Lesson 8: Motivation through job redesign and cognitive evaluation

Introduction

This lesson consists of:

1. Job Redesign Theory

2. Cognitive Evaluation Theory

3. Case Study

4. Student Journal Entry

Assignment

1. **Read Course Guide**, pages 139-164.

2. When you solve the case study or act as a leader in your organization:

I*.* ***Identify*** the **Areas of Interest**.

II. ***Analyze*** the situation using Job Redesign Theory.

A. ***Classify*** the level of growth need strength in the employee(s)/Area(s) of Interest.

B. ***Identify*** any missing core job dimensions.

C. ***Identify*** the critical psychological states that are being experienced and those that are missing.

D. ***Describe*** the personal and work outcomes.

Alternately,

II. ***Analyze*** the situation using Cognitive Evaluation Theory.

A. ***Classify***:

1. The employee’s(s’)level of interest in the assigned task.

2. The degree of challenge the task represents to the employee(s).

3. The locus of causality with respect to the available rewards.

4. The level of competence and self-determination with respect to the assigned task(s).

III. ***Explain*** how the missing core job dimensions affect critical psychological states experienced by the employee(s) and in turn, his or her motivation, performance, and satisfaction.

Alternately,

III. ***Explain*** how the competence and degree of self-determination of the employee(s) affect his or her/their motivation, satisfaction, and performance.

IV. ***Select*** an appropriate theoretical leader strategy(ies) to address Areas of Interest.

V. ***Apply*** the theoretical leader strategy(ies) to the situation in the form of a specific leader plan that addresses all Areas of Interest.

VI. ***Assess***, evaluate, and revise your leader plan.

3) **Complete a Student Journal entry** for Job Redesign Theory.

Have you or someone you know ever been in a dull, boring, unchallenging job in policing? What about the reverse--a challenging, stimulating, motivating job, in which you were eager to do your best every day? Think of an example of either kind of job.

Motivation through Job Redesign Theory

“The supreme quality of the gifted leader is to understand not only the needs of potential followers but the way in which those needs could be activated and channeled.”

—Mao Zedong

Thus far in the course, our investigation of motivation has focused exclusively on the individual. We have examined how judgments and biases, the stages of life, the perception of fairness, the person’s expectations, and the consequences of behavior all influence an individual’s performance. In this lesson, we will examine **how the job itself** may contribute to an individual’s motivation to perform.

Why do some employees constantly complain about their job? Why do certain individuals call in sick when there is nothing wrong with them? Why do people fail to live up to their full potential? The answers to these questions may lie not only with the individual employees but also with some aspects of their job. Recognizing this, a reflective leader can enhance motivation, satisfaction, and performance by using **Job Redesign Theory**.

Job redesign is not necessarily about changing the job a person does or reassigning them. Each of these changes may be beyond the abilities of a person’s immediate supervisor. Instead, job design theory can enable a leader to motivate an individual through subtle changes in how a person does their job and/or how they go about doing assigned tasks.

High Growth Needs (HGN)

Some people have *High Growth Needs*—they characteristically seek additional responsibility and challenge. If challenge is absent, these High Growth Need (HGN) individuals may become dissatisfied, unmotivated, and unwilling to perform well or even to attend work regularly. Recall that Dr. Albert Einstein, as a child, was considered a terrible student. He displayed disruptive behavior in class and seldom did his assigned homework lessons. Considering Einstein’s subsequent intellectual conquests and contributions, do you see a possible link between young Albert’s early failures, and his schoolmasters’ failure to recognize High Growth Needs?

Conversely, some people have *Low Growth Needs*. These are not necessarily tied to low ability. Low Growth Need (LGN) individuals merely prefer to go to work, do their jobs, and receive fair compensation. Additional challenge and responsibility have little appeal; security and comfort are much more important. Within their comfort zones, LGN employees can be reliable and responsible workers. However, when burdened with excessive challenge, Low Growth Needs employees are prone to dissatisfaction and loss of motivation. These employees may fail to perform because they feel stressed out. They may even fail to attend work regularly.

