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Cordery, J. & Parker, S. K. (2007).
Work organization. In P. Boxall, J. Purcell and P. Wright (Eds). Oxford Handbook of Human Resource Management. (pp. 187- 209) Oxford University Press: Oxford, is available online at: DOI:10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199547029.003.0001

CHAPTER 10

WORK ORGANIZATION

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In P. Boxall, J. Purcell and P. Wright (Eds). *Oxford Handbook of Human Resource Management*. Oxford University Press: Oxford. (2007)

10.1 INTRODUCTION

'The greatest improvement in the productive powers of labour, and the greater part of the skill, dexterity and judgement with which it is any where directed, or applied, seem to have been the effects of the division of labour' Adam Smith (1776, quoted in Davis and Taylor 1972:25).

'Perhaps the most prominent single element in modern scientific management is the task idea. The work of every workman is fully planned out by the management at least one day in advance, and each man receives in most cases complete written instructions, describing in detail the task which he is to accomplish, as well as the means to be used in doing the work... the average workman will work with the greatest satisfaction, both to himself and his employer, when he is given each day a definite task which he is to perform in a given time...' Taylor (1947, quoted in Vroom and Deci 1978: 297, 300).

'... workers respond best – and most creatively – not when they are tightly controlled by management, placed in narrowly defined jobs, and treated like an unwelcome necessity, but, instead, when they are given broader responsibilities, encouraged to contribute, and helped to take satisfaction in their work' Walton (1985:77).

'... organizations are beginning to make the more radical move of abandoning the concept of the job altogether. One factor contributing to the demise of traditional jobs is the growing use of self-managing teams... Although management typically plays a key role in deciding which skills the team requires and selecting the individuals who have these competencies, it is usually left to the team to decide how the work should be divided among its members. As the team evolves and team members become more multiskilled, the work that each individual performs often shifts to accommodate personal as well as work requirements' (Lawler and Finegold 2000: 7-8).

As the above quotations suggest, opinions as to the best ways to organise and manage work activities within the operating core of an organization have varied widely over the past two hundred and fifty years. The past three decades, in particular, have witnessed major changes to organizations and the work that is performed by their members, brought about in the main by technological changes and global competition. Terms such as lean production, manufacturing business process re-engineering, outsourcing, team-based working, 'kaizen', just-in-time production, empowerment, call centres, contingent workers, virtual teams, tele-work and the learning organization are just some of the words that have entered the *lingua franca* of management, denoting ways in which organizations have attempted to respond to such changes.

This chapter outlines a systems framework for describing the ways in which work activities are structured and coordinated by organizations in response to technological, economic and social imperatives. In doing so, we are particularly mindful of the impact that evolving work configurations have upon an organization, its members, and the broader environment within which that organization operates.

10.2 A SYSTEMS PERSPECTIVE ON WORK ORGANIZATION

The frequency with which such terms as task design, job design, work organization and work system are used synonymously suggests that it some conceptual clarification might be fruitful. According to Wall and Clegg (1998: 337), job design refers to ‘the specification of the content and methods of jobs’, while work organization ‘usually signifies a broader perspective linking jobs more explicitly to their organizational context’. Accordingly, we define work organization as *the way tasks are organized and coordinated within the context of an overarching work system*. A work system, in turn, may be viewed as a particular configuration of interacting sub-systems, including work content, technology, employee capabilities, leadership style, and management policies and practices (Beer, Spector, Lawrence, Mills and Walton 1985; Sinha and Van de Ven 2005). This conceptual framework is presented in Figure 1.

FIGURE 10.1 ABOUT HERE

Adopting a systems perspective on work organization has a number of advantages. First, it provides a common framework for describing the myriad ways of organizing and coordinating work processes that have evolved over time and in different contexts and which attract different labels or terminologies. For example, it can be used to differentiate, say, between different approaches to team working that might evolve in two different call centres. It can also be used to describe the working arrangements involved in practices as apparently diverse as lean production and empowerment.

Second, the work systems perspective recognises that the productive work of an enterprise arises as a result of a complex interplay between a number of work subsystems. For example, increases in the complexity of tasks performed by employees or in their role responsibilities are likely to be either facilitated or inhibited by the existing knowledge, skills and abilities they already possess, their attitudes towards such changes, and/or by the organisation’s capacity to deliver education and training. Such changes are also likely to necessitate changes to remuneration practices, as well as requiring first-line managers to delegate some of their tasks.

