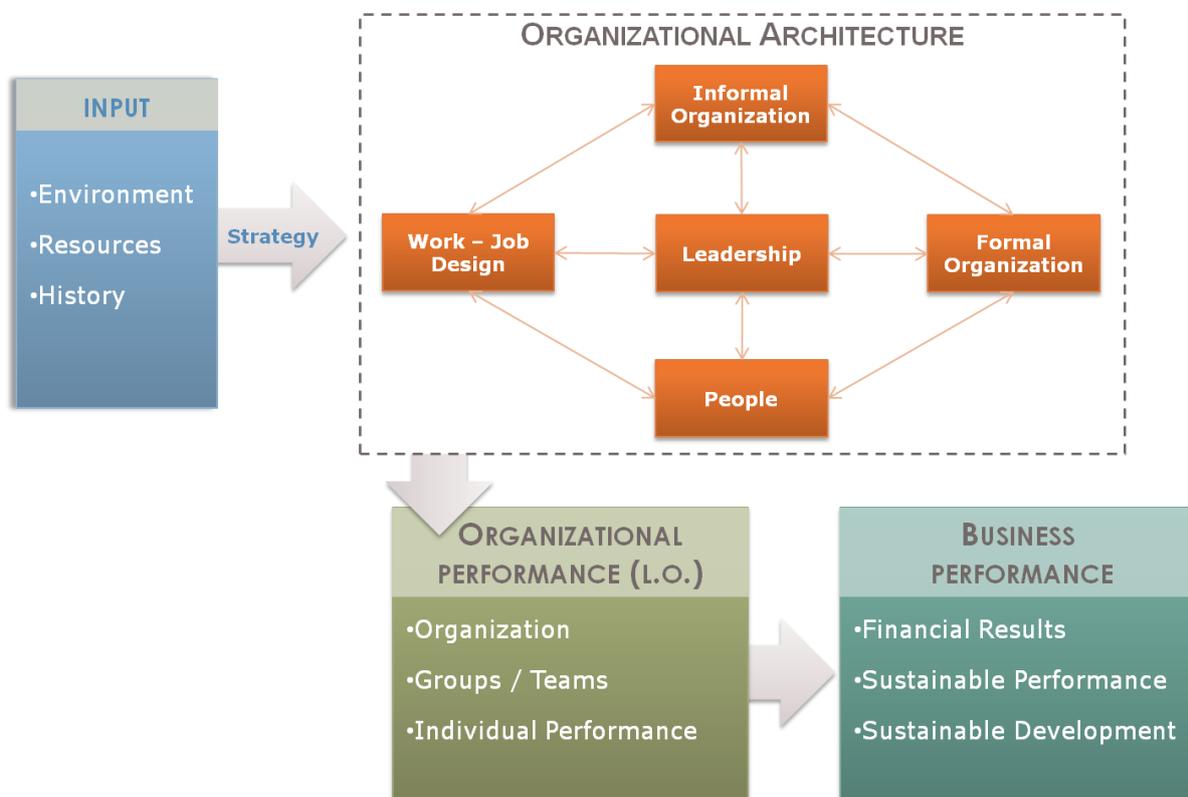




Learning Organization and Job-crafting : A powerful couple ?

As Organization Development Consultant & Facilitator our work with organizations often boils down to the question : how do we organize best our work and the way we work together in the formal context of an organization in order for managers and employees to maximize the use and development of their talent, energy and experience.

And that is also the underlying question in the well know ‘Congruence Model’ by Nadler & Tushman that suggest that effective translation of strategy into organizational architecture and the alignment of the different aspects of ‘organizing’ will lead to Organizational Performance and ultimately sustainable business results.



D. A.Nadler and M. L. Tushman, (1980 "A Model for Organizational Diagnosis,"Organizational Dynamics. Autumn 1980

Nowadays organizations are looking at ways to improve their innovative power, their capacity to change, their ability to share knowledge, learn from each other, collaborate effectively... or in short to create a Learning Organization, where each and every employee and manager, regardless of level or role, feels entitled to initiative and is effectively contributing to sustainable performance and business development.

That means that we are looking for new ways of organizing, no longer based on ‘managing and controlling’ what people do in organizations, but on intrapreneurship, innovation, ownership, shared leadership, ... We realize gradually that in a fast moving knowledge economy control is slowing down innovation and costs ultimately a lot more then confidence and autonomy.

