

Health and Safety Programs

Job Design

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What is job design?

"Job design" refers to the way that a set of tasks, or an entire job, is organized. Job design helps to determine:

- What tasks are done.
- How the tasks are done.
- How many tasks are done.
- In what order the tasks are done.

It takes into account all factors which affect the work, and organizes the content and tasks so that the whole job is less likely to be a risk to the employee. Job design involves administrative areas such as:

- Job rotation
- Job enlargement
- Task/machine pacing
- Work breaks
- Working hours

A well-designed job will encourage a variety of 'good' body positions, have reasonable strength requirements, require a reasonable amount of mental activity, and help foster feelings of achievement and self-esteem.

How can job design help with the organization of work?

Job design principles can address problems such as:

- Work overload
- Work underload
- Repetitiveness
- Limited control over work
- Isolation
- Shiftwork
- Delays in filling vacant positions
- Excessive working hours
- Limited understanding of the whole job process

Job design can be used to accommodate the abilities and diversity of individuals, including those returning to work following injury or illness. For example, job design is sometimes considered as a way to help deal with stress in the workplace. See the OSH Answers document [Workplace Stress - General](#) for more information.

Is there a difference between job design and workplace design?

Job design and workplace design are often used interchangeably because both contribute to keep the physical requirements of a job reasonable.

Job design refers to administrative changes that can help improve working conditions.

In comparison, workplace design concentrates on dealing with the workstation, the tools, and the body position that all influence the way a person does his or her work. Good workplace design reduces static positions, repetitive motions and awkward body positions. More information on workplace design is available in the [Ergonomics - Human Factors](#) section of OSH Answers.

What are features of good job design?

Good job design accommodates employees' mental and physical characteristics by paying attention to:

- Muscular energy such as work/rest schedules or pace of work.
- Mental energy such as boring or extremely difficult tasks.

Good job design:

- Allows for employee input. Employees should have the option to vary activities according to personal needs, work habits, and the circumstances in the workplace.
- Gives employees a sense of contribution and accomplishment.
- Includes training so employees know what tasks to do and how to do them properly.
- Provides good work/rest schedules.
- Allows for an adjustment period for physically demanding jobs.
- Provides feedback to the employees about their performance.
- Minimizes energy expenditure and force requirements.
- Balances static and dynamic work.

Job design is an ongoing process. The goal is to make adjustments as conditions or tasks change within the workplace.

What are common approaches to job design?

Achieving good job design involves administrative practices that determine what the employee does, for how long, where, and when, as well as giving the employees choice wherever possible. In job design, you may choose to examine the various tasks of an individual job or the design of a group of jobs.

Approaches to job design include:

Job Enlargement: Job enlargement changes the jobs to include more and/or different tasks. Job enlargement should add interest to the work but may or may not give employees more responsibility.

Job Rotation: Job rotation moves employees from one task to another. It distributes the group tasks among a number of employees.

Job Enrichment: Job enrichment allows employees to assume more responsibility, accountability, and independence when learning new tasks or to allow for greater participation and new opportunities.

Work Design (Job Engineering): Work design allows employees to see how the work methods, layout and handling procedures link together as well as the interaction between people and machines.

What are the overall goals of job design?

Goals can be in many different areas and include:

Task Variety

To alleviate boredom, avoid both excessive static body positions and repetitive movements. Design jobs to have a variety of tasks that require changes in body position, muscles used, and mental activities.

Two methods are job enlargement and job rotation. For example, if an employee normally assembles parts, the job may be enlarged to include new tasks such as work planning, inspection, quality control, or maintenance. Alternatively, the tasks may include working in the same department but changing tasks every hour. For example, in a laundry facility employees can rotate between various stations (sorting, washer, dryer, iron, etc) as long as it provides for a change in physical or mental expenditure.

Skill Variety

Through job enlargement and job enrichment, often new skills are required. Learning skills are often linked to job satisfaction, good mental health, and well-being.

Work Breaks / Rest Breaks

Rest breaks help alleviate the problems of unavoidable repetitive movements or static body positions. More frequent but shorter breaks (sometimes called "micro breaks") are sometimes preferable to fewer long breaks.

During rest breaks, encourage employees to change body position and to exercise. It is important that employees stretch and use different muscle groups. If the employee has been very active, a rest break should include a stationary activity or stretching.

Allowance for an Adjustment Period

When work demands physical effort, have an adjustment period for new employees and for all employees after holidays, layoffs, or illnesses. Allow time to become accustomed to the physical demands of work by gradually "getting in shape." Employees who work in extreme hot or cold conditions also need time to acclimatize.

Provide Training

Training in correct work procedures and equipment operation is needed so that employees understand what is expected of them and how to work safely. Training should be organized, consistent and ongoing. It may occur in a classroom or on the job.

Vary Mental Activities

Tasks should be coordinated so that they are balanced during the day for the individual employee as well as balanced among a group of employees. You may want to allow the employee some degree of choice as to what types of mental tasks they want to do and when. This choice will allow the employee to do tasks when best suited to their 'alertness' patterns during the day. Some people may prefer routine tasks in the morning (such as checklists or filling in forms) and save tasks such as problem solving until the afternoon, or vice versa.

Can I use job design for teams?

Yes. Since most tasks are not done in isolation, job design is very often used for a group of employees. In some cases, teams can be created that have an overall responsibility for a larger task or set of tasks. It is up to the team to decide how the job will be accomplished, which individual will do what tasks, and when. In most cases, team members will have many skills which allow them to change jobs from time to time. As with job design for individuals, additional opportunities such as inspection, quality control, maintenance, and related tasks such as ordering supplies are often assigned to the team in addition to their regular tasks.

What steps should I take when carrying out a job design project?

Although there are many ways to carry out job design, the following stages are essential:

Do an assessment of current work practices.

Is job design needed or feasible? Discuss the process with the employees and supervisors involved and be clear about the process, or any changes or training that will be involved.

Do a task analysis.

Examine the job and determine exactly what the tasks are. Consider what equipment and workstation features are important for completing the tasks. Identify problem areas.

Design the job.

Identify the methods for doing the work, work/rest schedules, training requirements, equipment needed and workplace changes. Coordinate the different tasks so each one varies mental activities and body position. Be careful not to under or overload the job.

Implement the new job design gradually.

You may want to start on a small scale or with a pilot project. Train employees in the new procedures and use of equipment. Allow for an adjustment period and time to gain experience with the new job design.

Get Feedback and Re-evaluate job design on a continual basis.

Make any necessary adjustments. Be sure to get feedback from all those involved.

You may also want to establish a committee to represent the various groups involved. Job design should involve employees, unions, the health and safety committee and managers during the entire process. Participation of all parties increases communication and understanding.

Be clear that the purpose of the job design is to strengthen the operations and its workforce, not to eliminate jobs or sets of skills.

What is an example of a job design checklist?

Job Design		Yes	No
Task and Skill variety	Repetitive tasks – Are the same muscle groups or mental tasks done over and over?		
	Static positions – Are there few or no opportunities to change position?		
	Fast work pace – Is there muscle tension and stress?		
Work/Rest Schedules	Long work period(s) – Is there potential for fatigue?		
Adjustment Period	Are there allowances for adjustment periods or varying pace of work for new/returning employees?		
Training	Have employees had adequate training?		
Mental variety	Is there some variety or ability to choose what to do next?		

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