Finally, as is the case with open systems perspectives on organisations generally (e.g. Katz and Kahn 1966), the work systems approach recognises that such a system interacts with (imports from, exports to) an environment that is defined, in large part, by such factors as the organization’s overarching corporate strategy, its culture, and the broader operating environment of the organization, one that is defined by societal, economic, political and legal considerations. While work systems can have an impact on such environments, for example by exporting skill, products or services, it is more likely that the effectiveness of a given work system configuration will depend on the degree to which it is compatible with its operating environment.

In the sections that follow, we describe the main components (sub-systems) of a work system and their inter-relationship. We then go on to discuss different criteria used to judge the effectiveness of work systems, and to review three generic work system configurations.

10.2.1 Work content

At the core of any work system's configuration are the tasks and roles performed by employees in their jobs – 'the set of activities that are undertaken to develop, produce and deliver a product – that is, a physical and/or information good and service' (Sinha and Van de Ven 2005). The content of that work/those jobs may be described in terms of a number of design parameters or characteristics, the range of which is considerable and reflect the predominant interests of those analysing or designing the work (e.g. Campion 1988). We choose here to focus on a limited set of core features of work content, commonly identified in the work design literature, which are not encapsulated by other aspects of the work system (e.g. rewards), and which are important from the perspective of both organizations and job incumbents (Baron and Kreps 1999; Hackman and Oldham 1976, 1980; Parker and Wall 1998; Parker, Wall and Cordery 2001; Sinha and Van de Ven 2005). These characteristics include the scope, control, variability, demands, and feedback directly associated with tasks and duties.

Scope. The breadth and level of tasks and responsibilities exercised by an incumbent represents a major work design parameter. Some jobs are highly specialised horizontally, that is to say, the range of tasks they contain is very small. This is frequently reflected in low cycle times for completion of units of work. Jobs can also be 'vertically' specialized, to the extent that more complex tasks, such as those involving planning, scheduling and decision-making and high level skills, are separated out. This is sometimes referred to as work simplification.

Discretion. In some work systems, employees have a high degree of control over operational aspects of work performance, such as the pace and timing of tasks or the performance strategies adopted, whereas in others no such discretion is permitted. The level of autonomy or discretion a job affords is generally regarded as being of considerable psychological significance to job incumbents, in respect of their motivation and satisfaction.

Variability. This aspect of job content relates to the degree of stability that exists in tasks and roles over time. In some work systems, for example, employees rotate between jobs or functional task groupings, whereas in others the content of the work remains fairly constant. Job rotation provides the employer with some benefits, in terms of flexibility of labour allocation, and potentially enables employees to utilise a greater proportion of their skills and talents. However, rotation may also interfere with the development of task proficiency and performance-relevant mental models (Hackman 2002).

Demands. Workload is also a key factor associated with jobs. Workloads can take the form of physical demands, though the increasing prevalence of knowledge-based work means that increasingly such demands are intellectual (or cognitive) in character. In the case of service jobs, there has been increasing recognition that work can involve emotional labour, and that the emotional demands this creates can be extremely stressful (Brief and Weiss 2002; Grandey 2000) – particularly in jobs that are also cognitively demanding (Glomb, Kammeyer-Mueller and Rotundo 2004). Demands can also arise as a consequence of role conflict, where job incumbents are required to perform multiple roles with conflicting objectives (e.g. Frenkel, Korczynski, Shire and Tam 1999). Demand is also experienced as a consequence of conflict between job and non-job roles (Raghuram and Weisenfeld 2004), particularly where work involves long hours (MacInnes 2005).

Feedback. Some jobs and tasks automatically generate information that enables the person performing them to judge how well he or she is performing. Performance feedback is an important determinant of the capacity to self-regulate within a job

(Locke and Latham 2002), though the performance monitoring capabilities provided by modern information technologies can generate both positive and negative consequences for organizations and employees alike (Frenkel et. al. 1999; Stanton 2000).

Interdependence. Finally, work content varies according to whether tasks/roles are performed individually or are assigned to a group (or team) of employees. It has become increasingly common for organisations to formulate and manage work content at the level of a team of employees, such as through the creation of self-managing work teams (Cordery, Mueller and Smith 1991), creating strong behavioural and outcome interdependencies between employees in the process (Wageman 1995).

While the content of tasks, activities and roles are at the core of the work system, they are critically dependent on other four other work sub-systems: technology, leadership, workforce capabilities, and management policies and practices. Each of these subsystems, and their relationship to work content, is now briefly discussed.