Core Job Dimensions

Job Redesign Theory states that jobs are more or less motivating depending upon the degree to which they are designed with core job dimensions in mind. While the presence or absence of these five core job dimensions may make a job more or less motivating to HGN employees, they may, in contrast, make a job aversive to a LGN employee. The leader who wants to make a job more motivating should know the power of these core job dimensions, along with how to make them part of a job.

1. **Skill Variety**
   * How many different skills does the job require?
   * Does it require too many or too few unique skills?
   * Does the employee possess the necessary skills?
2. **Task Identity**
   * Does the job involve completing a whole, identifiable piece of work from start to finish?
   * Can the employee see a tangible outcome from their efforts?
   * Are the job’s expectations and requirements clearly defined?
3. **Task Significance**
   * Does the job have a meaningful impact on others, either within the organization or beyond?
   * Does the employee perceive their work as important to the organization?
4. **Autonomy**
   * How much freedom and independence does the job offer in scheduling and decision-making?
   * Does the employee feel they have enough control over their work?
   * Is there too much or too little autonomy?
5. **Feedback**
   * Does the job itself provide clear and direct feedback on performance?
   * Does the employee regularly receive meaningful evaluations?
   * Is feedback coming from the work itself, supervisors, peers, or other sources?

Critical Psychological States

Individuals with High Growth Needs are happy when the job satisfies the three critical psychological states:

* The work they perform is meaningful,
* They experience responsibility for the outcomes of their work, and
* They obtain knowledge for the actual results of their work

Experiencing one or more of these key psychological states is what makes a job satisfying and motivating for high-growth need (HGN) individuals. Skill variety, task identity, and task significance are the core job dimensions that lead to **experienced meaningfulness of the work**. Autonomy leads to **experienced responsibility for the actual results of the work**, while feedback produces **knowledge of the actual results of the work**. If any of these five dimensions are missing or weak, HGN individuals may struggle to experience these psychological states. As a result, they may feel frustrated, less motivated, and underperform. The next section will outline leadership strategies to enhance these core job dimensions. Leaders can evaluate each dimension individually and adjust them to balance employee needs with organizational goals.

Leader Strategies

Once you know whether an individual employee has High or Low Growth Needs, and you have a good idea of which Core Dimensions are missing or weak, you are prepared to design a leader plan of action. There are five theoretical strategies a leader can use to build up missing core dimensions. Remember, the leader only uses this theory to enhance motivation for HGN employees. LGN people do not seek or do well in enriched, intrinsically motivating job situations. They prefer routine, repetitive, unchallenging tasks and little responsibility.

1. **Combining Tasks.**  Addsadditional parallel tasks to an existing assignment. The addition of new tasks may prove helpful when a job is lacking the core dimensions of skill variety or task identity.

2. **Vertical Loading.**This strategy is similar to combining tasks because it adds new responsibilities to a worker’s job. It differs, however, in that the added duties invite new challenge, supervisory responsibility, and some decision-making and creativity. Vertical loading is also known as job enrichment; it is especially effective for High Growth Need people whose current jobs lack autonomy.

3. **Forming Natural Work Units.** This is dividing or recombining the workload at its natural breakpoints in order to create meaningful chunks of responsibility. Natural work units are designed so that one worker, or one team of workers, has responsibility for an identifiable body of work (such as a truck engine), rather than random assignments (like bolting on fan blades). This strategy creates task identity and task significance.

4. **Establishing Client Relationships.** This strategy puts the employee in direct contact with the recipient of his or her goods or services, in an effort to build personal relationships. The goal is to instill a sense of responsibility, quality, and pride. This tactic often increases an employee’s sense of autonomy and skill variety but can also impact feedback.

5. **Opening Feedback Channels.** Increased, honest, specific, high-quality communication between leader and follower is a vital component of this strategy. Efforts should also be made to design work that enables employees to get direct results and feedback by the accomplishment of the work itself.

What do these core job dimensions look like in police work? How would a police leader turn the theoretical leader strategies into a practical form of action?

