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Learning Byte 249 Designing High Performance Jobs



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Designing High Performance Jobs

Improving the performance of key people is often as simple and as profound as changing the resources they control and the results for which they are accountable.

You have a compelling product, an exciting vision, and a clear strategy for your new business. You've hired good people and forged relationships with critical suppliers and distributors. You've launched a marketing campaign targeting high-value customers. All that remains is to build an organization that can deliver on the promise.

This article will show you how to design jobs for high performance by following the four spans of job design.

The Four Spans of Job Design

To understand what determines whether a job is designed for high performance, you must put yourself in the shoes of your organization's managers. To carry out his or her job, each employee has to know the answer to four basic questions:

- "What resources do I control to accomplish my tasks?"
- "What measures will be used to evaluate my performance?"
- "Who do I need to interact with and influence to achieve my goals?"
- "How much support can I expect when I reach out to others for help?"

The questions correspond to the four basic **spans** of a job: control, accountability, influence, and support.

Span 1 - Span of Control

- Defines the range of resources - not only people but also assets and infrastructure - for which a manager is given decision rights.
- These are also the resources whose performance the manager is held accountable for.
- Executives must adjust the span of control for each key position and unit on the basis of how the company delivers value to customers.
- To narrow the span - Reduce resources allocated to specific positions or units
- To widen the span - Allocate more people, assets and infrastructure

Span 2 - Span of Accountability

- Refers to the range of trade-offs affecting the measures used to evaluate a manager's achievements.
- The manager responsible for market share or business profit can make many trade-offs and thus has a relatively wide span of accountability.
- To narrow the span - Standardize work by using measures that allow few trade-offs
- To widen the span - Use nonfinancial measures or broad financial measures that allow many trade-offs



Span 3 - Span of Influence

- Corresponds to the width of the net that an individual needs to cast in collecting data, probing for new information, and attempting to influence the work of others.
- An employee with a narrow span of influence does not need to pay much attention to people outside his small area to do his job effectively.
- An individual with a wide span must interact extensively with, and influence, people in other units.

- To narrow the span
 - Require people to pay attention only to their own jobs
 - Do not allocate costs across units
 - Use single reporting lines
 - Reward individual performance
- To widen the span
 - Inject creative tension through structures, systems and goals

Span 4 - Span of Support

- Refers to the amount of help an individual can expect from people in other organizational units.
- The slider can be set anywhere from narrow to wide depending on how much commitment from others the person needs in order to implement strategy.
- To narrow the span
 - Use leverage, highly individualized rewards and clearly single out winners and losers
- To widen the span
 - Build shared responsibilities through purpose and mission, group identification, trust and equity-based incentive plans.

This is a précis of an article written by Robert Simons (rsimons@hbs.edu) the Charles M. Williams Professor of Business Administration at Harvard Business School in Boston. He is the author of Levers of Organization Design: How Managers Use Accountability Systems for Greater Performance and Commitment (Harvard Business School Press, 2005). Harvard Business Review - July-August 2005

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