10.2.2 Technology

The content of work activities and responsibilities is strongly influenced by the technical subsystem. In the first instance, task technology may directly influence the 'locus of control' in respect of work activities (Mintzberg 1979). In highly regulated or automated technical systems, such as provided by some assembly line and call centre technologies, the opportunities for people to exercise discretion in respect of the way they perform the work (e.g. pace, order) is virtually non-existent.

Furthermore, some technologies have a degree of sophistication and complexity that automatically generate cognitive demands within an operator's work role, and the inherent unreliability of many complex technologies may also generate variability and uncertainty in work tasks and role requirements (Wall, Cordery and Clegg 2002). Varying levels of technologically-derived uncertainty means that, for some jobs, it is possible to prescribe in great detail the manner of task execution using rules and standard operating procedures, while in others, the nature of task requirements and demands is not able to be specified in advance of their execution.

Technical systems also affect interdependence. Continuous process technologies, for example, generate complex levels of interdependence between tasks that favour the allocation of some coordination and control responsibilities to a group of employees. In other situations (e.g. some customer service roles), an employee is able to perform all required tasks independently of others, and the requirement to define collective work content is less acute.

10.2.3 Leadership

The leadership behaviours of managers and supervisors are also likely to help shape the content of work activities and to interact with other elements of the work system. For example, high levels of job discretion may act as a substitute for, or neutralise, the effects of some aspects of transactional and transformational leader behaviours (Whittington, Goodwin and Murray 2004). Conversely, the direct involvement of a manager or supervisor in the process of allocating tasks to employees, setting the pace of work, and in decisions over the choice of work methods will invariably reduce the level of scope and discretion experienced by job incumbents (Cordery and Wall 1985).

Where jobs and tasks are highly specialised, there is likely to be a need for first-level management to act as the linking mechanism, coordinating activities across individuals. However, where interdependent tasks are grouped within the one job, or within a responsible work team, then such coordinative behaviours on the part of first-level management are likely to be less necessary.

10.2.4 People

The successful performance of any set of work activities is clearly dependent on the level of commitment and capability demonstrated by the extant workforce (Ulrich, Zenger and Smallwood 1999). The knowledge, skills, and abilities the workforce possesses, are capable of attaining, or are willing to engage, create both opportunities and constraints in respect of the specialisation or enlargement of job content. Work roles frequently fail to capitalise fully on the existing knowledge skills and talents of employees (Morrison, Cordery, Girardi and Payne 2005), employees can also differ in the confidence with which they approach expanded or enriched work roles (Burr and Cordery 2001; Parker 1998), and cultural values and beliefs may also shape attitudes about (and acceptance of) different forms of work organization (Kirkman and Shapiro 1997).

10.2.5 Management policies and practices

Ultimately, any set of work roles and responsibilities must be supported by a set of sympathetic and appropriate management policies and practices. It has long been recognised that different approaches to work organization are frequently associated with different ‘bundles’ of human resource management practices (e.g. Pil and MacDuffie 1996). Models of team effectiveness generally specify elements of a supportive organizational context (training, information and reward systems) as being a key input to the effectiveness of team working (e.g. Hackman 2002). Elsewhere in the human resource management literature, the value of rigorous selection techniques, pay contingent on collective output, intensive training and development, job security guarantees, low status differentials, and widespread information sharing in supporting ‘high involvement’ work designs has been strongly advocated (e.g. Pfeffer 1998; O’Reilly and Pfeffer 2000).

10.3 ARCHETYPAL WORK SYSTEM CONFIGURATIONS

The effectiveness of any given work system design needs to be assessed against multiple criteria, given the potentially divergent interests of those associated with it (e.g. employees, employers, customers). The following six main criteria have been identified from the literature (Beer et al. 1985; Campion and Thayer 1987; Baron and Kreps 1999; Parker, Wall and Cordery 2001):

- the work system’s capacity to generate high levels of work performance and goal attainment on the part of those working within it,
- the degree to which the work system develops, produces and delivers its designated product or service in an efficient and cost-effective manner,
- the extent that work system is able to sustain and build on human capital and performance capabilities,

- the work system's capability of effective adaptation to changes in the organization's strategic direction (e.g. cost leadership vs innovation) and in operating environment (e.g. economic and labour market changes),
- the degree to which the work system generates rewards (intrinsic and extrinsic) for those who operate it, and
- its sustainability, in terms of its impact on the physical and psychological health of employees, the degree to which it builds positive social relationships, and effects a healthy work-life balance.