That will not only result in very different organizational features such as the desired organizational structure, culture, processes, job and workplace design, management and leadership practices, information sharing, decision and problem solving processes, etc...It will also affect the process we use to 'shape' our organizations in the future : How we do it, who does it, how often we do it, how much it is prescribed or actually emerging as we go, etc...

If we look at one of those organizational features : JOB & WORKPLACE DESIGN we see mainly two challenges :

- ◆ How to create engaging, challenging, rewarding jobs and workplaces for everybody, so people can maximize the use and development of their talents, energy and experience. And in that way optimizing their contribution to the organization TOGETHER WITH experiencing personal fulfillment.
- ◆ How to make sure that jobs and workplaces are flexible enough to cope with rapidly changing environments and customer demands. How do we change timely objectives, tasks, priorities, internal customers and suppliers relationships, etc... in order to keep up organizational performance.

That the classical 'job-descriptions' and yearly individual objectives will probably not longer do the trick, is becoming obvious.

An interesting alternative for DESCRIBING JOBS as a process initiated from HR or somewhere centrally in the organization might be JOB CRAFTING. Job Crafting indicates a process by which an individual is shaping his own job in such a way that it is a better fit for his/her needs, talent, energy and interest as individual. Job Crafting offers the opportunity to job holders to mould three core aspects of their work : TASKS, RELATIONSHIPS and PERCEPTIONS.

- ◆ **Task Crafting** : involves employees altering the set of responsibilities prescribed by a formal job description by adding or dropping tasks; altering the nature of tasks; or changing how much time, energy, and attention are allocated to various tasks
- ◆ **Relational Crafting** : involves changing how, when and with whom employees interact in the execution of their jobs. For instance an experienced employee could decide to work on part of his tasks together with a less experienced colleague in a kind of mentoring relationship
- ◆ **Cognitive Crafting** : involves employees changing the way they perceive the tasks and relationships that make up their job. For instance the ticket sales person could look at his job as 'contribute to a nice evening out for people' instead of 'execute ticket orders'

And why would we want to do that in our Organization?

Well we think job crafting could effectively add value to organizations in search of more flexibility, change capacity and stimuli for becoming a Learning Organization:

- ◆ It creates a **sense of ownership** for the job holder over his job and the tasks he is responsible for. He doesn't do them as much because he's told to do them but because he 'reflected' on questions like : why would I want to do it, what is the impact on others, is this the best possible way for me to do it, how can I by doing this contribute to the success of my organization, my team, etc...

- ◆ It puts also the responsibility to **quickly adapt** the things you do to the rapidly changing needs in the organization, with the jobholder. That will contribute to a more flexible organization.
- ◆ It helps the jobholder to **further develop his talents**, energy and fields of interests. He/She can enrich or enlarge his/her own job in such a way that the talents that were originally not tapped into are now contributing to the organization.
- ◆ It will also create a **sense of belonging**, when the job-holder needs to find out how he is contributing to the performance of his internal customers and what he expects from internal suppliers in order to do his job in the best possible way.
- ◆ Since the job holder can use his own experience and expertise in the design of his own job and workplace, chances are that **they reflect the real situation on the shop floor better**.
- ◆ It allows a more **meaningful global picture** of the job for the job holders since he had to reflect about how the different things he does link together.

Job Crafting could have a particular interest for people in the age of over 55 or 60 who have been recently confronted with the societal expectation of working longer than has been the case in last decades. We know that actively crafting your job helps to create a longer future time perspective and we also know that people who have a longer future time perspective will be inclined to craft their job in a way that gives them more development opportunities and thus creates more added value for the organization. (And enables them to enjoy their work longer, and therefore work longer)

Having said all that, we need to take some precaution.

The idea is of course not that individuals will from now on decide what they do and what they won't do anymore, totally irrespective of what the colleagues or the organization needs to achieve. So we at Move! would strongly suggest to use the ideas of job crafting in such a way that it 'clarifies' not only the individual contribution of individual jobholders, but that it also indicates how that job contributes to the sustainable performance of the organization.

