ABSTRACT
        The author proposes that four basic questions be
answered prior to the institution of any program of job improvement
at the workplace, regardless of the problem or the solution involved.
Each of the questions may help bring to light some hidden assumptions
and, in doing so, may clarify the goals of program development. These
questions are: (1) Whose goals are to be achieved by the program? (2)
What problem is the program attempting to solve? (3) What assumptions
are being made about the motivation and other personal
characteristics of those workers involved in the program? (4) What
goals are ignored by the program? The author discusses each question
as it relates to the evaluation of job-related problems.
(Author/PC)

PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT FOR THE WORKPLACE:
NECESSARY QUESTIONS AND HIDDEN ASSUMPTIONS

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Today's symposium is concerned primarily with one general type of solution to selected problems at the workplace, solutions that congregate under the rather loose heading of "job design." It must, therefore, underplay many other types of solutions: improved selection and placement; increased and better training opportunities; the attainment of full employment; the elimination of discrimination; and the modification of jobs in ways that are not primarily concerned with their content or structure.

This paper does not attempt to suggest that certain work-related problems are more important than others. Nor does it attempt to suggest that particular solutions are better than others. It proposes instead that there are four basic questions that must be answered prior to the institution of any program of job improvement, regardless of the problem or the solution involved. Each of these may help bring to light some hidden assumptions and, in doing so, may clarify the goals of program development. These four questions are:

1. Whose goals are to be achieved by the program?

2. What problem is the program attempting to solve?

3. What assumptions are being made about the motivation and other personal characteristics of those workers involved in the program?

4. What goals are ignored by the program?

Whose goals are to be achieved by the program?

There are at least three different perspectives, or sets of values, according to which the importance of any job-related problem may be evaluated. The first perspective, that of employers, is a

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familiar one and includes such matters as productivity, withdrawal from
work, counter-productive behavior, and adaptability to changing work
procedures. Among the outcomes desired from a second perspective,
that of employees, are the equally familiar ones of job satisfaction,
mental health, physical health, and so forth.

A third perspective can also be invoked: that of the community
or the society. Some of the costs and benefits associated with
working do not enter into the personal accounting of either employers
or employees. For example:

--Workers whose jobs undermine their health place an additional
   demand on the Nation's already overburdened system of health-
   care delivery.

--Workers whose skills and education are underutilized by their
   jobs represent an obvious social waste.

--A worker whose expression of dissatisfaction takes the form
   of reactions that result in termination may become a candidate
   for subsequent collection of unemployment compensation, an
   obvious drain on local resources.

--The income-deficient worker may burden society with a family
   prone to illness, future welfare costs, and substandard economic
   contribution.

The assignment of any goal to a particular perspective may at
times be somewhat arbitrary and perhaps even uncharitable. The
assignment does not mean to imply, for example, that from the point
of view of employers the physical or mental health of their workers
is of no importance, only that from the perspectives of most employers

there are other more important goals. Conversely, the assignment
does not imply that employees are necessarily indifferent to productivity.
Indeed, the harder it is intellectually to assign a goal to a particular
perspective, the more important that goal is likely to be. According
to this rule of thumb, action priorities might profitably be assigned
to those working conditions that affect outcomes that are patently
relevant to all three perspectives. Work-related illnesses and injuries
are one example. They are obviously important to the ill or injured
worker, represent a cost to his or her employer (in terms, for example,
of sick-pay and sick-days lost), and are costly to society as well
(in terms, for example, of the resulting demand on scarce medical
resources).

A consideration of all three perspectives can help us at times
to question the desirability of goals that we often, by habit, assume
are universally desirable. Reduced turnover is a common goal of
job redesign programs. However, data from the Ohio State longitudinal
surveys of the labor force suggest that leaving a job may be an
effective means of securing higher wages. While reduced turnover
may be desirable from an employer's perspective, leaving may often
be in an employee's best interest.

One may also ask how job redesign, when successful from an
employer's perspective, affects levels of employment -- a matter of
considerable importance to society. An appendix to Work in America
reviews many reportedly "successful" experiments in job redesign.
But some disquieting notes appear in the results of four experiments:

   --The plant is operated by 70 workers, rather than the 100 originally
     intended by industrial engineers.

   --Since the experiment there has been a 20 percent reduction in labor.

--Personnel requirement dropped from 120 to 71.