Using Job Redesign in the Police World

To fit a job to an employee, a leader must understand the person’s growth needs. Some might think, “I don’t care about their needs—I just want the job done!” While ensuring employees complete their tasks is essential, **Motivation through Consequences** is only one approach. If a leader wants **consistent high performance**, even without supervision, **Job Redesign** can be a valuable tool.

A leader’s role is to develop employees while also improving the organization. However, **job redesign must be carefully considered**—not every role can or should be altered. For instance, **low-growth need (LGN) employees** may avoid challenging tasks, while **high-growth need (HGN) employees** may compete for limited high-responsibility roles. **Equity concerns** also matter; employees may feel demotivated if they believe a poor performer was "rewarded" with a better job. Leaders must analyze the full situation before making changes.

Even in structured environments like civil service, **job redesign doesn’t require a complete overhaul**. Small adjustments—such as increasing **skill variety, autonomy, or feedback**—can be impactful. A high-growth need officer, for example, might benefit from leading roll call training, working an X-car occasionally, or conducting follow-up investigations. When used thoughtfully, **Job Redesign can enhance motivation, job satisfaction, and performance**, either alone or combined with other leadership strategies.

When using Job Redesign Theory, you may find it helpful to use Figure 15 below, working back from right to left.

#### Figure 15. Job Redesign



COGNITIVE EVALUATION THEORY

Intrinsic Motivation

Most theories of motivation focus on the external forces that motivate people. Equity Theory and Expectancy Theory are examples of these types of motivational frameworks. Expectancy Theory, for instance, hypothesizes that an individual will be more motivated to achieve organizational goals if the leader provides a desirable reward and clarifies the link between job performance and the reward. In this case, the follower comes to understand that certain behaviors are instrumental for the attainment of specific extrinsic rewards.

**Cognitive Evaluation Theory** offers a different, although complementary, view of motivation. Cognitive Evaluation Theory, which is a sub-theory of Self-Determination Theory, proposes that when extrinsic rewards are used, people will engage in the behaviors desired by the leader only when the rewards are valued and believed to be forthcoming from the behavior. Eventually, when an individual is consistently extrinsically rewarded for a behavior, that person begins to believe that the reward is the cause of the behavior. Thus, the ***locus of causality****,* or reason for the behavior, will rest in the reward itself. Unlike Expectancy and Equity Theory, however, Cognitive Evaluation Theory **focuses on intrinsic motivation**, where the locus of causality rests within the individual and not on some external reward.

There has been some criticism of Cognitive Evaluation theory due to the fact that most early studies were done outside of the organizational context. However, researchers tend to agree that offering obvious external rewards to motivate work can reduce intrinsic motivation. This can negatively impact psychological well-being, performance on meaningful tasks, and willingness to go above and beyond in work. In other words, the consistent focus on external rewards may impede intrinsic motivation.

*What is* ***intrinsic motivation****?* An activity is generally labeled as intrinsically motivated if there is no apparent external reward associated with the activity. An example of intrinsic motivation might be a student who decides to play computer games all night instead of studying for a history exam. Clearly, there is an extrinsic reward associated with studying for the exam (e.g., getting a good grade, failing the exam, etc.). There appears, however, to be no external reward associated with playing computer games. Therefore, it could be concluded that the student is intrinsically motivated to play computer games. If the student stops playing with the computer and starts studying for the exam, it probably could be concluded that the student was extrinsically motivated to study for the exam.

Where does intrinsic motivation come from*?* If you remember reading about the individual as a psychological system (IPS), our behavior is the result of the interaction of our attentional, perceptual, and cognitive systems with our environment. Intrinsic motivation, a key component of the cognitive process aspect, results from these interactions. For example, we know that childrearing practices greatly influence how basic intrinsic motivation manifests itself in the need for achievement. If a child’s environment is filled with exposure to and support for any given activity, (e.g., painting, playing a musical instrument, academic achievement, etc.), the likelihood that the child will become intrinsically motivated increases. Comparable circumstances also apply to the employees that you will lead. Given the right environmental and leadership influences, they too can become intrinsically motivated to perform any number of tasks or behaviors. CET can help us explain how this is possible.

