

DESIGNING WORK & SUPPORT SYSTEMS FOR INNOVATION



Scottish Centre for Employment Research (SCER)

FITwork project
www.FITwork.org.uk



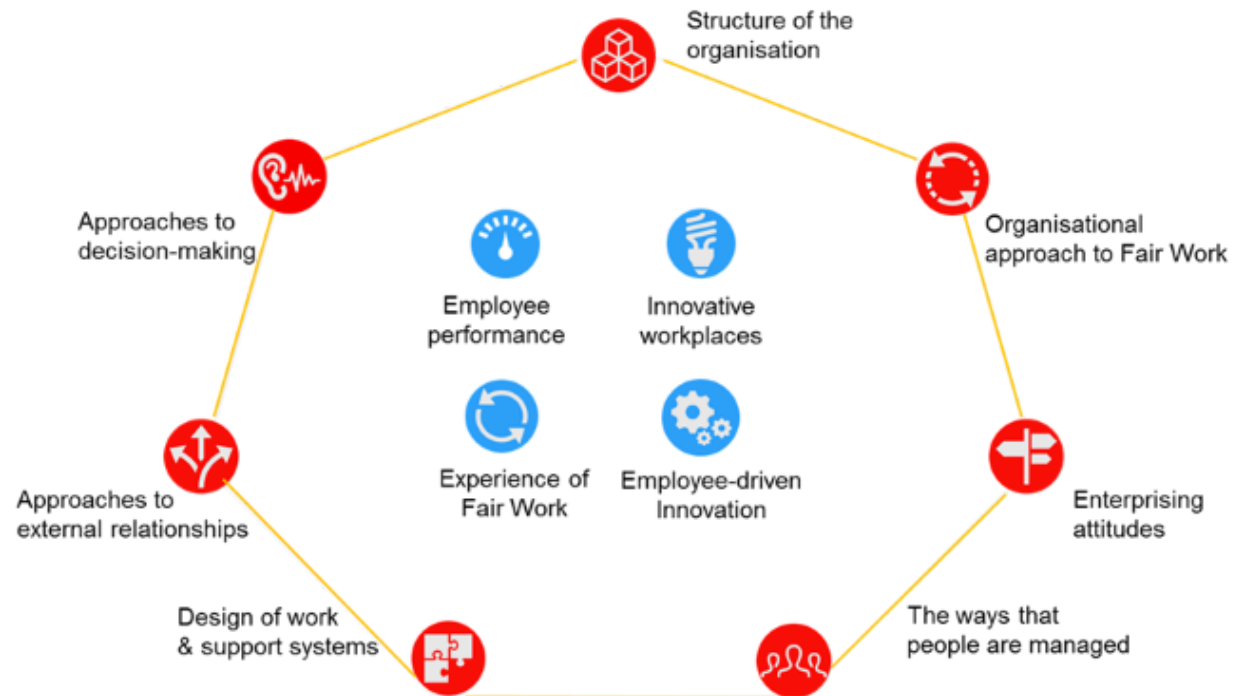
@InnovatingWorks

FITwork

The Fair, Innovative and Transformative work (FITwork) project focuses on workplace practices that enhance workers' ability, provide them with the opportunities to make an effective contribution at work, and that motivate them through the provision of fair work to deliver high performance, innovation and change.

Existing research points to key organisational features and workplace practices that are associated with higher levels of innovation. These features and practices span:

- How organisations are structured
- Approaches to decision-making
- How work and internal support systems are designed
- How people are managed
- Organisational approaches to fair work
- Organisational support for enterprising behaviours
- Approaches to external connections and networks



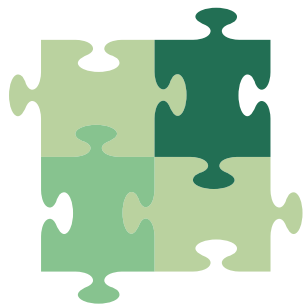
Why are work design & support systems important for innovation?

Strict hierarchy breeds caution amongst managers, encouraging decisions to be referred upwards with consequent loss of productivity and responsiveness.

It is important for managers to have confidence in the capabilities of employees and allow them the scope they need to perform and improve their work.

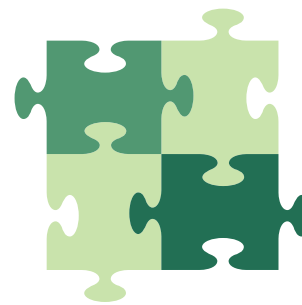
In the right circumstances, these features may enable the design of change, allowing innovative ideas to be embedded within the organisation owned by all.

