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Paper 14: Contemporary Issues in HRM & Future Trends
Module 14: Dejobbing



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Module 14: Dejobbing

1. LEARNING OUTCOME

After completing this module the students will be able to:

- Understand the importance of Dejobbing.
- Understand the strategies and processes of Dejobbing.
- Learn about Dejobbed organizations.
- Understand the relationship between the life cycle of an organization and Dejobbing.



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2. INTRODUCTION

The corporate world is going through turbulent times with organizations changing its strategies as quickly as a fly changes its direction. Under such circumstances, restricting the employees to a specified job can be fatal for the organization. This has paved the way for 'Dejobbing' in the corporate world.

The term 'Dejobbing' is a way out for the employee that frees them from the shackles of a job description. The number of organizations shifting towards this phenomenon has been increasing significantly over the last decade. From corporate giants like Google to the newly born start-ups, each one wants to do more with lesser resources, thus making way for dejobbing.

Before we begin exploring the term 'dejobbing', let us first try to understand what the word 'Job' stands for.

Google defines 'Job' as 'a task or piece of work' or 'a responsibility or duty'. In general, we can say that it is a well-defined task. This definition however has lost its meaning especially in the last decade courtesy the increase in competition in the market and change in government regulations. The days of a specified job are long gone and Job description is soon to be a historical term.

The 'jobs' as we know it are vanishing. And along with it are the terms like job security, specified duty and fixed-term employment. This has not only changed the way the Job analysis was done but has also called upon for new and innovative ways of recruiting candidates.

From the employee perspective, the employees need to expand their horizons and work beyond their specified roles and responsibilities. With organizations looking for reduction in workforce, only those who go beyond their normal work will survive this challenge. Gone are the days when an employee could ignore the extra work by saying 'It's not my work'. The employer now expects you to pick up and run with anything that comes your way.

Further this module discusses the definition of dejobbing and ropes in some points from some of the important research papers written on this topic for better understanding of the topic. The paper also discusses the techniques of dejobbing and how organizations like Apple, HP, IKEA and Microsoft made use of dejobbing to change their paths.

Various noted researchers and authors have done extensive research on this topic, but the most initial research was done by William Bridges in his paper "Job Shift: How to Prosper in a Workplace without Jobs" in 1994. In this module, the author termed 'Jobs' as "boxes in an organizational chart with regular duties, hours and salaries" and explained that this practice needs to go in order to gain more flexibility and efficiency.

The author suggests that the new definition of 'Job' is similar to that in the pre-industrial era. The author through his work has suggested some ways from employees' perspective on how to adapt to this changing environment and urges employees to go beyond their 'usual' work in order to learn and grow.

FezaTabassumAzmi, in her paper "Job Descriptions to Job Fluidity: Treading the Dejobbing path" (2007) suggests that more and more organizations are moving towards broader jobs, changing as per the situation and above their job specifications. The paper explores dejobbing in a new way and also uses the 'Ability-Willingness Matrix' and some relevant organizational examples to solidify her stand.

The paper also touches upon the need and methods of creating a strategy for dejobbing in the organization. The author has termed dejobbing as an inevitable phenomenon and invites organizations to embrace it rather than ignoring it and going the traditional way.

In the book “Boundary-less Organizations: Breaking the Chains of Organizational Structure” written by Dave Ulrich, Ron Ashkenas and Todd Jick (1995), the authors suggest that although structure helps in clarifying roles and control in an organization, it also creates barriers between people in different parts of the organization. The authors cite the example of Jack Welch when he took over as CEO of GE in early 1980s to solidify their point. The authors further elaborate on the term ‘boundary-less organizations’ and explain how can they prove to be useful in the ever-changing corporate scenario. As per the authors, getting rid of the various barriers is an absolute necessity in order to create a synergy within the organization.



“You can keep your job if you can come up with a satisfactory description of it.”

3. DEJOBING – The Jobless Job

Dejobbing, as per William Bridges (author of ‘Job Shift: How to prosper in a workplace without jobs’) “is when an organization or industry shifts away from formal job descriptions to some other arrangement to get their work done”.

According to ‘answers.com’ dejobbing “represents the gradual reverse of the process that created an employment driven economy now becoming obsolete as a result of globalization and technological advancement which makes it unnecessary for every business unit to reinvent the wheel”.

