ORGANISATION DEVELOPMENT, CULTURE AND CHANGE

At a Zoom Roundtable on 22nd September 2022, CRF's Organisation Development, Culture, & Change Community came together to discuss the ongoing relevance of job design. Many jobs evolve with little thought given to how they will be performed, how they link with other jobs or what their key purpose is. Yet, good job design is pivotal in performance improvement, job satisfaction and employee retention.

This summary shares some of the key insights from the discussion.

OVERVIEW OF THE ISSUES

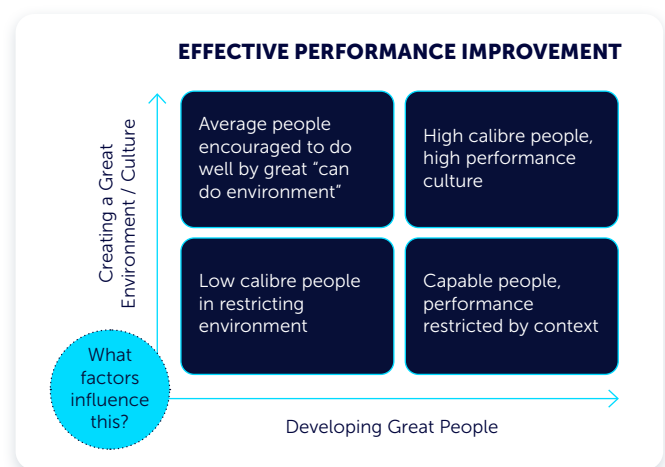CRF's Chairman Mike Haffenden launched the discussion by reviewing the issues.

He explored several key themes, including:

- The state of work is in flux right now: some people are fully remote, some people are back in the office, and most people are somewhere in between.
- What does this mean for job design? Some companies are trying to go right back to pre-pandemic jobs, while others are embracing the change that the pandemic has prompted. More broadly, a review of job design is needed.
- There are many vital components within job design which affect how well people function: social and emotional wellbeing, corporate responsibility, company culture, learning and development opportunities, reward, direction and deliverables, and so on.
- HR and OD professionals should focus not only on improving the quality of their people, but to improve the quality and calibre of the organisation that supports them.

Moreover, CRF's 4-box performance framework (see below) suggests that it is not enough to have great people – you also need a great environment in which they can flourish. The broader context of how someone's job is designed, and how they interact with their work environment, is a huge part of the people question for OD and HR professionals.

WHAT IS CRF'S MODEL FOR JOB DESIGN?

EFFECTIVE PERFORMANCE IMPROVEMENT

Creating a Great Environment / Culture →

| Average people encouraged to do well by great "can do environment" | High calibre people, high performance culture |
| Low calibre people in restricting environment | Capable people, performance restricted by context |

What factors influence this?

Developing Great People →

- The aim is to be top left or top right – enabling all people to achieve their full potential, regardless of what that potential is.

WHAT ARE THE COMPONENTS OF A GREAT COMPANY CULTURE?

- A major element of a supportive culture is that employees are given the time and space to be proactive and create new ways of working. This commitment to protecting time for people to zoom out and think about 'meta-work' – the work that goes into designing their working patterns, deliverables, methodologies, and so on – is how organisations can become more efficient and give their employees ownership over their processes. However, very often employees are not given enough space to learn, communicate and collaborate outside of the demands of their deliverables.

  » One participant suggested that "where the content of their jobs take 120% of their time, when you are under pressure to squeeze everything that you've got into the number of working hours [and]...during the pandemic, people are working beyond eight hours [so] there is hardly any [time outside their deliverables]."

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» Another participant explored the idea that it is important for employers to "create that space [for employees] to sit back and reflect on, 'what is it that I'm doing now? Am I doing work that really adds value? Or am I just running like a hamster on a wheel trying to finish stuff, [some of which] may not need to be done?"

» CRF research reflects that this is also a core agility routine: creating space and time for people to think about how their jobs function within the broader context of the organisation's design. To read more on this, check out CRF's latest report on OD for Agility (2022). *https://www.crforum.co.uk/research-and-resources/research-organisation-design-for-agility*

- Responsive, reflective leadership can help companies to create an open, collaborative culture and to be more agile, as well creating space for innovation.

- Another key aspect of company culture comes from leaders, who have a responsibility to role-model the behaviour that the company wants to see: when they don't do that, it becomes increasingly difficult to maintain an inclusive company culture.

» This is especially true when organisations are facing periods of significant or unexpected change, and when employees are experiencing personal difficulties as well as work-based ones. As CRF Chairman Mike Haffenden discussed, "it's very difficult to set a great environment, great culture, if you don't have that empathy throughout the organisation. I think [a good example of this is the apparently] generational difference among young colleagues who are...more comfortable with a hybrid environment versus our older colleagues whose work life has been predominantly in person."

In addition to the points that attendees discussed, CRF research suggests that the following components of culture are vital, alongside thoughtful job design:

- Clarity of direction
- Ethos of working together, not against each other
- Clarity of organisation structure – not too many or too few levels
- Well defined and applied processes
- Good training
- Minimal bureaucracy
- Values that are lived as well as discussed
- Clear and communicated strategy
- Responsive leadership
- Teamwork and communication
- Fun and belonging
- Meaning and purpose
- Supportive physical and emotional environment

WHAT ARE THE CURRENT PRIORITIES WHEN CONSIDERING GOOD JOB DESIGN?

