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Abstract

When they design a job, compensation professionals generally devote little time addressing employees' intrinsic motivational needs. Their primary focus is to design a job that allows an employee to get the work done efficiently and at an appropriate level of compensation. Daniel Pink's 2010 best-selling book, *Drive*, has caused many people to look at the job itself as a source of intrinsic motivation, especially for knowledge workers. This development gives us a needed push to reexamine the motivational value of the job itself and to consider probable reasons why this aspect of job design lacks emphasis.

Keywords

Daniel Pink, *Drive*, job enrichment, job design, intrinsic rewards, employee motivation, employee engagement, total rewards

One interesting aspect of the field of compensation management is the lack of attention given to designing intrinsically rewarding jobs to enhance employee motivation. Articles on how to design enriched jobs and the benefits of doing so are hard to find in contemporary compensation literature, and the topic is not a part of the curriculum for certifying compensation professionals.

The issue has been given visibility recently with the December 2009 publication of Daniel Pink's *Drive, The Surprising Truth About What Motivates Us*, which in 2010 was on the *Wall Street Journal's* list of the best-selling business books for more than 30 weeks. In it, Pink urges business leaders to make work intrinsically satisfying to reap the benefits of a motivated and productive workforce.

The theme is not new in the business world. In the 1970s, job enrichment was a hot topic in human resources, and several major companies reported successful programs. The popularity of Pink's book gives us a good reason to reexamine the concept of job design and to assess its relevance and importance as a source of employee rewards.

Job Enrichment

In the 1970s, job enrichment was a very popular topic in human resources. Job enrichment involves changing the elements of jobs to make them more challenging and rewarding for employees. Several informed commentators provide a flavor of its popularity:

Practitioners of job enrichment have been living through a time of euphoria. Their craft has moved from the psychology and management journals to the front page and Sunday supplement . . . it is being acclaimed in the popular press as a cure for problems ranging from inflation to drug abuse.¹

Experts believed that one cause of employee dissatisfaction was the nature of their work, as many were said to have boring, repetitive and meaningless jobs, offering little challenge. The redesign of their jobs was seen as an antidote, and some experts claimed that enriched or expanded jobs and less supervision would lead to more productive and satisfied employees.²

Although major companies, such as Motorola, AT&T and Northwestern Mutual Insurance Co. had successful programs,³ some had different experiences. Planned changes were often overwhelmed by entrenched operating systems, organizational structure and management practices.⁴ The effort was focused largely on blue-collar workers, and some unions reported that their members were uninterested in job enrichment.⁵ Surveys of blue-collar workers showed that having interesting work was not among their five most important job elements. White-collar workers, however, felt that it was the most important job element, outranking good pay.⁶

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In the early 1980s, the country was in a deep depression, giving some companies reasons to shun new ideas, such as job enrichment. Frederick Herzberg believed that the restructuring and downsizing that resulted from the business downturn often produced job enrichment serendipitously with fewer employees performing the same tasks.⁷ The specific reasons why it fell off the business agenda could not be located, but it appears that the recession played a part.

It appears that history may be repeating itself and that job enrichment or job design has relevance in the present workplace, at least in the mind of Daniel Pink and his followers. The fact that it has reappeared is one indication that it is not a fad but an enduring concept with a solid foundation in theory and practice.

Motivational Theories

Several compensation scholars believe that Frederick Herzberg deserves credit for introducing job design (specifically, job enrichment) as a key factor in work motivation.⁸ One famous management dictum based on Herzberg's thinking is "If you want people to do a good job, give them a good job to do."⁹

In his motivation-hygiene theory, Herzberg stated that work motivation is largely influenced by the extent to which a job is intrinsically challenging and provides opportunities for recognition and reinforcement. Herzberg saw the job's context (e.g., the work itself, achievement, responsibility and growth) as being far more important to employee satisfaction and motivation than organizational or *hygiene* factors, such as company policies and supervisory relationships.¹⁰

J. Richard Hackman and Greg R. Oldham continued Herzberg's thinking by relating work design, motivation, and job performance through their well-known and widely accepted job characteristics model. They maintain that employee motivation can be increased by enhancing a job's variety, challenge, autonomy, feedback and meaningfulness.⁶ Others have developed motivational theories based on task-based intrinsic rewards. One is Edward Deci's self-determination theory, which states that people have three innate psychological needs—to seek competence, autonomy and relatedness—that can be addressed in designing jobs to increase their motivation.¹¹

The Importance of Job Design to Employees

A variety of sources indicate the importance of job design to employees:

- A 2008 study by Harvard Business School researchers, which includes employees from 300 Fortune 500 companies, concluded that job design is one of the four primary levers employers

have to motivate and retain employees, as it satisfies the basic human drive to make sense of the world around us. The researchers believe that employees are motivated by challenging jobs that enable them to grow and learn and are demoralized by those that are repetitive or have no future. Talented employees who feel trapped often leave their companies to find new challenges. According to these researchers, the area is best addressed by designing jobs that have distinct and important roles in the organization and are meaningful and foster a sense of contribution to the organization.¹²

- Sibson Consulting's 2009 Rewards of Work Study of more than 2,000 U.S. workers found that job responsibility and feedback from the job were the fifth and seventh most important drivers of employee engagement. In its 2006 Rewards of Work Study of more than 1,200 U.S. employees, Sibson found that work content (e.g., variety, challenge, autonomy, feedback and meaningfulness) outranked compensation, benefits, career (e.g., advancement and training) and affiliation (e.g., work environment and trust) for satisfying, motivating and retaining nonsales employees. The same pattern existed in its 2000 and 2003 studies.^{13,14}
- Towers Watson's 2007 Global Workforce Study of 90,000 workers showed that having challenging work was the seventh most important driver for attracting employees. Jobs with an appropriate amount of decision-making authority and an impact on product or service were the fourth and eighth most important drivers for engaging employees, respectively. Doing exciting, challenging work was rated among the top five attributes that are important to people in their jobs, and 84% of employees said that they enjoy challenging work assignments.¹⁵
- McKinsey & Company's 2009 survey of more than 1,000 employees found that an opportunity to lead projects or task forces was a more effective motivator than the three highest-rated financial incentives—base pay increases, cash bonuses and stock or stock options, as shown in Table 1. McKinsey believes that nonfinancial motivators play a critical role in making employees feel that their companies value them and strive to create opportunities for growth. It claims that this theme appears frequently in most studies on the ways to motivate and engage employees.¹⁶
- A 2010 survey of 736 WorldatWork members found that the nature of the job or quality of the work was the highest rated factor for improving employee engagement, outpacing base and incentive pay programs, as shown in Table 2.¹⁷

Table 1. Ranking of Effectiveness of Incentives on Employee Motivation

• Praise and commendation	67%
• Attention from leaders	63%
• Opportunity to lead projects or task forces	62%
• Performance-based cash bonuses	60%
• Increase in base pay	52%
• Company stock or stock options	35%

Note. The figures indicate percentage of survey respondents answering extremely or very effective. Source: Dewhurst, M., Guthridge, M., & Mohr, E. (2009). *Motivating people: Getting beyond the money*. *McKinsey Quarterly Online*. Retrieved from https://www.mckinseyquarterly.com/Motivating_people_Getting_beyond_money_2460

Table 2. Ranking of Impact of Selected Incentives on Employee Engagement

1. Nature of job or quality of work	3.8 (mean)
8. Short-term incentives or bonus programs	3.42
11. Base salary level	3.30
12. Base salary increase	3.23
13. Nonfinancial recognition programs	3.20

Note. Fifteen incentives rated on a 5-point scale from very low to very high. Source: Scott, D., McMullen, T., & WorldatWork Staff. (2010). *The impact of rewards programs on employee engagement*. Retrieved from <http://www.worldatwork.org/waw/adimLink?id=39032>

Total Rewards

Some compensation professionals have recognized the idea of making jobs more intrinsically satisfying through the concept of total rewards. In 2000, WorldatWork, the largest association of compensation professionals, introduced its version of the concept of total rewards as the new baseline for the profession. At the same time, it changed its name from the American Compensation Association to WorldatWork, and adopted the tagline, “The Total Rewards Association.”

In explaining it, WorldatWork stated,

During the past decade, the profession has continued to mature. Increasingly, it has become clear that the battle for talent involves much more than highly effective, strategically designed compensation and benefit programs. While these programs remain critical, the most successful companies have realized that they must make a much broader look at the factors involved in attraction, retention, and motivation. And they must deploy all of the factors—including compensation and benefits—to their strategic advantage.

It went on to state,

Whereas compensation and benefits have clearly defined bodies of knowledge that are maintained by well-established professions, “The Work Experience” includes many elements of rewards that are important to employees and employers today but many times are less tangible. And while they always have existed in organizations, these elements traditionally have not received attention as important components of the entire attract–retain–motivate proposition. Yet, recent research consistently demonstrates that employees place high value on matters related to the total experience of working.

It expressed these thoughts in this total rewards model that identified the important rewards of work:

- Compensation
- Benefits
- The work experience
 - Acknowledgment
 - Balance of work and life
 - Culture
 - Career and professional development
 - Work environment, including job content, variety and challenging objectives.¹⁸

Total Rewards Model of 2006

In 2006, WorldatWork introduced a new version of its original model to better reflect the evolution of current practices.