Cognitive Evaluation Theory is based on the premise that there are two needs that drive intrinsic motivation: the ***need for competence*** and the ***need for self-determination***.

***Need for competence*** says that humans have a need to affect their environment. As we strive to have this effect, we garner inherent satisfaction in exercising and extending our own capabilities. CET suggests that the need for competence leads people to seek and conquer challenges that are optimal for their capacities and that competence acquisition results from challenging stimuli.

An illustration of a need for competence might be Michael Jordan’s decision to retire from basketball to play baseball. After being selected as the most valuable player in the league year after year, in addition to winning three straight NBA championships, it is possible that Jordan was not fulfilling his need for competence. As an average baseball player, he knew he would be consistently challenged attempting to play this sport. It is important to note that Jordan decided to play baseball and not become a short-order cook at Joe’s Diner. This illustrates that in addition to providing an optimal challenge, an individual must have an interest in a taskfor it to fulfill the need for competence.

Along the same lines, a corporal who was recently placed in a patrol sergeant position might be more intrinsically motivated than a sergeant who has been a patrol sergeant for four years. The corporal sees the patrol sergeant role as an opportunity to conquer challenges that are optimal for his capabilities. In contrast, the sergeant who has held the position for years might now be more interested in the challenges associated with being a watch commander.

The second need driving intrinsic motivation is ***self-determination***. Self-determination is an issue of choice. It is related to such concepts as volition, intentionality, and will. There are many non-intrinsically motivated behaviors that may be competence-oriented, but to be truly intrinsically motivated, a person must also feel free from pressures such as rewards or contingencies. As an example, a piano player attempting to master the playing of a difficult song is clearly fulfilling the need for competence. However, if the piano player’s parents require her to learn the song before she can go out and play, she will lack freedom of choice and hence, self-determination. She might not be intrinsically motivated.

Another example might be a new lieutenant who is given the responsibility of fixing a below-average night watch. The lieutenant would probably see this requirement as challenging and interesting. Therefore, this task would fulfill the need for competence. If the area commander, however, tells the lieutenant that she will be inspected in two weeks and if she fails it will have an adverse effect on her future advancement, then the lieutenant will lose her freedom of choice. She will not fulfill her need for self-determination and won’t be intrinsically motivated. Relating back to a term we used earlier, her locus of causality will be external. On the other hand, if the area commander simply told her to get the job done and that he would be available to support her in any way possible, then her self-determination might be preserved.

Why Does This Matter?

One might argue that the locus of causality is irrelevant. Why does it matter if a person is motivated intrinsically or extrinsically, as long as they’re motivated? The answer to this question is simple. If the person’s locus of causality is external (i.e., they are extrinsically motivated), when the reward or punishment that is seen as the cause of the behavior is removed, the individual will stop being motivated to accomplish the task. An example of this might be a tank company commander who tells his crews that the top two crews on the upcoming tank gunnery exercise will receive a four-day pass. The commander is hoping that this reward motivates his crews to train hard. If, however, the commander fails to offer the same (if not higher) reward the next time his company has tank gunnery, his soldiers will cease to be motivated to train because the cause of their earlier motivation has been removed. In contrast, the tank company commander who is able to intrinsically motivate his crews does not have to worry about providing subsequent rewards each time he wants to motivate them for gunnery training.

Controlling and Information Aspects of Rewards

The above discussion strongly suggests that the use of extrinsic rewards always decreases intrinsic motivation. In actuality, Cognitive Evaluation Theory argues that if the extrinsic rewards increase an individual’s sense of competence and self-determination, then the extrinsic rewards can also increase the individual’s intrinsic motivation.