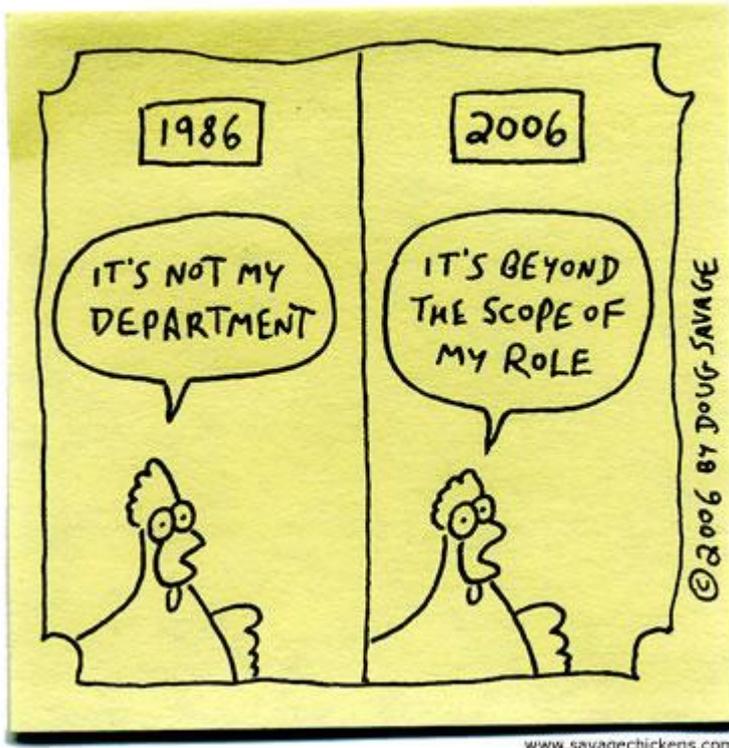
Therefore, dejobbing is simply disentangling of job descriptions and boundaries to make room for a team project approach of doing things in the organization. Dejobbing is focused

on doing more work with fewer resources. It is an easy way out for the companies who are looking to cut costs, especially the labour intensive organizations such as manufacturing where the labour cost constitutes major costing.

Jobs in today's era are becoming more and more ambiguous or opaque and much more extensive in nature. The tasks related to each job are broadening each day and thus the workers must be encouraged not to limit themselves based on their job description. As per bridges, "they hold people within boundaries, rather than allow them to focus on the work itself. So our people say 'That isn't my job', and the work doesn't get done because they aren't doing their work. They're doing their jobs." He also termed jobs as "too slow" and as a "historical artefact created by the Industrial Revolution"

Savage Chickens

by Doug Savage



4. REASONS OF DEJOBING

After defining what dejobbing is, we will now discuss the factors that made dejobbing necessary. As discussed earlier, dejobbing has shifted the definition of a job to the pre-industrial era. Some of the reasons that explain this shift are:

- **TECHNOLOGY**

Technology is the major driving force behind this shift. New technologies are developed almost every day making the older ones obsolete and therefore organizations who fail to adapt to the latest technology are the first ones to fall. A classic example for the same can be introduction of machines, which has made many manufacturing activities obsolete.

- **2. GLOBALIZATION**

The world has no boundaries anymore. For organizations willing to expand, sky is the limit. Companies are moving to their businesses to countries where the labour costs are cheaper in order to reduce costs. Companies want more efficient employees. The focus has shifted from labour rates to labour costs. For example: Xiaomi has started manufacturing its mobile phones in India instead of China as the labour costs are cheaper in India than China.

- **ECONOMIC INSTABILITY**

The world economy is trembling with one crisis after the other hitting the markets worldwide. In such a situation, company has no option but to downsize in order to survive. This results in a more competitive environment among the employees with only the best ones surviving in the organization. This requires employees to go beyond their usual limitations and perform over and above their conventional jobs.

- **CHANGING EMPLOYEES' PERSPECTIVE**

The major chunk of the workforce today is Generation Y workforce. Gen Y; in general, dislike the normal routinized work performed in the organizations. They instead, prefer more challenging, interesting and meaningful work. Therefore, it is important for the employer to provide employees with such tasks that are beyond their routine tasks.

Some other factors that can be credited for bringing in the concept of dejobbing are privatization, change in work culture and shift towards the service economy that require organizations to be more innovative and flexible and competitive.



5. Techniques of Dejobbing

Certain techniques that have helped in redefining the jobs are explained as follows:

- (i) **Flatter Organisations** – The traditional pyramid shaped organisations with several management layers are becoming obsolete and organizations are progressively reducing the management layers. In flatter organisations, there are less number of managers having a greater number of subordinates, which leads to

less supervision and the jobs of subordinates increase in both breadth and depth of responsibilities.