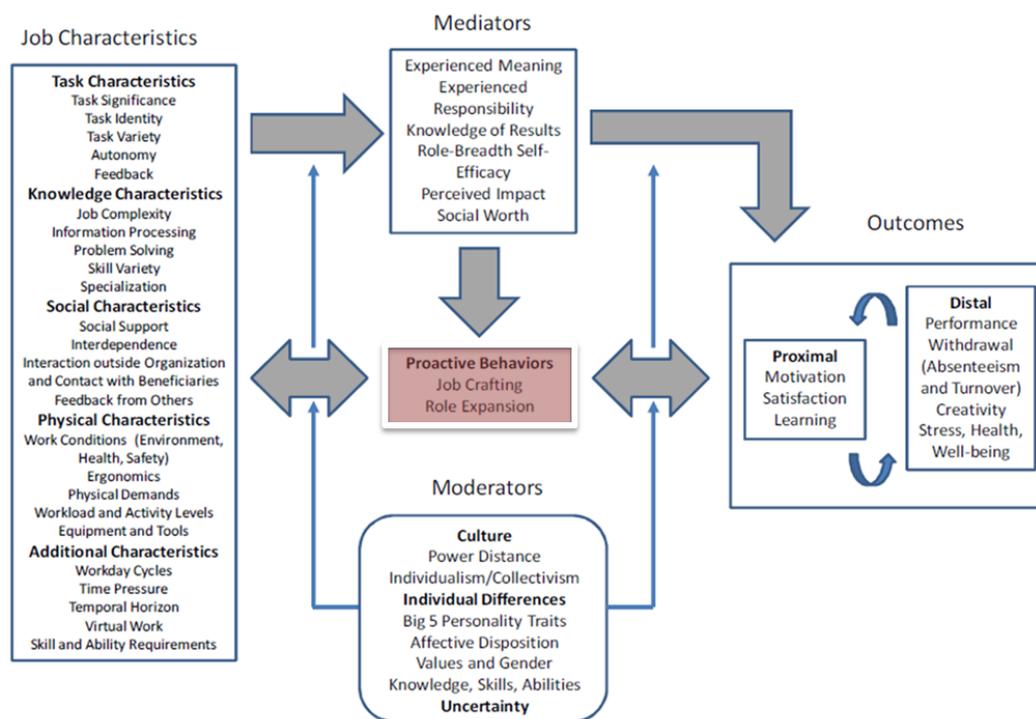
It would then become a '**social contracting exercise**' and not an individual activity. In to make it an 'shared organizational exercise' some following things might be important :

- ◆ Support individuals in their 'job crafting' effort (question, challenge, etc... to make them think out of the box)
- ◆ It is important that people start to think about 'crafting their job' from a clear 'shared purpose' as organization. So you need to work with your organization on a common understanding of what the organization is there for and develop a shared purpose for all in the organization.
- ◆ Contract clearly with the internal clients of your job, on how the job contributes to the chain of performance.
- ◆ Make sure job holders map the stakeholders for their job and understand how they impact the work and performance of others and how others impact their own job and performance.
- ◆ Parallel to the individual reflection in the job crafting process build also a collective process where team members, internal customers and other stakeholders are invited to work together on 'crafting their jobs' and 'crafting the relationship between those jobs'. That would not only end up in better 'jobs' probably but also in an improved collaboration between internal customers and suppliers.

Done in that way, job-crafting could be a very effective lever for a Learning Organization and improve the change capacity of an organization significantly. It would enhance ownership; strengthen collaboration, shared purpose and the ethic of contribution within an organization.

It is a way to avoid that job-crafting is one of those ‘consulting fads’ coming by in organizations without really being integrated in a ‘systemic’ approach of organizing. It could be a very important and a valuable contributor for the system change effort that needs to take place in a lot of organizations yet.

It’s certainly not the holy grail, and in an informal way it is already happening, but a fair deal of individual and collective involvement in and ownership for ‘job and work place design’ would absolutely contribute to the Learning Organization through individual motivation, job satisfaction, talent development and deployment, collaboration, flexibility, ... and ultimately a more effective organization and business results.



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About the Author

Clement Leemans is an experienced OD consultant. He is owner of Move!, a small international consulting practice focusing on organizational learning, change, strategic HR and team development. He looks at co-creation and shared leadership as important mechanisms to shape future proof organizations and sustainable performance. He is part-time professor at KULeuven@Brussels and Leuven University College where he lectures Group Dynamics, Organizational Psychology and Strategic Human Resources Management.



Prior to creating Move! in 2004, Clement Leemans worked for over 20 years in different HR and HRD roles, including top management level in companies such as ING, Belgacom and Lafarge. In Lafarge he was world-wide responsible for Organizational Learning & Development.

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