How can this be? Research on this topic has found that when people believe that the extrinsic reward provides information to them about their competence, the reward increases their intrinsic motivation. Therefore, from a leadership perspective, it is important to understand that as long **as the person receiving a reward sees it as informational and not controlling, their intrinsic motivation will increase**. As an example, suppose the training academy commander comes out to a range and yells at a sergeant because not enough of his cadets are qualifying expert. If the training academy commander then gathers the cadets together and tells them that everyone who qualifies expert will receive three days off, most cadets will see the reward as controlling, and this will decrease their intrinsic motivation (it might increase their extrinsic motivation). However, if the training academy commander, while walking down the firing line, sees a cadet shoot expert and then gives her a citation for marksmanship, the cadet will probably see the reward as informational (indicating superior performance), and her intrinsic motivation will probably increase.

Leader Actions

* **A leader should attempt to create a challenging environment**. If employees are challenged, their need for self-competence will theoretically lead to intrinsic motivation.
* **Once you create a challenging environment, keep it that way**. Much like Michael Jordan and basketball, once an employee masters a task, his or her intrinsic motivation will begin to decrease.
* **Attempt to provide positive rewards that provide information to employees as opposed to rewards that control.**
* **Avoid negative feedback and punishment**. Under very few circumstances will this increase intrinsic motivation.

Conclusions

Motivation can be categorized as intrinsic or extrinsic. Clearly, if everyone in your department were intrinsically motivated to perform every task associated with accomplishing the organization’s missions, life as a leader would be easy. We know, however, that this isn’t the case. Cognitive Evaluation Theory teaches us a framework for understanding intrinsic motivation. As leaders, we can use this information to create environments that facilitate intrinsic motivation. CET also provides information on using rewards and punishments as a means to increase motivation. Although punishment is clearly a preferred course of action in some instances, it will most likely decrease your employee’s intrinsic motivation. Rewards, however, will either increase or decrease your employee’s intrinsic motivation depending on whether you use the rewards to control or inform your employees. If you use the rewards to control your employees, you need to be aware that the cost associated with this increase in extrinsic motivation is a decrease in intrinsic motivation.

Ultimately, the importance of developing intrinsic motivation may best be expressed by the demands placed on you and your employees in stressful situations. Officers will not place their lives at risk because they want medals or extra pay. They will follow orders and risk their lives for you, the unit, their fellow officers, and their community because their job requires it, they feel good about the job they are performing, and it has become the right thing to do. This is the ultimate form of intrinsic motivation.

**References**

Associates of the Department of Behavioral Sciences and Leadership. (1981). *Leadership in Organizations*. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

Associates of the Department of Behavioral Sciences and Leadership. (1999). *Course Guide for PL 300: Military Leadership (AY 99-00)*. West Point, NY: Authors.

Gagné, M., & Deci, E. L. (2005). Self-determination theory and work motivation. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, *26*(4), 331–362. <https://doi.org/10.1002/job.322>

Hackman, J. R., & Oldham, G. R. (1980) *Work redesign*. Addison-Wesley

Hughes, R., Ginnett, R., & Curphy, G. (2022). *Leadership: Enhancing the lessons of experience*. 10th ed., McGraw Hill.

Lawler, E. E. (1994) *Motivation in work organizations*. Jossey-Bass

Riley, G. (2015). Differences in competence, autonomy, and relatedness between home educated and traditionally educated young adults. *International Social Science Review*, *90*(2), 1–27.

Case Study

As a brand-new patrol lieutenant, you are the day watch commander. During your first meeting with one of your sergeants, Dave Rok, he advised you that for the most part, the squad is composed of great cops. They show up for work on time, and seem to be genuinely interested in patrol work. According to Rock, the one exception is Officer Ted Davis. Sergeant Rock explains, “I don’t know what to do with him. All he does is mope around and talk about quitting the department. He also calls in sick quite a bit now. Last month he was assigned to investigate a traffic collision involving a city councilman’s wife. He did such a shoddy investigation that the previous lieutenant hit the roof! Davis wound up getting a written reprimand, but it could have easily been a formal complaint for Neglect of Duty.”

