

Top-Management Team at Ortiv Glass Corporation

The Ortiv Glass Corporation produces and markets plate glass for use primarily in the construction and automotive industries. The multiplant company has been involved in OD for several years and actively supports participative management practices and employee involvement programs. Ortiv's organization design is relatively organic, and the manufacturing plants are given freedom and encouragement to develop their own organization designs and approaches to participative management. It recently put together a problem-solving group made up of the top-management team at its newest plant.

The team consisted of the plant manager and the managers of the five functional departments reporting to him: engineering (maintenance), administration, human resources, production, and quality control. In recruiting managers for the new plant, the company selected people with good technical skills and experience in their respective functions. It also chose people with some managerial experience and a desire to solve problems collaboratively, a hallmark of participative management. The team was relatively new, and members had been working together for only about five months.

The team met formally for two hours each week to share pertinent information and to deal with plantwide issues affecting all of the departments, such as safety procedures, interdepartmental relations, and personnel practices. Members described these meetings as informative but often chaotic in terms of decision making. The meetings typically started late as members straggled in at different times. The latecomers generally offered excuses about more pressing problems occurring elsewhere

in the plant. Once started, the meetings were often interrupted by "urgent" phone messages for various members, including the plant manager, and in most cases the recipient would leave the meeting hurriedly to respond to the call.

The group had problems arriving at clear decisions on particular issues. Discussions often rambled from topic to topic, and members tended to postpone the resolution of problems to future meetings. This led to a backlog of unresolved issues, and meetings often lasted far beyond the two-hour limit. When group decisions were made, members often reported problems in their implementation. Members typically failed to follow through on agreements, and there was often confusion about what had actually been agreed upon. Everyone expressed dissatisfaction with the team meetings and their results.

Relationships among team members were cordial yet somewhat strained, especially when the team was dealing with complex issues in which members had varying opinions and interests. Although the plant manager publicly stated that he wanted to hear all sides of the issues, he often interrupted the discussion or attempted to change the topic when members openly disagreed in their views of the problem. This interruption was typically followed by an awkward silence in the group. In many instances, when a solution to a pressing problem did not appear forthcoming, members either moved on to another issue or they informally voted on proposed options, letting majority rule decide the outcome. Members rarely discussed the need to move on or vote; rather, these behaviors emerged informally over time and became acceptable ways of dealing with difficult issues.





In the case of decision-making groups such as this one, organization design also affects the nature of the issues that are worked on. The team meetings appear to be devoted to problems affecting all of the functional departments. This suggests that the problems entail high interdependence among the functions; consequently, high coordination among members is needed to resolve them. The team meetings also seem to include many issues that are complex and not easily solved, so there is probably a relatively high amount of uncertainty in the technology or work process. The causes of the problems or acceptable solutions are not readily discernible. Members must process considerable information during problem solving, especially when there are different perceptions and opinions about the issues.

Diagnosis of the team's design components answers the following questions:

1. **How clear are the group's goals?** The team's goals seem relatively clear; they are to solve problems. There appears to be no clear agreement, however, on the specific problems to be addressed. As a result, members come late because they have "more pressing" problems needing attention.
2. **What is the group's task structure?** The team's task structure includes face-to-face interaction during the weekly meetings. That structure allows members from different functional departments to come together physically to share information and to solve problems mutually affecting them. It facilitates coordination of problem solving among the departments in the plant. The structure also seems to provide team members with the freedom necessary to regulate their task behaviors in the meetings. They can adjust their behaviors and interactions to suit the flow of the discussion and problem-solving process.
3. **What is the composition of the group?** The team is composed of the plant manager and managers of five functional departments. All members appear to have task-relevant skills and experience, both in their respective functions and in their managerial roles. They also seem to be interested in solving problems collaboratively. That shared interest suggests that members have job-related social needs and should feel relatively comfortable in group problem-solving situations.
4. **What are the group's performance norms?** Group norms cannot be observed directly but must be inferred from group behaviors. The norms involve member beliefs about how the group should perform its task, including acceptable levels of performance. A useful way to describe norms is to list specific behaviors that complete the sentences "A good group member should ..." and "It's okay to" Examination of the team's problem-solving behaviors suggests the following performance norms are operating in the example:
 - "It's okay to come late to team meetings."
 - "It's okay to interrupt meetings with phone messages."
 - "It's okay to leave meetings to respond to phone messages."
 - "It's okay to hold meetings longer than two hours."
 - "A good group member should not openly disagree with others' views."
 - "It's okay to vote on decisions."
 - "A good group member should be cordial to other members."
 - "It's okay to postpone solutions to immediate problems."
 - "It's okay not to follow through on previous agreements."
5. **What is the nature of team functioning in the group?** The case strongly suggests that interpersonal relations are not healthy on the management team. Members do not seem to confront differences openly. Indeed, the plant manager purposely intervenes when conflicts emerge. Members feel dissatisfied with the meetings, but they spend little time talking about those feelings. Relationships are strained, but members fail to examine the underlying causes.