With these criteria in mind, we now compare and contrast three archetypal work systems. These are archetypes, in the sense that they represent idealised configurations of work sub-systems that may be found in organisational settings. Table 10.1 summarises the work content characteristics associated with different work system archetypes.

TABLE 10.1 ABOUT HERE

10.3.1 'Mechanistic' work systems

The configuration of work sub-systems we label 'mechanistic' represents a long-established tradition in work organization, and has arguably provided the dominant model for the organization of work over the past century. Its development may be traced forward from the writings of Adam Smith (1776) and Charles Babbage (1835) on the advantages associated with the division of labour, to the work of Frank Gilbreth (1911) and, more famously, Frederick Taylor (1911)'s scientific management treatise (Locke 1982).

The content of work activities within the mechanistic work system is typically characterised by high levels of horizontal and vertical job specialisation (low scope), tight constraints on the manner in which work is performed (low discretion), and little variation in the tasks performed (low variability). For these reasons, jobs that arise within such configurations are frequently described using adjectives such as 'simplified', 'narrow', 'de-skilled', 'fragmented' or 'standardized'. Furthermore, work activities are invariably organised with an individual (rather than a group) as the focus of task performance and accountability (low interdependence).

In terms of the other elements of the work system identified in Figure 10.1, work activities within mechanistic work systems are typically controlled and coordinated by close and direct task supervision, supported by the use of formal rules and standard operating procedures. Technology tends to be highly routinized, designed to deliver high predictability and low variability in task requirements. The simplified work content tends to generate (and attract) an operating workforce whose skill levels are highly specialised and who have limited flexibility. Human resource policies and practices tend to manage performance at the individual level, with pay based on individual job evaluation and/or performance output. Training is limited to creating proficiency in those tasks contained within a fixed job definition.

A contemporary illustration of the operation of mechanistic work systems can be found in Holman's (2005) description of call centres that adopt a 'mass service' model of service management. One way for such a call centre to cut costs is to employ cheaper, low skilled customer service representatives (CSRs). To do this, it becomes necessary to simplify the tasks they perform, and to 'embed' these tasks in

the technology by means of pre-ordained scripts and/or standard procedures governing customer-employee interaction. The work content in these systems can be characterised as low scope (CSRs mostly answer calls, usually of a similar type, whilst supervisors deal with any problems), low discretion (tightly-defined scripts specify what should be said throughout the call), low variability (CSRs usually do not rotate jobs), low interdependence (CSRs usually work on their own) and sometimes high demand (e.g. pressure to complete calls within certain times).

Mechanistic work systems clearly have the primary objective of delivering efficiency-related outcomes (Morgeson and Campion 2002). Amongst the benefits that they have been seen as generating (especially in the operating core of the organization) are reductions in training costs, improvements in productivity associated with reductions in the time taken to switch between different tasks, and increased task proficiency as job complexity is reduced. Job simplification may also mean that it becomes easier to find employees with the requisite base levels of skills in the labor market, and make it more feasible to automate some tasks.

On the debit side, however, it seems clear that the low discretion combined with high demands and low skill utilization frequently associated with job content in such work systems may generate negative psychological and behavioural outcomes, such as anxiety, depression, lower performance motivation, job dissatisfaction, absenteeism and turnover (Holman 2002; Marchand, Demers and Durand 2005). For example, Parker (2003) found that mechanistic forms of work organization associated with lean production practices generated reduced commitment, less willingness to accept broadened role responsibilities, and increased job depression.

10.3.2 ‘Motivational’ work systems

In contrast to the mechanistic archetype, ‘motivational’ work system configurations are founded upon prescriptions for work content that are seen as being intrinsically motivating or psychologically empowering for those performing the work – that is, the work involves satisfies innate psychological needs such as those for autonomy, competence and relatedness (Ryan and Deci 2000). The origins of ‘motivational’ work system configurations can be found in the writings of mid 20th century management theorists such as Douglas McGregor and Frederick Herzberg. McGregor, for example, argued that mechanistic work systems invariably under-utilized employee capabilities, particularly in respect of the exercise of ‘imagination, ingenuity, and creativity in the solution of organizational problems’ (1960:48), as well as their capacity to find work enjoyable and satisfying in and of itself.

McGregor’s theorising finds practical application in the ‘vertical job loading’ practices advocated by Herzberg (1968), in the subsequent development of the Job Characteristics Model of motivation (Hackman and Oldham 1976), and in the more recent concept of employee psychological empowerment (Spreitzer 1995; Seibert, Silver and Randolph 2004; Thomas and Velthouse 1990).

