

Learning about Work Design from “Spy” [Motion Picture]

"Spy" (2015), the action-comedy movie, implicitly weaves the work design perspective into its storyline. The movie revolves around a desk-bound spy assistant, Susan Cooper, who assists a field spy agent, Bradley Fine.

The movie begins by depicting Susan as a dissatisfied worker because she is only working behind the scenes at the CIA. Furthermore, she has no social support at work – her only friends are her partner, and Nancy, a fellow assistant. Susan's job involves repetitive tasks such as providing Fine with information about a target's location and background. In addition, Susan also deals with problems such as rats and other maintenance issues in the office. This aligns with Frederick Taylor's theory of designing work from the engineering approach. This method clearly specifies the task to be performed, the work methods to be used and the workflow.

The sociotechnical systems approach is illustrated when the CIA implements self-managed work teams, a sociotechnical system. The CIA gives Elaine, a team leader, the authority to design, direct and regulate the work method she saw fit to achieve her team's goal. Elaine goes about discussing work methods with her team members and assigns tasks based on the result of that discussion. For example, when required to allocate a field agent, she opened the discussion to the team members. There are three theoretical inputs in this approach used by Elaine. First, a team task design where Elaine states the goal of the mission – not being caught by their targets. Second, allowing team members to communicate and give their opinion on the task at hand. Third, organisational support when other departments within the CIA helped Elaine's team to achieve their goal. For example, the support they received from the Research and Development department provided Elaine's team with the best spy gadgets available to successfully complete their mission.

The motivational approach is evident when Susan is given the opportunity to be a field agent upon Bradley's death. This new role allowed Susan more autonomy, authority and responsibility, fitting in with her desire to do more at work. This resulted in Susan being more motivated and satisfied at work as she felt like she was using her skills, and could help to avenge Bradley's death. The positive result of job enrichment was apparent with Susan's mission success, helping the CIA to achieve its goal.

Although *Spy* is an action-comedy movie, it is interesting to relate the storyline to the various theories of work design. It depicted three different approaches that influenced the organisation's success to varying degrees.

References

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