

Review for *In a nutshell*

How work redesign interventions affect performance: An evidence-based model from a systematic review

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Jonny Gifford, October 2019

One principle firmly established in the HR body of knowledge is that making jobs more motivating increases performance: it's the classic 'win-win' or 'mutual gains' scenario. A particular turning point was Hackman and Oldham's (1975) job characteristics theory; specific work to have built on this includes that on job control and job resources to name but two. But how strong is the evidence on all this?

The first thing to note is that, while there is a wealth of research evidence in this area, many studies only show correlations, not causal relationships. This means that, rather than showing that job redesign motivates workers and motivation increases performance, they might reflect the reverse causality: that good performance motivates people and more motivated employees are more likely to have their jobs enhanced.

This study cuts through this problem by systematically reviewing the *longitudinal* research that shows which comes first – that is, what types of job redesign *predict* motivation and how this *predicts* performance. It reports on 55 intervention studies.

At a broad level, the study gives solid evidence that work autonomy, social support and feedback do predict positive outcomes including job satisfaction, wellbeing, performance and lower absenteeism. This is not only due to motivation; it is also explained by employees being able to respond faster, and learn and improve from their work.

Which practices work best? The study identifies five types of job redesign: system wide interventions (at an organisational level); autonomous work groups (team level); and job enrichment and enlargement, participation and relational interventions (all individual level).

Based on the evidence so far, employers' best bet is to focus on individual level interventions. Practices to consider here include: job rotation and increasing the variety of tasks in a job; making jobs more complex or highly skilled; giving workers greater autonomy and decision making power in their jobs; and involving employees in problem solving groups. The interventions labelled as 'relational' help employees see the significance or meaningfulness of their jobs, for example through contact with inspiring leaders or the people their work benefits, or getting them to reflect on why their work is worthwhile.

Finally, the study gives insights into the conditions under which job redesign works best. The authors find that it is especially relevant in *uncertain* work contexts, as this is where responsiveness and learning are most critical, and that timely feedback is an important ingredient for employees to be able to learn. Aspects of personality are also relevant, for example with conscientious, 'prosocial', optimistic and confident employees being most

responsive to job redesign. And finally, organisational systems should be aligned with changes in job design.

As a systematic review, this study represents the best available evidence on managerial led work redesign, giving an authoritative view that should be used as a key reference point.