Over time, a set of prescriptions for enhancing the motivational properties of jobs have been developed (see Table 10.2). Of central importance is the perceived need to create individual work roles that contain a reasonable breadth and depth of job tasks, as well as a fair degree of autonomy. Frequently, this approach is described as job enrichment or empowerment (Parker and Wall 1998). To continue our earlier illustration with respect to customer service call centres, Holman (2005: 116) described an ‘empowered’ CSR job in which, for example, CSRs have higher scope (e.g., carry out a variety of calls, solve problems themselves, and use a range of high-

level skills), higher discretion (e.g., calls are usually unscripted), and greater interdependence (CSRs need to share information and draw on others' knowledge). Such empowered CSR jobs are more prevalent in high-value added market segments because customers demand professional attention, which is facilitated by a motivational work design. Interestingly, however, it is in the low-value-added and more cost-conscious market segments where high involvement work practices appear to have most impact on sales growth: they not only add value, but they are also rarer and therefore confer competitive advantage (Batt 2002).

INSERT TABLE 10.2 ABOUT HERE

In terms of the four other elements of the work system, the motivational configuration typically seems to work best when the associated technology is non-regulatory, providing reasonable scope and opportunity for operator discretion, and moderately complex, so that there exist meaningful opportunities for problem-solving and a variety of tasks to be performed. In other words, there needs to be a degree of non-routineness associated with the technical system if real empowerment is to exist, and for motivational advantages to accrue (Wall, Cordery and Clegg 2002). Wright and Cordery (1999) found that performance motivation and job satisfaction were higher for wastewater treatment plant operators in high discretion job roles where the complexity and unpredictability (operational uncertainty) of the technical system was high, but not where the technology was relatively simple and predictable. In the latter situations, 'empowered' jobs proved less satisfying and motivating than those designed according to more mechanistic principles.

The sort of leadership practices that are typically advocated in association with empowered work content are those that involve less direct supervision of task performance, employee involvement in decision-making and 'transformational' leadership (Avolio, Zhu, Koh and Bhatia 2004; Cordery and Wall 1985; Whittington et al. 2004). Transformational leaders motivate employees to perform at the highest levels through a range of supportive practices, such as inspirational communication, role modelling, and coaching.

Workforce characteristics also play a role in supporting empowered work content. For example, individual differences in knowledge and ability, growth need strength, and extrinsic satisfaction of individual employees can moderate the strength of the relationship between empowered/enriched job content and motivational, affective and performance outcomes (Oldham 1996). Cultural values can also influence responses to empowerment. For instance, Eylon and Au (1999) found that individuals from a high power distance culture did not perform as well in a simulation exercise when they were empowered relative to when they were not empowered. High power distance cultures are those in which inequalities amongst people are seen as appropriate and acceptable, such as in the form of centralized or paternal leadership. Such findings suggest cultural factors can shape the relative benefits of empowered work systems.

Finally, empowered work content is frequently 'bundled' with other supporting management and human resource management practices, including flexible or 'fuzzy' role descriptions, information systems that have the job holder as the focal point for the delivery of performance information, increased investment in training to support expanded role content, an emphasis on career development, and skill-based pay (Oldham and Hackman 1980).

Studies of the impact of motivational work systems on a range of effectiveness criteria have generated mixed results. Evidence is consistently supportive that the work content produced by such configurations (relative to more mechanistic systems) generates a sustained willingness to expend effort, positive work attitudes (e.g. job satisfaction, commitment), and lower levels of absenteeism and turnover on the part of employees (Parker and Wall 1998). Where such work designs afford the incumbent the opportunity to self-regulate in response to exposure to the demands (physical, cognitive, emotional) associated with work, they may also reduce the stressful effects of demanding jobs (Terry and Jimmieson 1999). Empowered work designs have also been associated with increased knowledge and perspective taking (Parker and Axtell 2001; Wall, Jackson and Davids 1992), the development of greater role breadth self-efficacy, or employees' confidence in their ability to carry out proactive, interpersonal and integrative tasks (Parker 1998), and a more flexible and proactive role orientation on the part of job incumbents (Parker, Wall, and Jackson 1997; Morgeson, Delaney-Klinger and Hemingway 2005).