The problems facing the team can now be explained by assessing how well the group design fits the inputs. The larger organization design of Ortiv is relatively differentiated and promotes flexibility and innovation in its manufacturing plants. The firm supports participative management, and the team meetings can be seen as an attempt to implement that approach at the new plant. Although it is too early to tell whether the team will succeed, there does not appear to be significant incongruity between the larger organization design and what the team is trying to do. Of course, team problem solving may continue to be ineffective, and the team might revert to a more autocratic approach to decision making. In such a case, a serious mismatch between the plant management team and the larger company would exist, and conflict between the two would likely result.

The team's issues are highly interdependent and often uncertain, and meetings are intended to resolve plantwide problems affecting the various functional departments. Those problems are generally complex and require the members to process a great deal of information and create innovative solutions. The team's task structure and composition appear to fit the nature of team issues. The face-to-face meetings help to coordinate problem solving among the department managers, and except for the interpersonal skills, members seem to have the necessary task-relevant skills and experience to drive the problem-solving process. There appears, however, to be a conflict in the priority between the problems to be solved by the team and the problems faced by individual managers.

More important, the key difficulty seems to be a mismatch between the team's performance norms and interpersonal relations and the demands of the problem-solving task. Complex, interdependent problems require performance norms that support sharing of diverse and often conflicting kinds of information. The norms must encourage members to generate novel solutions and to assess the relevance of problem-solving strategies in light of new issues. Members need to address explicitly how they are using their knowledge and skills and how they are weighing and combining members' individual contributions.

In our example, the team's performance norms fail to support complex problem solving; rather, they promote a problem-solving method that is often superficial, haphazard, and subject to external disruptions. Members' interpersonal relationships reinforce adherence to the ineffective norms. Members do not confront personal differences or dissatisfactions with the group process. They fail to examine the very norms contributing to their problems. In this case, diagnosis suggests the need for group interventions aimed at improving performance norms and developing healthy interpersonal relations.

INDIVIDUAL-LEVEL DIAGNOSIS

The final level of organizational diagnosis is the individual job or position. An organization consists of numerous groups; a group, in turn, is composed of several individual jobs. This section discusses the inputs, design components, and relational fits needed for diagnosing jobs. The model shown in Figure 6.1(C) is similar to other popular job diagnostic frameworks, such as Hackman and Oldham's job diagnostic survey and Herzberg's job enrichment model.¹⁴

Inputs

Three major inputs affect job design: organization design, group design, and the personal characteristics of jobholders.

Organization design is concerned with the larger organization within which the individual job is the smallest unit. Organization design is a key part of the larger context surrounding jobs. Technology, structure, measurement systems, human resources



systems, and culture can have a powerful impact on the way jobs are designed and on people's experiences in jobs. For example, company reward systems can orient employees to particular job behaviors and influence whether people see job performance as fairly rewarded. In general, technology characterized by relatively uncertain tasks and low interdependency is likely to support job designs allowing employees flexibility and discretion in performing tasks. Conversely, low-uncertainty work systems are likely to promote standardized job designs requiring routinized task behaviors.¹⁵

Group design concerns the larger group or department containing the individual job. Like organization design, group design is an essential part of the job context. Task structure, goal clarity, group composition, performance norms, and team functioning serve as inputs to job design. They typically have a more immediate impact on jobs than do the larger, organization design components. For example, group task structure can determine how individual jobs are grouped together—as in groups requiring coordination among jobs or in ones comprising collections of independent jobs. Group composition can influence the kinds of people who are available to fill jobs. Group performance norms can affect the kinds of job designs that are considered acceptable, including the level of jobholders' performances. Goal clarity helps members to prioritize work, and group functioning can affect how powerfully the group influences job behaviors. When members maintain close relationships and the group is cohesive, group norms are more likely to be enforced and followed.¹⁶