You were surprised to hear this about Officer Davis. You remembered him as a recruit five years ago when you were a sergeant at the academy. Ted Davis really impressed you. You thought he would be a top-notch police officer and maybe even your boss one day. Before he joined the department, Ted had graduated cum laude from the local university with a Master’s degree in Education. He taught English to sixth graders for a year and then decided he was not working up to his full potential. He wanted to do something more ambitious, so he applied for the police department and wound up graduating number one in his academy class. Before tonight, the last thing you heard about Davis was that he had entered graduate school to pursue a degree in Criminal Justice.

You decided to speak to Officer Davis. You begin by going directly to the heart of the matter. “Ted, why do you want to quit police work?”

Officer Davis appears to be taken aback. He says, “I really don’t want to quit police work; I’m just not happy with what I’m doing. I’ve been working patrol in this division for three years now. It seems like all I do is go from call to call and take simple crime reports. And for what? Nobody reads these reports, so what difference do they make anyway? Most of them are just being filed for insurance purposes. Then, when I do get an interesting call, Sergeant Rock always seems to show up.

“I never get a chance to see a case through to its end. Sergeant Rock is always telling me ‘Just take the reports and let the detectives handle the follow-up.’ Especially on ‘hot shot’ calls, Sergeant Rock always takes over. He begins directing me to do things I have already begun to do. I’m a pretty smart guy. I think I should be able to decide the best way to handle a field situation. I never get a chance to do that.” You realize that it’s going to take some work to get Officer Davis fired up again. You know that you had better start soon, before you lose one of your most talented officers.

Use all four steps in the Leader Thought Process.

I. (Step I) ***Identify*** the **Areas of Interest**.

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

7.

8.

9.

10.

(If necessary, continue listing **Areas of Interest** on another page.)

II. (Step II) ***Analyze*** the situation using Job Redesign Theory.

What is the relationship among the Areas of Interest listed above? More specifically, is there a chronological order or **logical chain of events** that helps you make sense of the facts you have? If so, outline the time sequence of events.

Classify the employee’s growth needs. Are they high or low in this situation?

What are the personal and work outcomes? How has the current design of Officer Davis’ job affected his motivation, satisfaction, and/or performance?

What critical psychological states are being experienced? Which are missing or low?

Which Core Dimensions are missing or low?

III. (Step II) ***Explain*** how the missing core job dimensions affect critical psychological states and, in turn, motivation, performance, and satisfaction.

Do the facts of the case and your explanation form a pattern that allows you to identify a fundamental or **root cause** (i.e., is there something in the case information that suggests it is the underlying cause of all or most of the Areas of Interest)?

IV. (Step III) ***Select*:** Which theoretical leader strategy(ies) would be effective in this situation?

Which leader strategy(ies) should the leader use to address the Areas of Interest in this situation?

V. (Step III) ***Apply*** the theoretically correct leader strategy(ies) to the situation in the form of a specific leader plan.

Address all the **Areas of Interest** you have identified and translate the theoretical leader strategies into specific actions you would take and communications that you would send to the employee(s) of interest. What will you do and say to whom, when, where, and how? What do the theoretical leader actions look like in practice?

VI. ***Assess*** the effectiveness of your leader plan and revise as needed.

After your leader plan, list the measures you would use to evaluate your actions. In this step, leaders need to ask, “What information do I need to tell whether or not my leadership is having the desired effects? How will I obtain the information I need? How can it be generated? Who can help me get what I need? How often should I collect data and in what form?”

Name:

**Complete a Student Journal entry** for Job Redesign Theory.

Have you or someone you know ever been in a dull, boring, unchallenging job in policing? What about the reverse--a challenging, stimulating, motivating job, in which you were eager to do your best every day? Think of an example of either kind of job. Describe the person(s) who had the job in terms of his or her level of Growth Need. Then describe the job in terms of the core job dimensions that were present or missing and their effect on the critical psychological states of the person(s) who had the job. What happened to the person’s motivation, performance, and satisfaction? What could the leader have done to make the job more motivating? What would you have done, if you had been the leader, to make the job more motivating using Job Redesign Theory?