To the extent that task performance is potentially directly affected by motivated effort, self-efficacy, and positive work orientations, such work design configurations appear likely to generate high levels of both task and contextual performance (Langfred and Moye 2004). For example, Griffin (1991) showed that a motivational work redesign increased, over the longer-term, the performance (assessed via supervisory ratings) of over 500 bank tellers. Workman and Bomber (2004) similarly found that increasing employee involvement in work process decision-making within a call centre led to significant improvements in customer satisfaction, fewer repeat calls, and better problem resolution, along with improvements in job satisfaction and organizational commitment. Overall, however, the evidence in respect of the impact on productivity is equivocal (Wall, Cordery and Clegg 2002), leading to calls for various methodological improvements in this research area (e.g., Parker and Turner 2002), as well as the suggestion that there may be some degree of trade-off between work systems that are motivating and satisfying, versus 'mechanistic' work systems that are productive and efficient (Morgeson and Campion 2002).

Common criticisms of motivational work systems include the observation that they frequently fail to deliver any real increase in autonomy to employees (Argyris 1998; Forrester 2000), and that the expanded work roles may simply translate into more demanding work and longer hours (Yates, Lewchuck and Stewart 2001). As we discuss later, these criticisms reflect more on the implementation of motivational work systems, rather than the effects of work content per se.

10.3.3 'Concertive' work systems

Concertive work systems are sometimes referred to as team-based or commitment models of work organization, and represent a substantial component of what has come to be known as a high-commitment human resource management approach (Boxall and Purcell 2003). The aim of the 'concertive' work system is to put in place a pattern of working arrangements that maximises the likelihood of employees working in concert with each other, whilst expending high levels of effort in the effective pursuit of organizational goals. The first full and coherent expression of the characteristics of this work system configuration, which evolved from the work of socio-technical systems theorists at the Tavistock Institute of Human Relations (e.g. Trist and Bamforth 1951; Pasmore 1988), was provided by scholars at the Harvard Business

School (Beer et al. 1985; Walton 1985) and has since received strong advocacy through the writings of Pfeffer and colleagues at Stanford University (e.g. Pfeffer 1998; O'Reilly and Pfeffer 2000).

At the core of the concertive work system, work activities are assigned to self-managed work teams rather than individuals. This involves a group of employees being allocated a relatively whole task to perform, where group members are (at least partially) multi-skilled in respect of the overall set of group tasks, have substantial discretion over decisions relating to the performance of the work, and where performance is managed at the level of the group, rather than the individual (Cordery 2005). The increased discretion/responsibility is extended beyond the immediate production/service task, to aspects of the management of the broader work role. Thus, for example, the work team as a whole might also exercise responsibility for developing performance goals and standards, allocating tasks and workloads, performance monitoring, initiating and/or conducting training and development activities, liaising directly with customers, and hiring new team members (Cohen and Bailey 1997; Kirkman and Rosen 2000).

With the self-managed work team defining the characteristic work content, the concertive system accommodates such arrangements by virtue of a supportive configuration of technical, leadership, workforce and human resource management sub-systems. In the first place, it has been argued that variability and unpredictability associated with the technology is a desirable, if not essential, pre-condition for the creation of self-managing work teams (Wall et al. 2002). Furthermore, research has shown that moderate to high levels of technological interdependence are key determinants of the desirability of both the decision to allocate work to teams in the first place and of the level of self-management they are afforded (Hackman 2002; Langfred and Moye 2004). The viability of team-based work is also affected by leadership style. Some have argued that the key to the maintenance of effective self-management within teams is the absence of a formal external leadership role (Beekun 1989), pointing out that managers often struggle to adapt to their introduction (Douglas and Gardner 2004; Vallas 2003), while others have advocated various forms of leader coaching (Hackman and Wageman 2005; Morgeson 2005).

Models of team effectiveness routinely identify management practices in respect of rewards, training and information sharing as being necessary to support team-based tasks and roles (e.g. Hackman 1987). Both team-based pay and skill-based pay are strongly advocated (Bartol and Srivastava 2002; Kirkman and Rosen 2000; Walton 1985). Training systems need to help teams develop the depth, breadth and flexibility of skills needed for effective self-managed team performance (Ellis, Bell, Ployhart, Hollenbeck and Ilgen 2005; Marks, Sabella, Burke and Zaccaro 2002). In addition, adequate, directed and shared information and feedback are critically important to a team's capacity to exercise effective self-determination (DeShon, Kozlowski, Schmidt, Milner, and Wiechmann 2004). Other management policies that have been identified as supportive of the concertive model of work organization include job security guarantees, the reduction of status differentials, and team-level work role descriptions (Pfeffer 1998; Kirkman and Rosen 2000).

