

## STUDENT SUMMARY NOTES

# chapter 13

## HRM and high-performance workplaces

### Chapter overview

In this chapter we examine various job design strategies including the classical approach, the human relations movement, and contemporary approaches emphasizing self-management. It is emphasized that fundamental innovations in job and organizational design results in changes in HRM functions such as selection, rewards, appraisal, and training and development.

#### **Chapter objectives:**

After studying this chapter, you should be able to:

1. Explain the nature of work and the core dimensions of job design
2. Understand how management decisions concerning job and work design affect employee commitment, well-being and performance, employment relations and organizational and societal outcomes.
3. Define job design and describe specific work organization strategies
4. Understand the theoretical arguments underpinning high-performance work systems
5. Explain the main principles of high-performance work systems
6. Understand the relationship between different job and work designs and human resources strategies

### Lecture outline

#### Introduction

The way work is organized is a critical internal contingency affecting both micro and SHRM. Work design influences the four “Cs” - commitment, competence, cost effectiveness, and congruence found in some HR models. The

chapter describes how work is constantly being redesigned as managers adapt to economic and technological changes.

## The nature of work and job design

Definition - paid work is the physical and mental activity that is carried out at a particular place and time, according to instructions.

Definition draws attention to some central features of paid work: activity or effort, place and time, social relationship, and reward.

Paid work shaped by gender relations. Rewards, satisfaction and hazards are unequally distributed.

**HRM and globalization 13.1:** Commuting time in the EU is work time

This report (p.420) illustrates how governments can influence employers' decisions about job design.

Job design involves changing tasks and responsibilities to reconfigure jobs and relationships in the workplace. Job design impacts on the key HRM activities. Refer to **Figure 1.3, p. 20**.

The core dimensions of job design (autonomy and the number of tasks performed by an employee) are illustrated in **Figure 13.1 and 13.2, p. p. 423**.

## The development of work systems

The assumptions and principles underpinning the high-performance work system (HPWS) originate in the limits of classical systems of work design.

### Classical work systems

Early developments in job design are outlined including division of labour (Adam Smith; Charles Babbage) and factory control and alienation (Karl Marx).

Scientific management developed by Frederick Taylor early 1900s.

Systematically (five principles) determines how work, both manual and non-manual, should be divided into its smallest elements in order to maximize labour productivity.

Fordism - inter-linking system of conveyor lines. Standardized commodities to gain economies of scale. Enhanced management control through work-study:

*“The idea is that man must have every second necessary but not a single unnecessary second” (Henry Ford, 1922).*

**HRM and globalization 13.2: Bureaucracy, work and HRM**

This report (p.426) illustrates that bureaucracy is not just a thing: it is also a conceptual model or ‘thinking tool’ that for many decades served as a basic reference point in discussions about organizations.

Scientific management or ‘Taylorism’ and Fordism have disadvantages for HRM including, worker alienation, high turnover and absenteeism, conflict, and high cost of supervision.

New work design systems developed from the work conducted in the U.S. by Elton Mayo in the 1920s. Quality of working life (QWL) Movement emphasized social needs, ‘closure’ or the completeness of tasks, the incorporation of quality control, task variety, and autonomy.

Refers to a number of different work designs- job enrichment [see **Figures 13.3, 13.4 and 13.5, pp. 427-8**] reorganization of assembly lines and Japanese-style work regimes.

**Study tip:** Mike Noon’s et al., 2013 book, *The Realities of Work* (Basingstoke: Palgrave) offers a more detailed account of the theoretical approaches to studying work and management strategies.

## **Japanese and American work design practices**

Japanese model of manufacturing identifies three core production techniques (cellular technology (self-directed teams)), just-in-time, and total quality control that create two high dependency relationships that are moderated by HRM techniques, supplier policies and management ideology, leading to several production outcomes.

**Study tip:** For a critical approach to work redesign see Paul Thompson’s ‘Introduction: Unmanageable Capitalism’ (pp.165-1750 in *Oxford Handbook of Work & Organization* edited by Ackroyd, Batt, Thompson and Tolbert (2005). Also many articles are available from journals such as *New Technology, Work and Employment* which can help you illustrate recent developments in job design.

The nature of work and managerial control strategies in post-bureaucratic organizations is critically evaluated.

A critical account of the development of re-engineering is given and we examine the managerial premise that ‘core’ employees are a valuable asset

capable of serving customer needs without a 'command and control' management structure.

Limitations of re-engineering include, conceptual vagueness, top-down management approach (contrary to the espoused theory). BPR allegedly enhances management control.

## High-performance workplaces

The section gives a review of the principles and evidence of HPWS. This model of work design is a general approach to managing organizations that aims to stimulate more effective employee involvement and commitment with the aim of achieving higher levels of productivity.

### Characteristics of high-performance working

HPWS is generally enacted through mutual employer-employee reciprocation: employers develop high-commitment and trust-building work practices, and, in return, employees experience higher levels of job autonomy and involvement in workplace decision-making.

**Table 13.1 (p. 434)** compares the traditional and HPWS models.

### Enacting high-performance working

*Sustainable* HPWS depends more than the simply up-skilling workers. It depends on a complex combination of enhanced skills, motivation, and the opportunity to deploy skills. This is often referred to as the AMO (Ability, Motivation and Opportunity).

**Figure 13.6 (p. 435)** depicts the HR causal chain and illustrates the potential impact of perceptions in influencing the effectiveness of HPWS.

#### HRM as I see it

View the interview with HR practitioner, Gregor Karolus, (p.435), who discusses the role of HR in creating a HPWS.

## Identifying high-performance work practices

This section emphasizes the point that fuelling the degree of conceptual complexity and ambiguity enveloping the concept of HPWS itself is the lack of an agreed list (s) of concomitant HPWS practices.

## Tension and paradox

Contemporary designs, including HPWS, can illustrate the paradox that 'managers must give up control in order to enhance their control'. Labour process theorists have challenged the popular view that technological change leads to highly skilled workforce.

**HRM in practice 13.2** High-performance working in action: public and voluntary sectors

This example (p.437), examines the importance of non-technical factors in promoting HPWS, such as organizational culture and climate. Be sure to link this report to the concept of organizational culture discussed in Chapter 15.

Critics have argued that 'self-managed teams' have greater control referred to as computer-controlled-autonomy (Bratton 1992).

Paradox stems from what are referred to as "differentiation-integration tension" (see **Figure 13.7, p. 438**).

## Engaging in critical thinking

### Chapter case study: Currency Inc.

This case draws upon material from the chapter and illustrates the challenges of managing organizational change.

**Tip to students:**

Recall the material on sustainability in Chapter 2 and look at green HRM featured in Chapter 16.

## Reflective question/essay question

"HPWS is simply the latest wave in a series of management initiatives to increase employee cooperation, productivity, and managerial control". Discuss.

**Tip to students:** A comprehensive answer would, after defining the terms, explain developments in the job design movement and identifying common strands. The alleged outcomes of enhanced employee empowerment, job security, and job satisfaction need to be judged against the alleged

negative outcomes by critics. Do also consider the challenges of measuring performance (see Chapter 3).