



# chapter 1

## the nature of contemporary HRM

### HRM in Practice

#### Only 39 per cent of employees experience 'decent' work

The processes of globalization produced 'new' work systems. The managerial mantra of "flexibility" has produced various work designs such as cellular production, lean production, and team-based work. The popular discourse on these 'post-bureaucratic' work systems emphasizes that such new configurations lead to an 'enrichment of work'. However, as this CIPM study reports job redesign does not necessarily produce high 'quality' or "good" jobs:

According to new research from CIPD, only 39 per cent of workers think that their job is 'good'. A 'good' job is defined as 'exciting but not too stressful'. The research explored how employees felt about their job and their relationships with managers and colleagues. It concluded that employers should make jobs more appealing and interesting to improve commitment from employees. 'Most jobs can be made interesting or even exciting if they are well managed,' Mike Emmott, CIPD employee relations adviser, said.

An interesting and exciting job was one with variety and security, and where the role of the employee was clear. Many workers did not believe that their job had these qualities – a fifth of respondents thought that the demands of their job were unrealistic and the same proportion found their jobs either very or extremely stressful. Nic Marks, head of well-being research at the New Economics Foundation and co-author of the report, said that interest and excitement were key elements in the psychological contract between employers

and employees. 'If employees don't feel their role is exciting, this will be reflected in underperformance and their lack of commitment and satisfaction,' he said.

Critical workplace scholars argue that some new work regimes are basically 'a euphemism for work intensification' (Hyman and Mason, 1995). To capture the new realities of the modern workplace, critics often use the term 'McWork', meaning that a vast amount of work experience, especially for young people, women and workers of colour, involves menial tasks, part-time contracts, the close monitoring of performance and entrenched job insecurity. Others, however, argue for a context-sensitive understanding of work system redesign (Bratton, 1992; Edwards et al., 2001; Geary and Dobbins, 2001). This approach makes the point that new work designs do not have a uniform outcome but are likely to be contingent on a number of variables, such as business strategy.

**Stop!** This article encourages you to examine the popular rhetoric around notions of "job enrichment" and employee "empowerment" and to consider exactly what is meant by "decent" work or a "good" job. What is your idea of a "good" job? Are employer goals of competitive advantage or superior public services compatible with employee goals of decent work?

### **Sources and further information**

S. Procter, S. (2006) 'Organizations and Organized Systems: From Direct Control to Flexibility,' In S. Ackroyd, R. Batt, P. Thompson, and Tolbert, P. (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Work and Organization*, (pp. 462-84); P. Thompson and H.McHugh (2009) *Work and Organisations*, Chapter 15, 'Work systems: restructuring the division of labour' (pp. 216-232), Basingstoke: Palgrave. Source: Julie Griffiths, People Management, August 2005.