--Half of the old supervisors (were) not needed. [1]

While they reduced labor costs and were, therefore, successful from an employer's perspective, these four experiments would have been equally successful from the perspective of employees or society at large only if the workers displaced by the changes had been subsequently re-employed. Can the labor market be counted upon to reabsorb workers who may be displaced by large-scale job redesign programs? If not, is large-scale job redesign justifiable during episodes of slackened demand for labor?

The specification of program goals may therefore help program designers to understand their otherise unstated perspectives, priorites, and value assumptions. Once these are understood, a justifiable claim can be made on the resources of those who are being asked to support the program. Following a clarification of goals, the interested parties can be identified more clearly and their support can be justified more rationally. For example, if increased productivity and profits are specified as goals, a program instituted to attain these ends clearly embodies an employer's perspective and not that of employees or society as a whole. Under such circumstances, management would be hard pressed to justify the program to labor and enlist its support. Where productivity or profit is still the goal, but where workers are under a profit-sharing program, a better case can be made to labor. Where the goal is one of reducing turnover amoung the chronically unemployed, a mixed set of perspectives is involved -- those of the employees affected by the program, their employers, and even society at large. Under such conditions management can legitimately make some claim to the resources of community action groups and government.

What problem is the program attempting to solve?

It is always easier to apply a ready-made solution to a problem
than to define the problem precisely and tailor-make a solution. Managers
are heard to say, for example, "We're trying out here what they did at
Donnelly Mirrors" or "We're applying here the same principles that are
being used at Pet Foods." But the organizational diagnosis that must
precede any tailor-made solution is rarely easy, and two pitfalls are
particularly dangerous: programatic overkill and the misattribution of blame.

Programatic overkill. Sometimes a local problem is smaller than the
scope of a program imported to solve it. Problems can at times be solved
without setting out to change workers' motivation or attitudes. For example, if
the goal is one of reducing absenteeisr   iteness, such solutions as
changing hours of work or work schedules to make them more compatible with
workers' life styles, or changing times of arrival at work to avoid traffic
jams may sometimes suffice. Only when simple, direct solutions to well-
identified problems have been tried without success is there any demonstrable
need for the expense entailed in large scale job redesign.

Misattribution of blame. Work-related problems are usually assumed to
be rooted in workers themselves (their motivation, skills, etc.), their jobs,
and the "fit" between what workers want and what their jobs provide. Each
type of causal assumption implies a distinctly different course of sub-
sequent action. If the source of the problem is attributed to workers
themselves, some type of training or retraining is a reasonable solution.
Attributing the problem to job characteristics implies that the appropriate
solution involves changing working conditions including job redesign.
Attributing the problem to the job-worker "fit" points in the direction
of job redistribution and reassignment.

The identification of such causes is not always as easy as it sounds. One manufacturing company adopted a job-training program after identifying its goal as reducing turnover among its newly hired disadvantaged workers -- a not unreasonable approach. The independent research organize. a studying this training program simultaneously conducted a study of the sources of turnover among the company's disadvantaged. It concluded -- too late to be of much help -- that this turnover was attributable almost exclusively to the poor quality of the jobs to which the disadvantaged were being assigned, something that no amount of training could change. [2] Thus, the training program failed because it was irrelevant to the problem it intended to solve. A more appropriate solution would have involved either job redesign or modified placement procedures.

What assumptions are being made about the motivation and other personal characteristics of workers involved in the program?

At one extreme is the assumption that each worker is a unique individual and should be treated as such. However, philosophically appealing it may be, this assumption is not a very useful one, except perhaps when it comes to counseling, skill training, or programmed learning. When management plans to introduce a new machine, procedure, or structure, certain motivational assumptions must be made about the workers affected by the change.

At the other extreme is the assumption that all workers are pretty much alike, at least in terms of what they want from their jobs. Under this rubric of homogeneity are a number of familiar prototypes, notably that of the "economic man." Between the two polar assumptions there are intermediate positions that make motivational assumptions only about workers in limited segments of the labor force. The principal danger in such assumptions is that, for lack of adequate data, they are

prey to both popular and scholarly stereotypes -- for example, of the "typical" disadvantaged worker, young worker, or woman worker.