The following five rewards were included in the new model:

- Compensation
- Benefits
- Work–life balance
- Performance and recognition
- Development and career opportunities.¹⁹

In revising its model, WorldatWork spent more than 12 months gathering the experiences and feedback of practitioners. When members were surveyed in August 2005, they indicated that the five types of rewards noted above in the new model were the most important factors for attracting, retaining and motivating employees. The job itself was not listed as a primary motivator, as in the earlier one, and was considered as a “contextual” factor in attracting, motivating and retaining employees.¹⁹

Employees, on the other hand, placed great importance on other intangibles in the work experience such as the job itself, as indicated in a 2003 Towers Watson survey of 35,000 employees who ranked challenging work as the

third, fourth and second most important drivers of attraction, retention and engagement, respectively.²⁰

HR consulting firms do not always include the job itself in their total rewards model.²¹ According to a June 2010 article, “A Decade of Total Rewards,” written by Towers Watson and Hay Group consultants, there is no common definition of total rewards in the HR profession. The authors listed meaningful work among the relevant current rewards.²²

Drive

Daniel Pink’s *Drive, The Surprising Truth About What Motivates Us*, has received considerable attention in the business world and on several popular employee compensation blogs, such as the Compensation Café, since its publication in December 2009.

Pink’s main thesis is that intrinsic rewards are underutilized source for motivating employees, especially those performing complex and creative tasks. He provides evidence that intrinsic rewards work and that financial incentives limit creativity and can undermine it by interfering with our natural tendencies to direct our own lives to learn and create new things. He believes that financial incentives work best for people in routine jobs, which offer few intrinsic rewards to motivate their holders. He is not a total critic of conventional pay systems—he believes that people should be paid above market pay rates and according to their relative contribution to the firm.

Pink’s ideas for motivating knowledge workers are based primarily on Edward Deci’s self-determination theory of human behavior, which states that people have three innate psychological needs—to seek competence, autonomy and relatedness. Relatedness includes the feeling of being connected to others and doing work that has a higher purpose. Deci believes that these three needs must be satisfied to have motivated, productive and happy employees. Pink recommends that employers take steps to enable employees to satisfy these needs so they can realize their highest levels of performance.²³

Compensation professionals can see the relevance of this theory in the concept of employee engagement. In its 2007-2008 *Global Workforce Study*, Towers Watson identified the following top 10 drivers of employee engagement for U.S. employees.¹⁵ Noted after each is the Deci need that is addressed.

- Senior management sincerely interested in employee well-being (relatedness)
- Organization’s reputation in the community (relatedness)
- Improved my skills and capabilities in the past year (competence)
- Appropriate amount of decision-making authority to do my job well (autonomy)

- Organization quickly resolves customer concerns (relatedness)
- Seek opportunities to develop new knowledge/skills (competence)
- Have excellent career advancement opportunities (competence)
- Can affect work/product/service (autonomy)
- Organization’s reputation for social responsibility (relatedness)
- Senior management acts to ensure organization’s long-term success (relatedness)

In this analysis, Pink’s ideas are strongly supported in two important respects. None of the top 10 engagement drivers relate to financial incentives, and all have varying degrees of connection to Deci’s basic needs that are necessary for high performance. Many of the drivers dealing with autonomy and competence are on the mark and can be addressed through job design.²⁴

The book tries to fill in the “gaps in our understanding of the motivational effects of incentives, especially when work is complex, difficult to prescribe, and dynamic, such as is often the case with professionals, knowledge and creative workers, and the like,” as noted by Notre Dame professor Matt Bloom.²⁵ Until these gaps are understood, we will continue to see books claiming that nonfinancial rewards are the best method for motivating these employees.

Critics of Intrinsic Rewards

The field of intrinsic rewards is not without prominent skeptics. In *Rewarding Excellence*, Edward E. Lawler makes the following observations about intrinsic rewards:

Unfortunately, . . . the advocates of intrinsic motivation do not provide viable alternatives to the traditional pay-for-performance approaches; they only provide compelling criticisms of them.

What the advocates of intrinsic motivation do not recognize is that, in most cases, intrinsic rewards are not sufficient in and of themselves to motivate all of the behaviors that are needed to make most organizations successful. In the absence of pay-for-performance systems, it is hard to imagine, for example, how organizations can motivate people to take on tasks as chicken processing or making cold calls for telephone services and credit cards.

The research evidence leaves little doubt that intrinsic rewards can be important motivators.²⁶

Unfortunately, Lawler does not provide references to support these statements so that readers can form their own opinion. Based on his research, Pink is offering a more sophisticated approach to developing a rewards strategy

than his predecessors. Pink does not advocate the complete scraping of pay-for-performance systems in favor of the ones based only on intrinsic rewards.

