

Job-Crafting

How can it enhance organizational performance?

By Clement Leemans



Adapted from: Nadler & Tushman

As Organization Development Consultant & Facilitator, our work with organizations often boils down to the question: *How do we organize best our work and the way we work together in the formal context of an organization in order for managers and employees to maximize the use and development of their talent, creativity, energy and experience?*

That is also the underlying question in Nadler & Tushman's Congruence Model¹ (shown above), suggesting that effective translation of strategy into organizational architecture and the alignment of the different aspects of 'organizing' will lead to Organizational Performance and ultimately sustainable business results.

Nowadays, organizations are looking at ways to improve their innovative power, their capacity to change, their ability to share knowledge, learn from each other, collaborate effectively... or in short to create a Learning Organization, where each and every employee and manager, regardless of level or role, feels entitled to initiative and is effectively contributing to sustainable performance and business development.

A number of relatively new insights in OD are effectively contributing to our ideas about how the future organization would have to be in order to be effective and sustainable. And these insights often have a serious impact on HR practices such

as job and function definitions, objective setting & performance management and talent development. Three of those contributions I would like to specifically mention here.

Distributed Leadership delivers a useful contribution to how in knowledge intensive organizations we can avoid the separation between 'thinkers' and 'doers' or 'deciders' and 'executers'. "Rather than viewing leadership practice as a product of a leader's knowledge and skill, the distributed perspective defines it as the interactions between people and their situation"² It goes against the attention charismatic leaders got in the media (specifically in the US) and highlights the risks it poses for the sustainable development of knowledge intensive companies.

How do we make sure that at any given moment, any professional can take leadership in an area he has the competencies, ideas and energy in order to contribute to organizational performance and sustainable development? Leadership is no longer a capacity of an individual but an organizational competence. It makes organizations more flexible, uses the available expertise in a more effective way and avoids inattentive blindness that often leads to inappropriate management decisions. It allows for the complex social system a knowledge organization is to 'use that complexity and expertise' to understand better in the complex business environment the organization is operating in



and swiftly act upon that analysis.

Collaborative Enterprise³ with notions such as shared purpose and ethic of contribution. The main idea is that "...Collaborative communities encourage people to continually apply their unique talents to group projects—and to become motivated by a collective mission, not just personal gain or the intrinsic pleasures of autonomous creativity.(...) Collaborative communities share a distinctive set of values, which we call an ethic of contribution. It accords the highest value to people who look beyond their specific roles and advance the common purpose. The collaborative view rejects the notion of merely "doing a good job" This insight is also a warm plea for not describing jobs in terms of tasks to do, objectives to reach etc... but describe the 'contribution' that somebody makes in an organization in terms of 'impact' it has on the performance and success of others (internal customers) in the organization and on the business performance and sustainable development of the organization as a whole. It will contribute to the companies' capacity to change.

If the 'expected outcome' of your activity in your organization is clearly defined, nobody has to tell you what you need to do or what you need to do differently now because the situation has dramatically changed. You can figure that out for yourself. The phrase: "That's not my responsibility" or "that's not in my job description and yearly objectives" will no longer be valid if your 'organization culture' is geared towards 'contribution' and not 'objectives or individual performance'.

Self determination theory⁴ offers a framework for developing autonomous motivation with professionals. Considering professionals as 'competent' and supporting them in their development, making sure they feel related to the social system they are active in (is similar to the idea of shared purpose and ethic of contribution) and autonomy or the feeling that they have control over their own decisions and actions (including the responsibility for the outcome and the impact of their behavior).

From the Learning Organization concept onwards, till now, we have been looking for new ways of organizing, no longer based on 'managing and controlling' what people do in organizations, but on 'intrapreneurship', innovation, ownership, shared leadership, ... We realize gradually that in a fast moving knowledge economy control is slowing down innovation, underutilizes our collective expertise and costs ultimately a lot more than confidence and autonomy.

Sooner rather than later, this should result in radical changes in organizational architecture, more specifically in terms of organizational structure, culture, processes, job and workplace design, management and leadership practices, Human Resources policies and practices, information sharing, decision and problem solving processes, etc. It will also affect the **process** we use to 'shape' our organizations in the future: How we do it, who does it, how often do we do it, how much is it prescribed or actually emerging as we go, etc.

If we look at one of those organizational features: JOB & WORKPLACE DESIGN we see mainly two challenges:

- How to create engaging, challenging, rewarding jobs and workplaces for everybody, so people can maximize the use and development of their talents, energy and experience. And in that way optimizing their contribution to the organization

TOGETHER WITH experiencing personal fulfillment.

- How to make sure that jobs and workplaces are flexible enough to cope with rapidly changing environments and customer demands. How do we change timely objectives, tasks, priorities, internal customers and suppliers' relationships, etc in order to keep up organizational performance.

That the classical 'job-descriptions' and yearly individual objectives will probably no longer do the trick, is becoming obvious. An interesting alternative for DESCRIBING JOBS as a process initiated from HR or somewhere centrally in the organization might be JOB CRAFTING⁵: Job Crafting indicates a process by which an individual is shaping his own job in such a way that it is a better fit for his/her needs, talent, energy and interest as individual. Job Crafting offers the opportunity for job holders to mould three core aspects of their work: TASKS, RELATIONSHIPS and PERCEPTIONS.

