

Animation 10.2

During the industrial revolution and, in particular, with the introduction of the mass production era (which we discussed in chapter 3), the nature and organisation of work changed. Instead of workers being generalist craftsmen and women, work was simplified and deskilled, whilst employees were engaged in a limited number of tasks.

This is referred to as the division of labour. In high volume assembly operations work became very repetitive, which meant workers were highly efficient in doing their job but not highly involved or engaged with their work.

Initially organising work in factories was undertaken by managers on a trial and error basis. But in the late 1800s Frederick W. Taylor began a more rigorous approach to work measurement and design. This became known as the 'scientific management' approach.

By engaging in time and motion study, tasks were systematically rationalised to make them more efficient and the flow along assembly lines was speeded up. Workers now had little or no control over what they did or how they did it.

Although highly efficient, it became clear that organising work in this way was stressful for the workforce. Physical stress could be caused by poor positioning of equipment, so that workers had bend, stretch or lift unnecessarily. This led to ergonomic design wherein the work place is designed to ensure that employees' health and safety are assured.

All three of these approaches - division of labour, scientific management and ergonomic design - tend to focus on the work context, and as such the worker is simply another "cog in the wheel". The emphasis is therefore on management control rather than the employee.

But many employers and organisations began to realise that there were significant benefits to be gained by involving their employees more. So a number of other approaches to job design have been adopted.

One of these was team working. By creating teams, individual workers not only work more collaboratively together, but also have more social interaction in the workplace. As a result, processes may be operated more effectively and worker motivation may improve.

Another approach is to multi-skill some or all of the workforce. Instead of employees being expected to do the same repetitive task hour after hour, workers were trained so that they could work on more than one task and hence have some variety of what they did.

Finally, some organisations have adopted empowerment. In this approach responsibility for some aspects of the job are shifted from management down to the employees themselves. Those who do the work have a high degree of control over how it is done.