Finally, it has long been recognized that the composition of work teams is a determinant of their effectiveness, and that the level of knowledge, skill and ability available within the team is critical (Hackman 2002). It appears that some individuals are better suited to working in self-managed work teams than others, by virtue of possessing knowledge, skills and abilities (KSAs) related to conflict resolution, collaborative problem solving, communication, goal setting and performance

management, and planning and task coordination (Stevens and Campion 1999; Leach, Wall, Rogelberg and Jackson 2005; Morgeson, et al. 2005).

The apparent popularity of concertive team-based work systems over recent decades has been well documented (Lawler et al. 1995; Staw and Epstein 2000), with several potential benefits having been identified (Cordery 2004, 2005). First, the use of self-managed work teams may enable more direct forms of control to be exercised over critical interdependencies within the work process. Second, teams increase the range of knowledge and expertise potentially available for problem-solving. Third, they may generate administrative efficiencies and greater flexibility in labour allocation. Finally, to the extent that they incorporate elements of the motivational configuration described earlier, team-based work systems are also seen as generating a range of socio-psychological outcomes, such as improved opportunities for meaningful social interaction, and improvements in job characteristics (variety, autonomy, etc). This may act as an important attractant for talent in the external labor market (Pfeffer 1998).

As with motivational work systems, research findings as to the effects and success of concertive team-based work systems are mixed. In general, as with empowered work, the evidence seems stronger and more consistent that they generate positive motivational and affective outcomes (e.g. Batt 2004; Cordery, Mueller and Smith 1991; Hunter, MacDuffie and Doucet 2002) than that they enhance performance and productivity (Allen and Hecht 2004). This is not to say that significant performance benefits haven't been obtained via the introduction of such systems (e.g. Banker, Field, Schroeder and Sinha 1996; Macy and Izumi 1993); it's just that the findings are inconsistent (e.g. Spreitzer, Cohen and Ledford 1999). Even when it comes to employee reactions to work within concertive systems, not all employees are seen to react favourably, and workloads may be intensified leading to increased stress (Hutchinson, Purcell and Kinnie 2000) and increased conflict between work and non-work roles (Knights and McCabe 2003). Furthermore, the particular nature and strength of behavioural norms developed by highly cohesive self-managed work teams may impact negatively on both performance and the well-being of individual team members (Barker 1993).

In the next section, we conclude with some of the possible reasons for the inconsistent findings in respect of this and other work system configurations.

10.4 CONSISTENCY, FIT AND TRADE-OFFS IN WORK SYSTEM EFFECTIVENESS

Several questions arise out of our review of the mechanistic, motivational and concertive configurations. First, why is it that there are such divergent findings in relation to the predicted outcomes for each work organization archetype and, second, do these models represent points on an evolutionary scale of improvement in the design of work systems? In other words, are concertive models better suited to contemporary organisational settings than mechanistic (and motivational) approaches?

In answering the first question, we have suggested that the effectiveness of any particular work system will be determined by the degree of consistency amongst its constituent elements. If teamworking or empowerment is not supported by appropriate changes to supervisory leadership, or the reward system continues to only reward individual performance, or if the technology either over-determines the manner of task performance or generates few real opportunities for collective decision

and action, then concertive configurations are obviously less likely to flourish (see, for example, Sprigg, Jackson and Parker 2000, who showed negative effects of teamwork when introduced in an incompatible setting). That such internal consistency is hard to achieve and maintain may help to explain the sometimes weak and inconsistent effects we have noted for several work configurations, and is one reason that it has been suggested that the operation of a work system, along with its supporting human resource management architecture, can act as a source of competitive advantage for some firms (Baron and Kreps 1999; Pfeffer 1998).

In respect of the relative merits of the various approaches, this point is still a matter of considerable discussion and debate. One position is that the mechanistic, motivational and concertive work systems are effective to the extent that they provide a well-integrated match with what the organization is trying to achieve, its culture, and the broader societal context within which the organization is located. This is analogous to the 'best fit' perspective that has been advanced elsewhere in respect of strategic human resource management (Boxall and Purcell 2003; Wright and Snell 1998; Youndt, Snell, Dean and Lepak 1996). Baron and Kreps (1999), for example, question whether or not a high-commitment model (with its embedded 'concertive' work system) is likely to be as effective in situations where the corporate strategy is competing on cost, where process improvements are unlikely to be found, where there are high levels of mobility in the labour market, where there is a declining market, where the level of skill in the current workforce is very low, and where competition exists in the form of another employer operating a similar work design configuration. Implicit in this view is the notion of a trade-off between criteria such as cost effectiveness and efficiency on the one hand, and others such as innovation, flexibility and employee motivation and commitment on the other (Morgeson and Campion 2002).

