[Parker, S. 2021, Does the Evidence and Theory Support the Good Work Design Principles? An Educational Resource, Safe Work Australia, Canberra](#)

This digest summarises an educational resource, like a simple textbook, that sets out the evidence-base and theoretical underpinning of work design. It particularly focuses on the psychosocial aspects of work design.

Work design pertains to "job characteristics" or features of work that affect how people feel about their jobs. The research for this study was funded by SafeWork Australia and written by Professor Sharon Parker from University of Western Australia. Many subheadings in this digest are hyperlinked to videos where Sharon explains the topic.

[Thrive at Work](#)

This work is part of the evidence base for Thrive at Work, an initiative led by the 'Future at Work' program at Curtin University. Thrive at Work is described as a 'journey' with four steps:

1. A [simple framework](#) – Is a holistic approach with three pillars (mitigate Illness, prevent harm and promote thriving) and each pillar has three building blocks (nine in total).
2. [Implement](#) - Helps organisations to develop a strategic approach to workplace mental health by unifying research and regulations into a single framework.
3. [Resources](#) — Provides toolkits, guides, and other resources to support workplaces to thrive.
4. [Mitigate](#) – addresses this pillar through the three building blocks of detecting illness; supporting and accommodating illness; and increasing individual resources for managing mental ill-health.

[What is Work Design](#)?

Work design concerns the "content and organization of one's work tasks, activities, relationships, and responsibilities" (Parker, 2014). In its active form, it is 'job crafting' which is to change one's tasks, relationships, and ways of thinking about work to make one's job more meaningful and motivating.

Examples of positive job characteristics include:

- Job autonomy: Being able to make decisions within the job
- Task variety: Having a range of tasks in the job
- Skill utilisation: The opportunity to use one's skills in the job
- Task significance: Doing a job that is important
- Task identity: Doing a whole job
- Job feedback: Getting feedback whilst doing one's work

Why do we need good job design?

There is a legal basis for Work Design, as well as a human rights ('mental health for all') and a business case (productivity) basis.

Work Design can be leveraged as an intervention that addresses underlying organisational factors that determine mental health. This is because many job characteristics have been found to result in higher levels of motivation to work, and less stress from work which has run on effects in terms of productivity and the organisation meeting its targets.

Theories of work design

In section four, the report describes and critiques the major psychosocial theories of work design (Job Characteristics Model; Demand-Control model; Sociotechnical Systems Theory). Key Insight: Many of the problems with contemporary work design, such as the tendency for managers to design simplified and narrow work, stem from the historical dominance of Taylorism (simplified, low-autonomy jobs) / Scientific Management.

The Job Characteristics Model is a prominent model in the Work Design literature. This Model advocates for strategies that address Taylorism to create better work designs (including job rotation, job enlargement, job enrichment, and self-managing teams)

How do you design/redesign work?

Work design can be constrained by the situation, such as the need to turn out to incidents, but tasks, shift structure etc can always be crafted, altered, or negotiated.

Good work design covers multiple characteristics, physical, biomechanical, cognitive, and psychosocial. Examples of job crafting include:

- Focusing efforts on tasks that are most interesting
- Building new relationships with others at work
- Reducing uninteresting or unnecessary tasks
- Introducing better ways of doing things; and
- Obtaining more support from the supervisor

Imagine designing the role of a police officer. Illustrative work design decisions include:

- Which activities should be grouped together to form a meaningful police officer job?
- Which decisions should be made by officers and which by their supervisors?
- Should individual jobs be grouped together into a team?
- Can one build in routine tasks amidst complex ones to ensure officers are not overwhelmed?

Conclusion: the value of job design and one size does not fit all

The theory and evidence presented in Sharon Parkers report dovetails with Safe Work Australia's 'Good Work Design' principles. It demonstrates the value of good work design for health, safety, well-being, motivation, performance, organisational productivity, and other related outcomes.

Good work design encompasses multiple characteristics and yet, the exact psychosocial work characteristics will depend to some extent on the needs, preferences, and capabilities of the individuals, as well as the unique features of the agency or organisational context. In essence, one size is unlikely to fit all which is why involving employees in any work redesign process is so essential. Participation enables individuals to shape the work design to fit and will also improve the quality of any work design solution.