1. TELL PEOPLE WHAT YOU WANT THEM TO DO

- People need to know what's expected of them and they need to know what their deliverables or objectives are, both for the benefit of the business and the employee. In the words of one participant, without that, "how do you know when you've done well, or when you've done anything?"

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- Once you've established what they are, you also have to answer the question of how to get people to buy into the objectives. One participant, working in the retail sector, felt that this is an easier question when performance can be tied to bonus, whereas in public sector organisations, "you haven't got that carrot".
  - » To tackle this challenge, organisations need to consider their future focus: your objectives may be meaningful now, but "[if your] context changes dramatically then how do you get colleagues to change direction [?]" The pandemic is an apt example of this, where existing people strategies had to be radically reinvented in order to accommodate public health guidance and the shift to remote working.
- One participant in the public sector outlined how they have changed their approach to setting objectives. In their words, "we've gone from a very structured, rather archaic process, which a lot of staff felt was really just a tick box exercise...to a more sort of conversational type approach. Staff now set their own objectives, which can be based around their role, their team objectives that are linked to the corporate strategy, but also their personal objectives, around learning and development. We only launched the new approach in April, but, so far, the feedback has been very positive. I think people feel much more engaged and that they feel that they have a greater sense of ownership, [since] they're designing their own objectives."

2. GIVE THEM AN OPPORTUNITY TO SHARE AND COLLABORATE

- To be human is to be social and, for many people, work is a source of potential friendship and collaboration. The social element of working in a team, with other like-minded individuals, can be a strong motivating factor. A 2018 Gallup poll found that people who reported having one or two close friendships at work were up to twice as motivated and engaged.
- In Mike Haffenden's words, "it's absolutely fundamental that we [offer] social things, improve collaboration, coordination, and ensure that there is a harmony to [the work] context." At a very simple level, this can mean feeling comfortable discussing how your weekends went, but it extends all the way into business priorities around how people think, collaborate, and communicate within and across teams.
  - » Some participants have made moves in this area by changing the design of the office, such as moving from closed doors to an open-plan office as people return after the pandemic, or by rethinking their social and emotional wellbeing strategy.

3. MAKE SURE THAT PEOPLE GET A CHANCE TO LEARN AND IMPROVE

- A big part of this passive development is found through contact with others, from shadowing senior leaders to working with colleagues.
- Learning is a crucial part of an organisation's success: from agility to financial performance, from leadership development to talent retention.
  - » Online learning platforms have flourished during the pandemic, as safe, accessible ways for people to fit learning into their off-hours or busy work schedules.
- Actively prioritising learning also allows employees to explore their long-term career development and ambitions, create a sense of shared purpose, and feel more motivated during their day-to-day work. More information on CRF's research into learning can be found in our new Learning Knowledge Hub. *https://www.crforum.co.uk/hubs/learning-knowledge-hub*

CRF's job design model includes 4 elements:

Hygiene factors – including pay and conditions

Objectives/Deliverables – including task tracking and achievements and rewards

Social – including fun events, co-ordinating across the employee population, and intuitive communication

Learning – including personal and professional growth opportunities, and alignment with business strategy

Purpose – including future-focused strategy

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HOW HAS THE PANDEMIC IMPACTED JOB DESIGN?

- The pandemic created a unique opportunity for companies big and small to evaluate their jobs, their culture, and their structures.
  » Even across "different organisations with different [ages and levels of] maturity", one participant suggested, "it was almost a sort of going back to [basics]… [we] started with leadership, and leader behaviour, and being really clear [that] if your leaders aren't setting the context and the culture and you're not investing in it, it's going to be difficult."
  » In terms of structures, hybrid and remote work prompted companies and individuals to re-think their career pathways. From one participant, "if you're an organisation that's been around a long time…are [your job structures] now fit for purpose? Some are starting from scratch and others are in the middle of transitions."
  » Another participant stated in their department that they've got "an operational family, but that looked quite different before the pandemic than it is now."
- One aspect of culture that has been brought to the forefront by the pandemic is the sense of belonging that employees feel at their organisation. From onboarding to retention, from remote working to potential returns to the office, fostering a sense of belonging is increasingly important when thinking about company culture and team structures.
- Other organisations are building on the increasing significance of relationships in a hybrid working world to "foster a greater sense of client centricity." One participant described this as "building a more relational culture, [whether] it's person to person, within the organisation, or between the organisation and the clients." This new 'relationality' they described means shifting to more in-person meetings and events and focusing on meaningful relationship building.
- Recent data has also indicated that businesses will need to keep a close eye on what technology, practices, and objectives work best in what will undoubtedly remain a hybrid working world, in order to make sure that culture is being built and productivity continues to increase where possible.

FURTHER READING

CRF. 2022. **Organisation Design for Agility.** Research Report. *https://www.crforum.co.uk/research-and-resources/research-organisation-design-for-agility*

Gallup. 2018. **Why We Need Best Friends At Work.** *https://www.gallup.com/workplace/236213/why-need-best-friends-work.aspx*

Journal of International Marketing. 2014. **Understanding Cultural Differences in Innovation: A Conceptual Framework and Future Research Directions.** *https://www.jstor.org/stable/43966455*

UPCOMING EVENTS
IN-PERSON AND ONLINE WORKSHOP

The Future of Learning