- **Task Crafting** involves employees altering the set of responsibilities prescribed by a formal job description by adding or dropping tasks; altering the nature of tasks; or changing how much time, energy, and attention are allocated to various tasks (within a context of ownership for a shared purpose and ownership for the contribution you can make to your organization)

- **Relational Crafting** involves changing how, when and with whom employees interact in the execution of their jobs. For instance, an experienced employee could decide to work on part of his tasks together with a less experienced colleague in a kind of mentoring relationship

- **Cognitive Crafting** involves employees changing the way they perceive the tasks and relationships that make up their job. For instance, the ticket sales person could look at his job as 'contribute to a nice evening out for people' instead of 'execute ticket orders'

And why would we want to do that in our Organization?

Well we think job crafting could effectively add value to organizations in search of more flexibility, change capacity and stimuli for becoming a Learning Organization:

- It creates a **sense of ownership** for the job holder over his job and the tasks he is responsible for. He doesn't do them as much because he's told to do them but because he 'reflected' on questions like: Why would I want to do it, what is the impact on others, is this the best possible way for me to do it, how can I by doing this contribute to the success of my organization, my team, etc.

- It puts also the responsibility to **quickly adapt** the things you do to the rapidly changing needs in the organization, with the jobholder. That will contribute to a more flexible organization.

- It helps the jobholder to **further develop his talents**, energy and fields of interests. He/she can enrich or enlarge his/her own job in such a way that the talents that were originally not tapped into are now contributing to the organization.

- It will also create a **sense of belonging**, when the job-holder needs to find out how he is contributing to the performance of his internal customers and what he expects from internal suppliers in order to do his job in the best possible way.

- Since the job holder can use his own experience and expertise in the design of his own job and workplace, chances are that **they reflect the real situation on the shop floor better.**



- It allows a more **meaningful global picture** of the job for the job holders since he had to reflect about how the different things he does link together.

Job Crafting could have a particular interest for people in the age of over 55 or 60 who have been recently confronted with the societal expectation (mainly in Europe) of working longer than has been the case in last decades. We know that actively crafting your job helps to create a longer future time perspective and we also know that people who have a longer future time perspective will be inclined to craft their job in a way that gives them more development opportunities and thus creates more added value for the organization. (And enables them to enjoy their work longer, and therefore work longer)

Having said all that, we need to take some precaution.

The idea is of course not that individuals will from now on decide what they do and what they won't do anymore, totally irrespective of what the colleagues in the organization need to achieve. So I would strongly suggest to use the ideas of job crafting in such a way that it 'clarifies' not only the individual contribution of individual jobholders, but that it also indicates how that job contributes to the sustainable performance of the organization.

It would then become a '**social contracting exercise**' and not an individual activity. That process could be facilitated (not pre-scribed) by HR and replace to a large extent the yearly objective setting exercises and the laborious process of job descriptions and function classification. Some of the following might contribute to successfully use job crafting as a co-creative exercise that is reinforcing the learning organization:

- Support individuals in their 'job crafting' effort (question, challenge, etc... to make them think out of the box)
- It is important that people start to think about 'crafting their job' from a clear 'shared purpose' as organization. So you need to work with your organization on a common understanding of what the organization is trying to achieve (contribute to customers) and develop a shared purpose for all in the organization.
- Contract clearly with the internal clients of each job holder, on how the job contributes to the chain of performance.
- Make sure job holders map the stakeholders for their job and understand how they impact the work and performance of others and how others impact their own job and performance.
- Start the exercise as a collective exercise to define and craft the 'team job' which then can be developed further on the individual level
- Parallel to the individual & team reflection in the job crafting process build also a collective process where team members, internal customers and other stakeholders are invited to work together on 'crafting their jobs' and 'crafting the relationship between those jobs'. That would not only end up in better 'jobs' probably but also in an improved collaboration between internal customers and suppliers.

Done in that way, job-crafting could be a very effective lever for a Learning Organization and improve the change capacity of an organization significantly. It would enhance ownership; strengthen collaboration, shared purpose and the ethic of contribution within an organization.

It is a way to avoid that job-crafting is one of those 'consulting

fads' coming by in organizations without really being integrated in a 'systemic' approach of organizing. It could be a very important and a valuable contributor for the system change effort that needs to take place in a lot of organizations yet.

It's certainly not the holy grail, and in an informal way it is already happening, but a fair deal of individual and collective involvement in and ownership for 'job and work place design' would absolutely contribute to the Learning Organization through individual motivation, job satisfaction, talent development and deployment, collaboration, flexibility, ... and ultimately a more effective organization and business results.

An important success factor will also be the willingness of the HR department in organizations to let go their well-intended control and standardization reflex that is leading to standardized function descriptions, individual performance objectives, function classification and standardized performance criteria, etc... Push all that towards individuals, teams and place it in the 'core' of the collaboration of professionals in contributing to the sustainable performance and development of the organization. HR should also for their activities and policies, take into account that 'control costs more than confidence and autonomy'. **PM-ITM**

Notes

1. David Nadler and Michael Tushman. (1980)., *A Model for Diagnosing Organizational Behavior. Organizational Dynamics* 9, no. 2, 35-51.
 2. James Spillane. (2005)., *Distributed Leadership. In : The Educational Forum*, vl.69.
 3. Paul Adler, Charles Heckscher and Laurence Prusak. (2011)., *Building a Collaborative Enterprise. Harvard Business Review. July-August 2011.*
 4. Dan Stone, Edward Deci and Richard Ryan. (2009)., *Beyond Talk: creating autonomous motivation through self-determination theory. Journal of General Management.* 34(3), 75-91
 5. Justin Berg, Jane Dutton & Amy Wrzesniewski. *Job Crafting and Meaningful work. In : Brian Dik, Zinta Byrne, and Michael Steger. (2013). , Purpose and Meaning in the Workplace. American Psychological Association.*
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