- (ii) **Work Teams** – Now days the traditional job requirement of specialization where the employees had to perform the same tasks daily is reducing, today tasks are organized around teams and processes instead of specialised functions. In such organisations, the employees have to fulfil a variety of job roles which leads to cross functional and self-directed teams.
- (iii) **Boundary-Less Organisation** – According to Gilmore, “In a boundary less organisation, the widespread use of teams and similar structural mechanisms reduces and makes more permeable the boundaries that typically separate departments, (like sales and production) and hierarchical levels”. In such organisations, cross functional teams are the norm and the employees are actively discouraged from have ‘it is not my job’ kind of attitude.
- (iv) **Re-Engineering** – According to Hummer and Champy, “Re-engineering is the fundamental thinking and radical redesign of business processes to achieve dramatic improvements in critical contemporary measure of performance, such as cost, quality, service and speed.” Re-engineering brings about a radical quantum change in an organisation. It requires organisational members to rethink what work should be done, how it is to be done and how best to implement these decisions. Jobs can be re- engineered in many ways eg,
 - a. Several specialised jobs can be combined into few relatively enlarged and enriched ones.
 - b. Employees become collectively responsible for overall results rather than being individually responsible for their own tasks.
 - c. Supervisory checks are reduced and employees are made responsible for their own work.
 - d. Employees are empowered to use more decision making authority while carrying out work in small teams.

6. CHARACTERISTICS OF A DEJOBBED ORGANIZATION

On the basis of the discussions so far, we can highlight the various characteristics of a dejobbed organization as shown in the figure below.

BROAD, GENERALIZED AND MARKET DRIVEN JOBS
MULTI-SKILL AND MULTI-TASKING TRAINING
WORKING BEYOND JOB DESCRIPTIONS
EVER-CHANGING AND BRIEF CHARACTER OF JOBS
FLEXIBLE WORKFORCE
CROSS-FUNCTIONAL ASSIGNMENTS
TEMPORARY AND AUTONOMOUS GROUPS

Figure: CHARACTERISTICS OF A DEJOBBED ORGANIZATION

1. Broad, Generalized and Market-driven jobs

In a dejobbed organization, the jobs are not specific to a set of tasks to be performed but rather are of generic nature. There are real-time tasks that need to be done which are derived from the market demand.

2. Multi-skill and Multi-tasking training

The employees in this scenario cannot be judged on the basis of a single competence but rather are required to possess multiple skills. They are supposed to handle multiple tasks at the same time and be efficient too.

3. Working beyond Job descriptions

Employees must not restrict themselves to the boundaries set by the Job description. Job description should just act as a base for the employee to complete the task in hand and employer must play an equivalent role in guiding the employees to overcome this obstacle by keeping Job descriptions flexible.

4. Ever-changing and brief character of Jobs

Since the jobs are market driven, they change as per the requirement. Each new project brings in new challenges and opportunities. Also, the competencies required in one project may not be useful in the other one making them ephemeral in nature.

5. Flexible Workforce

The workforce requirements change in a dejobbed organization as the workers are expected to do more work than usual. The workforce needs to be more agile and responsive to the changes in the market in order to increase the efficiency of the organization.

6. Cross-functional assignments

Employees need to work beyond the departmental boundaries as described in their job description. Organizations now employ teams constituting of individuals who have multiple skill-sets and are ready to learn. The employees must go beyond their comfort zone and perform all the tasks required.

7. Temporary and Autonomous groups

The teams in a dejobbed organization are formed as per the requirement of the project that comes up instead of the traditional teams. These groups have more autonomy when it comes to decision-making. The teams last as long as the project does. For every new project, new teams are formed.

7. ORGANIZATION LIFE STAGES AND DEJOBING

Throughout its life, an organization undergoes a lot of transformation- from being a start up to a prominent market player to a declining brand. As per William Bridges, dejobbing is strongly entwined with the life cycle of organizations.

- As a start-up, an organization faces shortage of workforce and a specified task or duty. There is a continuous change in the work that needs to be performed as per the shift in the market. There are no job descriptions to define a job role and

responsibilities and jobs have not crystallized as of yet. People have to do everything that they face irrespective of their specified role.

- As the organization begins to expand and grow, the scenario takes a turn with jobs now beginning to solidify giving rise to a rigid and concrete job descriptions that specifies the roles and responsibilities of an individual. This results in the formation of boundaries between various roles that differentiates one from the other and restricts an individual's ability to expand.
- During the further stages, as the company expands more and more, the need to become more efficient is realized in order to sustain this growth. This is when the organization shifts back to the start-up culture wherein each individual is required to perform tasks as per the need of the organization and not the job description. This type of structure in an organization provides more learning opportunities for the employees as well.



" We weren't able to promote you because we couldn't think of a new title. "

8. FORMULATING A DEJOBING STRATEGY

Companies which have been relying on superior products and technology are finding it hard to sustain their growth in the market. In such competitive world, the only thing to bank upon is continuous innovation and transformation. Organizations must realize the benefits that dejobbing can create for them.