FACTORS IN THE DESIGN OF WORK THAT AID INNOVATION



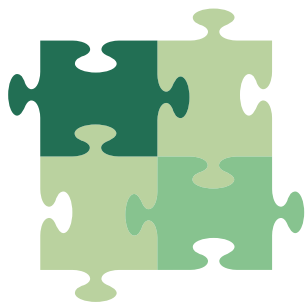
1

Employees understand how their job fits in with other jobs in the organisation.



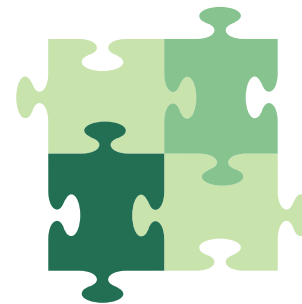
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Job design encourages people to interact and raises employee awareness of developments in other areas of the organisation.



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Employees have time to reflect and propose solutions.



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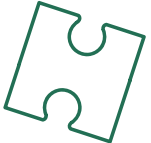
Employees have autonomy to change relevant work practices.

What do we know about work design & support systems and innovation?


Innovation is closely linked to skills in creativity and problem-solving.

Job design can either facilitate opportunities for problem-solving and creativity or limit the potential for both.

Rethinking job design can offer benefits both in terms of supporting more discretionary and innovative behaviour and delivering fulfilling work - a win for employees and employers



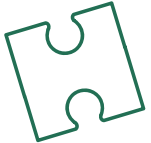
The way work is organised influences how well workers are able to use their capabilities. Well-designed tasks encourage staff to optimise use of their skills and talents and encourage better performance.



Allowing employees' discretion in scheduling their own work and in controlling its pace has been found to minimise physical strain and psychological stress without diminishing performance.



Appropriate job design can deliver fulfilling jobs and work, which is important to employees and an important dimension of fair work.



Workplace support mechanisms also appear to have an important role to play - employees need to feel supported through opportunities to learn and participate in order to cope with, and benefit from, innovation.



There is extensive evidence that jobs associated with high levels of autonomy, task variety and feedback are more likely to foster innovation.

HOWEVER...

Despite claims for its potential, common use of lean systems have not always delivered improved autonomy and decision latitude for workers.

Fewer than 20% of employees are in jobs that allow them to use discretion and judgement in how they undertake their tasks.

Process and service design can make it difficult to share ideas 'on the job'.

Where businesses have high levels of cross learning, employees are significantly more likely to generate creative problem-solving.

Examples of practice

Job redesign & upskilling



One large law firm has made efforts to broaden job responsibilities by engaging creatively in devolving functions from partners and expanding non-partners roles. This generates additional development opportunities for employees and allows all staff to focus on higher value activities. Such redesign is supported by greater efforts to co-design training, enhance training transfer and share learning.



Similarly, a large call centre was able to reap business, employee and customer benefits from redesigning jobs to have broader specifications. Staff had greater discretion to use their skills as they saw fit in customer interactions. Customers received a more tailored service encounter. The business benefited through maintaining performance levels while enhancing employee motivation and reducing turnover.

Scope for problem-solving



Where work design gives scope for problem-solving, employees develop skills that can support innovation. One personal services firm encouraged employee ownership of business challenges, leading to employees delivering innovative solutions that enhanced their own skill and job quality, while delivering a new revenue line for the business. Similarly business challenges in an industrial firm were resolved by enabling employees to define an innovative solution that reduced waste, increased revenue, and supported wider employee skills development.

Work redesign



A large food and drinks company has undergone business change, developing new business lines. To redesign work to support new business lines, the company has moved from an automated to a manual production line. This has simultaneously increased product yield and given employees more time to complete a task, taking the pressure off work reducing stress.



A pharmacy reconfigured the work space to an open plan design to deliberately support staff and customer interaction, and to support an effective work flow. The design of space, and of jobs, promotes extensive informal interaction, information sharing and collaborative working.

Collaborative work design



At one digital services company, collaborative work design ensures that staff roles are not restricted to narrow specialisms and as a result, there appears to be a strong crossover learning between staff and management. The design of work has also allowed the firm to develop strong working relationships with service delivery partners.



At a small financial services company, inter-disciplinary project working and support for cross-functional and self-managed teams generated positive opportunities to share ideas. This was underpinned by the creation of physical spaces where staff were encouraged to interact and share learning.



One UK wide engineering company has practices which encourage people from different parts of the business to work together. The facilitation of shared learning through a two day workshop that brought together different divisions was aimed to break down the silos to enable understanding of different aspects of the business to learn from each other, improve communication and start to collaborate. Job design - project working in particular - encourages people to interact and to cross-fertilise ideas and practices.