Personal characteristics of individuals occupying jobs include their age, education, experience, and skills and abilities. All of these can affect job performance as well as how people react to job designs. Individual needs and expectations can also affect employee job responses. For example, individual differences in growth need—the need for self-direction, learning, and personal accomplishment—can determine how much people are motivated and satisfied by jobs with high levels of skill variety, autonomy, and feedback about results.¹⁷ Similarly, work motivation can be influenced by people's expectations that they can perform a job well and that good job performance will result in valued outcomes.¹⁸

Design Components

Figure 6.1(C) shows that individual jobs have five key dimensions: skill variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy, and feedback about results.¹⁹

Skill variety identifies the degree to which a job requires a range of activities and abilities to perform the work. Assembly line jobs, for example, generally have limited skill variety because employees perform a small number of repetitive activities. On the other hand, most professional jobs, include a great deal of skill variety because people engage in diverse activities and employ several different skills in performing their work.

Task identity measures the degree to which a job requires the completion of a relatively whole, identifiable piece of work. Skilled craftspeople, such as tool-and-die makers and carpenters, generally have jobs with high levels of task identity. They are able to see a job through from beginning to end. Assembly line jobs involve only a limited piece of work and score low on task identity.

Task significance identifies the degree to which a job has a significant impact on other people's lives. Custodial jobs in a hospital are likely to have more task significance than similar jobs in a toy factory because hospital custodians are likely to see their jobs as affecting someone else's health and welfare.

Autonomy indicates the degree to which a job provides freedom and discretion in scheduling the work and determining work methods. Assembly line jobs generally have little autonomy: The work pace is scheduled, and people perform preprogrammed tasks. College teaching positions have more autonomy: Professors usually



can determine how a course is taught, even though they may have limited say over class scheduling.

Feedback about results involves the degree to which a job provides employees with direct and clear information about the effectiveness of task performance. Assembly line jobs often provide high levels of feedback about results, whereas college professors must often contend with indirect and ambiguous feedback about how they are performing in the classroom.

Those five job dimensions can be combined into an overall measure of job enrichment. Enriched jobs have high levels of skill variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy, and feedback about results. They provide opportunities for self-direction, learning, and personal accomplishment at work. Many people find enriched jobs internally motivating and satisfying. (Job enrichment is discussed more fully in Chapter 16.)

Fits

The diagnostic model in Figure 6.1(C) suggests that job design must fit job inputs to produce effective job outputs, such as high quality and quantity of individual performance, low absenteeism, and high job satisfaction. Research reveals the following fits between job inputs and job design:

1. Job design should be congruent with the larger organization and group designs within which the job is embedded.²⁰ Both the organization and the group serve as a powerful context for individual jobs or positions. They tend to support and reinforce particular job designs. Highly differentiated and integrated organizations and groups that permit members to self-regulate their behavior fit enriched jobs. These larger organizations and groups promote autonomy, flexibility, and innovation at the individual job level. Conversely, bureaucratic organizations and groups relying on external controls are congruent with job designs scoring low on the five key dimensions. Both organizations and groups reinforce standardized, routine jobs. As suggested earlier, congruence across different levels of organization design promotes integration of the organization, group, and job levels. Whenever the levels do not fit each other, conflict is likely to emerge.
2. Job design should fit the personal characteristics of the jobholders if they are to perform effectively and derive satisfaction from work. Generally, enriched jobs fit people with strong growth needs.²¹ These people derive satisfaction and accomplishment from performing jobs involving skill variety, autonomy, and feedback about results. Enriched jobs also fit people possessing moderate to high levels of task-relevant skills, abilities, and knowledge. Enriched jobs generally require complex information processing and decision making; people must have comparable skills and abilities to perform effectively. Jobs scoring low on the five job dimensions generally fit people with rudimentary skills and abilities and with low growth needs. Simpler, more routinized jobs requiring limited skills and experience fit better with people who place a low value on opportunities for self-direction and learning. In addition, because people can grow through education, training, and experience, job design must be monitored and adjusted from time to time.

Analysis

Application 6.2 presents an example of applying individual-level diagnosis to job design. The university is considering a change in the job design of a program administrator. The application provides information about the current job and asks whether or not the proposed change makes sense. Examination of the inputs and job design features and how the two fit can help to make predictions about the advisability of the change.