A contrasting view to that of Baron and Kreps (1998) is that any corporate strategy, including cost leadership, is best effected by a motivated, and committed workforce (Pfeffer 1998; O'Reilly and Pfeffer 2000), and that concertive systems are best suited to attracting and retaining talent, meeting contemporary societal expectations in respect of the rewards work should offer, and sustaining the high levels of organizational performance required for success in today's highly competitive global business environment. These contrasting views partly reflect different meanings of effectiveness (e.g., Pfeffer and colleagues' perspective incorporates broader societal criteria). Nevertheless, they do diverge in their vision of how work systems affect organizational performance; an issue which is perhaps best served by further empirical inquiry.

10.5 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter, we outlined a systems framework that captures the essential characteristics of the myriad ways in which work activities can be organized. The three major ways that work has been organized map onto the quotations that we introduced at the outset. Smith (1776) and Taylor (1947) advocated as the most efficient and motivating the mechanistic work system, characterised by "simplified" jobs that are low in scope, discretion, variability, feedback, and interdependence. Walton (1985) described the value of the motivational work system, characterised by enriched jobs with high scope and discretion. The final quotation by Lawler and Finegold (2000) recommended the concertive work system, which particularly emphasises high levels of interdependence between jobs, or team working. All of

these three archetype work systems can be seen within today's workplace, each offering advantages and disadvantages for individuals and organizations. The mechanistic work system can offer efficiency gains (at least in some contexts) but few motivational or humanistic benefits. Both the motivational and concertive approach offer the latter, as well as potential benefits for flexibility, innovation and other such performance outcomes, but their overall effect on organizational effectiveness has been less consistently demonstrated.

In large part, the inconsistent demonstration of positive organizational effects of motivational and concertive work systems reflects the interdependence between work organization and other organizational subsystems. As our systems perspective suggests, work content affects, and is affected by, technology, leadership, people's skills and attributes, and management policies and practices. Aligning these subsystems to be coherent and internally consistent is difficult, especially when implementing motivational and concertive work systems that often require a quite radical departure from traditional mechanistic practices.

The systems approach to work design means that, although choices often exist in how to organise work, one must consider and manage those choices in conjunction with other organizational subsystems. The systems approach also has implications for research, suggesting the need for more explicit consideration of the interrelationships between subsystems when evaluating alternative work configurations, as well as the need to further assesses the impact on effectiveness of fit between the internal work system and the broader organizational and strategic environment.

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Figure 10.1 The organization of a work system (after Beer et.al, 1985, p. 570).

Work System	Scope	Discretion	Variability	Demands	Interdependence	Feedback
Mechanistic	Low	Low	Low	Physical demands	Low	Low
Motivational	High	High	Moderate	Cognitive	Moderate	High
Concertive	High	High	High	Cognitive and Affective demands	High	High

Table 10.1 A taxonomy of work content characteristics associated with different work system archetypes

‘Motivational’ strategies

1. Arrange work in a way that allows the individual employee to influence his or her own working situation, work methods, and pace. Devise methods to eliminate or minimize pacing.
 2. Where possible, combine interdependent tasks into a job
 3. Aim to group tasks into a meaningful job that allows for an overview and understanding of the work process as a whole. Employees should be able to perceive the end product or service as contributing to some part of the organization’s objectives.
 4. Provide a sufficient variety of tasks within the job, and include tasks that offer some degree of employee responsibility and make use of the skills and knowledge valued by the individual.
 5. Arrange work in a way that makes it possible for the individual employee to satisfy time claims from roles and obligations outside work (e.g. family commitments).
 6. Provide opportunities for an employee to achieve outcomes that he or she perceives as desirable (e.g. personal advancement in the form of increased salary, scope for development of expertise, improved status within a work group, and a more challenging job).
 7. Ensure that employees get feedback on their performance, ideally from the task as well as from the supervisor. Provide internal and external customer feedback directly to employees.
 8. Provide employees with the information they need to make decisions.
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Table 10.2 Recommended job design strategies (Parker and Wall, 1998, p.20)