

Job Design - Keys to Motivation, Performance, & Satisfaction

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What motivates your staff to perform? Is their work interesting? Is it meaningful? Does it stimulate responsibility? Lead to satisfaction? Are their job-related needs being met? The following is a well-researched job design model that can help you answer these questions, and evaluate if your practice is structured to promote a high-performance team.

Job design refers to organizing tasks, duties, and responsibilities into a productive unit of work. It involves designating the content of jobs and the effect of jobs on employees, and identifying the components of a given job is an integral part of design.

More attention is being paid to job design for three major reasons:

- Job design can influence performance in certain jobs, especially those where employee motivation can make a substantial difference. Lower cost through reduced turnover and absenteeism are also related to good job design.
- Job design can affect job satisfaction. Because people are more satisfied with certain job configurations than with others, it is important to be able to identify what makes a “good” job.
- Job design can affect both physical and mental health. Example problems such as backache or leg pain can sometimes be traced directly to job design, as can stress and related high blood pressure and heart disease.

The job-characteristic model below identifies five important design characteristics of jobs. Such characteristics affect the meaningfulness of work, stimulate responsibility, provide knowledge of results and lead to desired psychological and behavioral outcomes. Jobs designed to take advantage of these five components are more likely to be positively received by employees, and a key in distinguishing between “good” and “bad” jobs.

Skill Variety

The extent to which the work requires several activities for successful completion indicates its skill variety. For example, low skill variety exists when an assembly-line worker performs the same two tasks repetitively. The more skills involved the more meaningful the work.

Skill variety can be enhanced in several ways. Job rotation can break the monotony of an otherwise routine job with little scope by shifting a person from job to job. Job enlargement broadens the scope of a job by expanding the number of different tasks to be performed.

Task Identity

The extent to which the job includes a “whole” identifiable unit of work carried out from start to finish and resulting in a tangible outcome is its task identity. For example, having one staff member responsible for all aspects of recall and another responsible for the nutrition and retail product inventory results in task identity. Separation of duties and well-written job descriptions help promote task identity.

Task Significance

The amount of impact a job has on other people indicates its task significance. A job is more meaningful if it is important to other people for some reason. Since staff love to hear how their job contributes to the success of the practice, public and private acknowledgement of the importance of their positions via memos, meetings and performance appraisals is key.

Autonomy

The extent of individual freedom and discretion in the work and its scheduling indicates autonomy. More autonomy leads to a greater feeling of personal responsibility for the work. Job enrichment, or increasing depth of a job by adding responsibility for planning, organizing, controlling and evaluating the job, results in more autonomy. Increasing an employee’s accountability for work by reducing external controls also promotes autonomy.

Feedback

The amount of information employees receive about how well or how poorly they have performed is feedback. Feedback helps employees understand effectiveness of their performance and contributes to their overall knowledge about their work. Again, the doctor (C.E.O.) plays a significant role providing feedback of the staff’s collective performance via group memos, meetings and discussions and personal performance via closed-door meetings.

Finally, it is important to note individual responses to jobs vary. A job may be motivating to one person but not to someone else, and depending on how jobs are designed, they may provide more or less opportunity for employees to satisfy their job-related needs. For example, being a receptionist may furnish a good opportunity to satisfy social needs, whereas a training assignment may satisfy a person’s need to be an expert in a certain area. Furthermore, a job that gives little latitude may not satisfy an individual’s need to be creative or innovative. Although it is imperative to understand how jobs satisfy psychological needs, and hire appropriately for a good fit, the design of the job should first be evaluated to promote motivation, performance and satisfaction. Remember, it’s not just “the work done” in a position that defines the job. It’s also the atmosphere of the practice, and more specifically, of a given job itself.