Some of the ways to incorporate a dejobbing strategy in the organization are:

1. Redefining the Business model

The mission and vision of an organization should be flexible enough to enable the organization to adapt to the changing times. The organization must reinvent its organizational model in order to make way for dejobbing. For example – Tesco constantly rejuvenates its values, principles and goals as part of its strategy to grow.

2. Overhauling the present structures

The organizations must be ready to redesign its traditional structures in order to accommodate the dejobbing strategy. Dejobbing cannot co-exist with a hierarchical and highly centralized organizational structure. Flatter the

organization, more successful is the dejobbing strategy. For example – HP shifted from a highly centralized structure to a decentralized one which led to the overall improvement of employees' skills and capabilities.

3. Reforming Organizational Culture

The organizational culture is a system of shared values, beliefs and assumptions which governs the behaviour of the people in an organization. The culture of the organization must encourage and help employees to take challenging and cross functional tasks. The organizational culture must promote adaptability and flexibility in the organization. For example – Toyota's success is attributed to its strong culture that accommodates its willingness to change as per the circumstances.

4. Realigning resources and people

The dejobbing strategy calls for the reconfiguration of all the resources and workforce that the organizations possess so that they are in sync with each other. With each new challenge, the organization must redesign the link between its resources and the workforce. For example – 3M provides its employees with all the resources they require in order to carry out a research and hence promotes innovation within the organization.

5. Redefining work

As we have discussed earlier as well, the organizations need to go beyond the specified job descriptions. The organizations must move from role orientation towards the work orientation. They must realize that specific tasks can make a job dysfunctional over time. For example – British Airways encourages its employees to think beyond. They focus on integrating flexibility in the organization.

6. Multi-tasking and Multi-skilling

Dejobbing demands that employees be ready to perform multiple activities simultaneously if need arises. Also, the employees must be self-motivated to learn and grow new skills in order to attain their overall development and make them challenge-ready each time. For example – Nestle provides continuous training and development opportunities to its employees and encourages them to learn new skills to stay ahead in the ever-changing industry.

7. Uphold the HR values

All the above mentioned methods cannot produce successful results without a supportive HR strategy. The HR strategy needs to be in-line with the corporate strategy and must be flexible enough to accommodate changes with time. For example – FedEx follows 'people service profit (PSP)' philosophy and values its employees as a key contributor towards the organization's profitability. It integrates all the HR issues with the corporate strategy.

9. CORPORATE EXAMPLES OF DEJOBING

Dejobbing is already being used by some of the renowned companies in order to gain competitive edge and reduce labour costs. These companies have moved on from the concept of specified jobs towards the boundary-less jobs. Some of the prominent examples companies introducing dejobbing include:

- (i) INTEL - Flexible set-up imploding the existing hierarchy. Work is based on projects and therefore the associated responsibilities change accordingly. Employees perform a number of different tasks at different places and under several team leaders.

- (ii) APPLE - People work beyond the scope of the job description. What needs to be done is done irrespective of the specified role. System promotes flexibility and autonomy to employees as their duties keeps changing.
- (iii) GE - People are encouraged to work in different teams and take up different roles in order to learn new skills to help the employees diversify. New assignments and challenges provide employees a platform to test their newly honed skills.
- (iv) MICROSOFT - Project based assignments are deployed rather than department based. People work across functions on various discontinuous projects in order to help employees evolve and grow.
- (v) IKEA - Promotes work-life balance through flexible work design. It encourages its employees to innovate, experiment and grow and values the abilities of each employee. Strong culture that accommodates creativity, openness, diversity and competitiveness.
- (vi) P&G - Provides sufficient opportunities to the employees for career development and growth. Employees can opt for diverse assignments and work in different teams. The company has redesigned its work processes and organizational design to make employees more participative.

10. SUMMARY

Jobs are fast disappearing from the current corporate scenario. Organizations are witnessing a paradigm shift towards a dejobbed environment from the era of specified tasks and duties. Organizations must be prepared to mend their ways and be flexible and agile towards the changing circumstances. Companies must redesign their strategies and organizational structure in order to accommodate the dejobbing strategy into its corporate strategy.

In this scenario, the onus lies on the individuals to demonstrate their value to the organizations. The employees should be ready for everything that the organization throws their way. Individuals must indulge into Self-branding in order to highlight their employability. The wider the skill-set of the employee, more likely he is to be employed. Workers must be a team player now rather than being individual stars.

Dejobbing is the inevitable truth of the new age corporate world. Both employer and employee must come together in order to accommodate it and overcome the challenges posed by the ever-changing market.