He also acknowledges that employees' compensation must fairly reflect their contributions, many jobs require financial rewards to motivate employees and many people primarily work to make money or attain the recognition denoted by financial rewards. His basic claim is that employees doing complex and creative work will perform at higher levels if their intrinsic needs, as well as their financial ones, are met.

Contrary to Lawler's claim, there appear to be viable programs to address intrinsic needs, such as the generally accepted job characteristics model for improving employee motivation.^{10,27}

Analysis and Implications

Despite the importance of job enrichment to employees and employers, the job itself presently is not a major item on the agendas of compensation professionals. Articles on the benefits of enriching an employee's job are hard to find in contemporary compensation publications, and it is not a part of the curriculum for certifying compensation professionals. In 2009, a panel of compensation subject experts, convened by the Society for Human Resources Management, did not identify job enrichment as a top 10 workplace trend.²⁸ There are several likely reasons for the low level of interest.

First, we have no clear evidence that employees are dissatisfied with the design of their jobs, making a call to enrich jobs suspect. As noted above, the possibility exists that many jobs may have been enriched in recent years as duties and responsibilities have expanded for employees who remain after firms have eliminated jobs and organization levels.

Several HR consultants have reported an increase in the number of "hybrid jobs," which encompass more than one functional area.²⁹ This development is consistent with employers' preferred choice of personnel cost reduction actions during the current recession of laying off employees over other measures, which increases the likelihood of initiating expanded duties for the remaining employees.³⁰

Second, the business case for improving job design may not be well known or as strong as it could be. Several HR consultants link higher engagement levels to better business results and organizational performance levels.^{31,32,33} Work design is typically part of the engagement gestalt, but its effects have not been isolated.

Third, some compensation professionals may feel unqualified to design enriched positions, and some may feel that it is not their job. As previously mentioned, it is not a major topic in their certification training,³⁴ and articles providing guidance about establishing job enrichment programs are hard to find.³⁵

A review of the 1970s and 1980s literature for job enrichment gives no indication that compensation experts played a prominent role in job design efforts, which is understandable since the main thrust was unrelated to pay. However, with their knowledge of an organization's jobs, work systems and employee motivation theories, compensation professionals are in an excellent position to introduce meaningful job changes, especially if they become familiar with job enrichment principles.

Fourth, compensation professionals may be too focused on improving their core pay programs to tackle new areas. It is difficult to find reports stating that major pay and performance programs are running at desired levels and do not require improvement.^{36,37,38} The present emphasis for many reward professionals is not on enriching jobs.³⁹

Fifth, enriched positions usually will have greater responsibility or a broader range of duties that could justify a pay increase. Some compensation professionals frown on granting pay increases for job upgrades of incumbents and prefer employees to physically change jobs to trigger a pay increase. Others may feel constrained by pay increase budgets and fear an increase in job upgrade requests and pay increases that are inevitable with a job enrichment program.⁴⁰

In the 1970s, prominent job enrichment consultants reported that the failure to change reward systems in response to job changes was a major problem in sustaining job enrichment efforts.⁴¹ These are some reasons why some compensation professionals may resist efforts to enrich jobs and downplay their significance.

Sixth, the job itself is de-emphasized under skill-based pay and salary broadband programs, which focus more on the individual than on the job as the basis of pay decisions. In addition, job evaluation plans, which would increase compensation professionals' knowledge of a firm's jobs, are declining in popularity in favor of using market-based plans to value jobs, which require less in-depth job knowledge to administer.^{42,43}

Seventh, WorldatWork and some prominent HR consultants have not included the job itself as a major reward source in their total rewards models for attracting, retaining and motivating employees, despite some good evidence that they should. The 2010 finding, noted above, that compensation professionals rated the job as the number one reward for affecting employee engagement is significant. It may represent the beginning of recognition of job design for changing employee behavior and could result in changes to total rewards models and thinking that will help give job design more prominence and force.

Eighth, as noted previously, the 1970s record for job enrichment efforts is not well publicized today and is not wholly positive. In 2000, Edward Lawler had significant reservations about using intrinsic rewards.

Pink has raised important issues and received considerable publicity, but the attention given to job design does

not appear to be enough to sustain interest without a clear and compelling business need to redesign jobs. His ideas are not new in the field of employee motivation, and HR consultants have confirmed the importance of the job itself through employee engagement surveys for the past 10 years, without a widespread effect on HR practices.

Perhaps, when the economy is running at full steam and compensation and benefit programs have been restored to prerecession levels, the time will be right to focus on intangible job-related motivators. Compensation professionals must decide if they want to lead job enrichment initiatives or watch other HR disciplines develop programs with a power to motivate employees that rivals financial incentives.

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Bio

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