Design*. Wimbledon: CIPD.
- Clegg, C. and Spencer, C. (2007) 'A Circular and Dynamic Model of the Process of Job Design', *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*, Vol. 80, pp. 321-339.
- Crawford, E., Rich, B., Buckman, B. and Bergeron, J. (2013) 'The Antecedents and Drivers of Employee Engagement', in Truss, C., Alfes, K., Delbridge, R., Shantz, A. and Soane, E. (Eds) *Employee Engagement in Theory and Practice*. London: Routledge.
- Davenport, T (2012) Personal communication.
- Davenport ,T. and Harding, S. D. (2010) *Manager Redefined: The Competitive Advantage in the Middle of Your Organization*. San Francisco: Jossey Bass.
- Davenport, T. O. and Harding, S. D. (2012) 'The New Manager Manifesto' *Human Resources People & Strategy*, Vol. 35, no. 1, pp. 24-31.
- Economist Intelligence Unit (2010) 'Re-engaging with engagement: Views from the boardroom on employee engagement. London: EIU.
- Fredrickson, B. L. (2001) 'The Role of Positive Emotions in Positive Psychology: The Broaden-and-Build Theory of Positive Emotions,' *American Psychologist*, Vol. 56, pp. 218-226.
- Fried, Y., and Ferris, G. R. (1987) 'The Validity of the Job Characteristics Model. A Review and Meta-Analysis' *Personnel Psychology*, Vol. 40, pp.287-322.
- Garg, P. and Rastogi, R. (2006) 'New Model of Job Design: Motivating Employees' Performance', *Journal of Management Development*, Vol. 25, No. 6, pp. 572-587.
- Grant, A. M. (2008) 'The Significance of Task Significance: Job Performance Effects, Relational Mechanisms, and Boundary Conditions,' *Journal of Applied Psychology*, Vol. 93, pp. 108-124.
- Green, F. (2006) *Demanding Work: The Paradox of Job Quality in the Affluent Economy*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

- Grzywacz, J. and Dooley, D. (2003) 'Good Jobs to Bad Jobs: Replicated Evidence of an Employment Continuum from Two Large Surveys', *Social Science & Medicine*, Vol. 56, No.8, pp. 1749-60.
- Hackman, J. R., and Oldham, G. R. (1980), *Work Redesign*, Reading: Addison-Wesley.
- Humphrey, S. E., Nahrgang, J. D., and Morgeson, F. P. (2007) 'Integrating Motivational, Social, and Contextual Work Design Features: A Meta-Analytic Summary and Theoretical Extension of the Work Design Literature,' *Journal of Applied Psychology*, Vol. 92, pp. 1332-1356.
- Kahn, W. A. (1990) 'Psychological Conditions of Personal Engagement and Disengagement at Work,' *Academy of Management Journal*, Vol. 33, pp. 692-724.
- May, D. R., Gilson, R. L., and Harter, L. M. (2004) 'The Psychological Conditions of Meaningfulness, Safety and Availability and the Engagement of the Human Spirit at Work,' *Journal of Occupational & Organizational Psychology*, Vol. 77, pp. 11-37.
- Melamed, S., Ben-Avi, I., Luz, J., and Green, M. (1995) 'Objective and Subjective Work Monotony: Effects on Job Satisfaction, Psychological Distress, and Absenteeism in Blue-Collar Workers,' *Journal of Applied Psychology*, Vol. 80, pp. 29-42.
- Morgeson, F., Dierdorff, E. and Hmurovic, J. (2010) 'Work Design *in situ*: Understanding the Role of Occupational and Organizational Context', *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, Vol. 31, pp. 351-360.
- Morgeson, F. P., and Humphrey, S. E. (2006) 'The Work Design Questionnaire (Wdq): Developing and Validating a Comprehensive Measure for Assessing Job Design and the Nature of Work,' *Journal of Applied Psychology*, Vol. 91, pp. 1321-1339.
- Oldham, G. and Hackman, J. (2010) 'Not What it Was and not What it Will Be: The Future of Job Design Research', *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, Vol. 31, pp. 463-479.
- Parker, S., Wall, T. and Cordery, J. (2001) 'Future Work Design Research and Practice: Towards an Elaborated Model of Work Design', *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*, Vol. 74, p. 413-440.
- Saks, A. M. (2006) 'Antecedents and Consequences of Employee Engagement,' *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, Vol. 21, pp. 600-619.
- Schaufeli, W. B., and Bakker, A. B. (2004) 'Job Demands, Job Resources, and Their Relationship with Burnout and Engagement: A Multi-Sample Study,' *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, Vol. 25, pp. 293-315.
- Shantz, A., Alfes, K., Soane, E., and Truss C. (2013 – in press) 'A Theoretical and Empirical Extension of the Job Characteristics Model'. *International Journal of Human Resource Management*.
- Soane, E. (2013) 'Leadership and Employee Engagement' in Truss, C., Delbridge, R., Alfes, K., Shantz, A. and Soane, E. (Eds) *Employee Engagement in Theory and Practice*. London: Routledge.
- Soane, E., Shantz, A., Alfes, K., Truss, C., Rees, C. and Gatenby, M. (2013) 'The Association of Meaningfulness, Wellbeing and Engagement with Absenteeism: A Moderated Mediation Model'. *Human Resource Management*. Vol. 52, no. 3, pp. 441-456.

Torrington, D., Hall, L., Taylor, S., and Atkinson, C. (2011) *Human Resource Management*. 8th Edition. Harlow: Pearson.

Towers Watson (2010) *Global Workforce Study: 'The new employment deal: How far, how fast, how enduring*. New York: Towers Watson.

Truss, C. (2012) 'Spinning Plates and Juggling Hats: Employee Engagement in an Era of Austerity'. Wimbledon: CIPD.

Truss, C., Delbridge, R., Alfes, K., Shantz, A. and Soane, E. (Eds) (2013) *Employee Engagement in Theory and Practice*. London: Routledge.

Truss, C., Soane, E., Edwards, C., Wisdom, K. Croll, A. and Burnett, J. (2006) *Working Life: Employee Attitudes and Engagement 2006*. Wimbledon: CIPD.

Work Foundation (2009) *Knowledge Workers and Knowledge Work. A Knowledge Economy Programme Report*. Lancaster: Work Foundation.

Work Foundation (2012) *Good Work, High Performance and Productivity*. Lancaster: Work Foundation.

Wrzesniewski, A. and Dutton, J. (2001) 'Crafting a job: Revisioning Employees as Active Crafters of their Work', *Academy of Management Review*, Vol. 26, No. 2, pp. 179-201.