The success or failure of a job redesign program may hinge on the motivational or other assumptions made about the workers undergoing the program. Ray Katzell has already reported today that experiments in job enrichment or enlargement appear most successful when those participating are young, relatively well-educated, and unalienated. Likewise, Hulin and Blood's 1968 review of previous investigations attempting to determine the relationship between job enlargement and job satisfaction concluded that this relationship was contingent to a great extent upon characteristics of the workers involved, with alienated blue-collar workers being particularly unresponsive to job enlargement. [3] The success of compact work-weeks also depends upon the personal characteristics of those experiencing the new schedule -- especially their age, sex, marital status, and preparation for dealing with suddenly "freed" workdays. [4] Both these examples caution against the wholesale application of programs of job alteration without: (1) reviewing previous experiments with the particular program, or similar programs, to determine the types of workers for whom the program is likely to be most and least effective; and (2) deciding whether the workers involved in the program's planned application have those personal characteristics that augur best for the program's success.

What goals are ignored by the program?

Given limited resources, the explicit commitment to a particular program designed to improve working conditions requires that some aspects of the problem be assigned a low priority. Determining what is to be left undone is a source of worry to numerous critics of job redesign programs.

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One such concern over imbalanced priorities is expressed by Agassi[5], who feels that concentration of job redesign will divert attention away from what she regards as issues more central to working women: upgrading the skills of women in the mainstream of technological and scientific development; improving child-care services for working parents; and challenging the uninterrupted, year-round, all-week, full-time work pattern as the only legitimate one.

A second concern, expressed by Wool[6] among others, is that an overemphasis on job redesign may divert attention from the more important problem of securing full employment. Full employment, according to Wool, is the most effective solution to the problems of American workers. A full employment situation creates a seller's market for available labor. As a result, employers are compelled to compete for the scarce labor available and in doing so to provide more attractive jobs. What the full employment argument leaves unstated is precisely how jobs are to be made more attractive. Higher wages is obviously one answer. Better hours and working conditions are still other answers. But there is no reason to stop there. More interesting and self-developing work is also a possible answer. Advocating full employment does not, therefore, necessarily make job design irrelevant. Rather, it treats job design as just one of a large number of strategies that employers may adopt to attract and retain qualified personnel.

Another major concern over priorities comes from organized labor, which has been somewhat cool toward recent job redesign experiments. [7] Part of this coolness probably stems from labor's observation that many of the more widely publicized job redesign programs have been

initiated by management, often with the aid of consultants or academics, in nonunion establishments. Some reservation may also stem from labor's suspicions, on the basis of past experience with management-instigated change, that job redesign may be a new, covert means of speedup. Organized labor can also object to the complications that job redesign may create for bases of compensation. Many labor contracts established through collecti bargaining either include or rest upon prior agreements about wage scales keyed to job descriptions. Where the design of a job affects the formal description of that job and pay rates are calculated accordingly, job redesign is a disguised bread-and-butter issue of critical concern to labor.

In short, the reservations of organized labor -- like those of women, and the advocates of full employment strategy -- should remind us of the goals we surrender in the adoption of job design as the solution to problems at the workplace. There are, and will continue to be, not only other solutions but other value priorities as well.

FOOTNOTES

[1] <u>Work in America</u>, Report prepared by Special Task Force for the Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare, December, 1973, pp. 189, 193, 197.

[2] Robert Quinn, B. D. Fine, and Teresa Levitin, <u>Turnover and Training: A Social-Psychological Study of Disadvantaged Workers</u> (Springfield, Va.: National Technical Information Service, Operations Division, 1971), Document No. PB194775.

[3] Charles Hulin and Milton Blood, "Job Enlargement, Individual Differences, and Worker Responses," in L. Cummings and W. Scott, Jr. <u>Readings in Organizational Behavior and Human Performance</u> (Homewood, Ill. : Irwin-Dorsey, 1969), pp. 377-393.

[4] Albert Glickman and Zenia Brown, <u>Changing Schedules of Work: Patterns and Implications</u> (Washington: American Institutes for Research, 1973).

[5] Judith Agassi, "Women and Work" (paper prepared for the International Conference on the Quality of Working Life, Arden House, Harriman, N.Y., Sept. 24-29, 1973. The paper will appear in the conference's proceedings).

[6] Harold Wool, "What's Wrong with Work in America?" <u>Monthly Labor Review</u>, March, 1973, pp. 38-44.

[7] Because the labor movement is so diverse, there is no single spokesperson for "labor's position" with regard to job redesign. Two contrasting statements are, however, presented by: Thomas Brooks, "Job Satisfaction--An Elusive Goal," <u>AFL-CIO American Federationist</u>, October, 1972, p. 5 et seq.; William Winpisinger, "Job Enrichment: A Union View," <u>Monthly Labor Review</u>, April, 1973, pp. 54-56.