

Frontline Job Redesign

LOUISIANA DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES

What is job redesign and why was it selected?

The Louisiana Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS), Child Welfare Division (CWD) partnered with the Quality Improvement Center for Workforce Development (QIC-WD) to develop, implement, and test an intervention to address issues identified in the needs assessment including low employee morale, high staff turnover, and poor outcomes for families and children. A [frontline job redesign](#) was selected as the intervention because the agency wished to approach these long-standing challenges in an innovative manner. A job redesign is comprised of activities that alter specific jobs or interdependent systems of jobs in ways that benefit both employees and the employer. The goal of a redesign is to improve the quality of workers' job experience and their productivity ([Hackman, 1980](#); [Parker, Morgeson, & Johns, 2017](#)).

How is a job redesign conducted?

There are a variety of approaches, but the process, which was conducted with an expert in industrial-organizational psychology, included the following steps:

1. Conducted a thorough job analysis to identify the tasks that made up the job
2. Identified the knowledge, skills, and abilities that are needed to perform job tasks
3. Examined reconfiguration options, while considering the anticipated costs, benefits, and implications of the redesign
4. Implemented the job redesign
5. Evaluated target outcomes (e.g., job satisfaction, stress, turnover) before and after the job redesign

Job redesign is a thoughtful, time intensive process. The assessment phase, which included the job analysis, took about 10 months to complete with DCFS. The Work Design Questionnaire (WDQ; [Morgeson & Humphrey, 2006](#)) was used to inform the redesign process. The WDQ assesses 20 distinct work characteristics that are grouped into four categories to gather employees' perception of their jobs including the physical and social environment. Areas assessed included perceptions of task variety, decision-making autonomy, information processing demands, problem-solving, interdependence, and feedback from others. These data were used to inform decisions about specific areas of the job that should be addressed by the redesign. Once the reconfiguration of the job was developed, it took many months to conduct a phased roll-out in Louisiana. [Implementation](#) required extensive training of existing staff in their new job duties, team building, and the recruitment, hiring and training of the new employees who filled the newly created Child Welfare Team Specialist position. The scope of a redesign can vary greatly based on the extent of preparation and systemic changes needed to support the implementation of the new design, and time spent monitoring and evaluating the intervention. Due to the technical nature of this process, it was essential that the QIC-WD team, which included a workforce expert, guided the DCFS job redesign.



What is the research behind job redesign?

The subject of job redesign has a more than 100-year history of research and theory (see [Parker, Morgeson & Johns, 2017](#) for a review). Research indicates that job characteristics (such as the amount of autonomy one has in the job, the variety of tasks and skills needed to perform the job, and the amount of social support within the role) are linked to important organizational outcomes including job performance, work motivation, stress, role conflict, and turnover intentions ([Humphrey, Nahrgang, & Morgeson, 2007](#)). For example, in one recent quasi-experimental study, employees in the experimental group who received a job redesign increased their well-being when compared to the employees in the control group. These jobs were redesigned to improve employees' job control, participation, skill utilization, and performance feedback ([Holman, Axtell, Sprigg, Totterdell, & Wall, 2010](#)). There

are a variety of new theories and approaches to job redesign that have emerged, and work design plays a critical role in the conceptualization of organizations of the future ([Parker, Morgeson & Johns, 2017](#)).

What research gap does the QIC-WD address?

Although job redesign efforts are fairly common in many government, manufacturing, insurance, banking, and healthcare settings, to our knowledge there are no published research studies or program evaluations of a formal job redesign in a child welfare agency. Given the many well-documented challenges inherent in child welfare jobs related to workload, complexity of cases, documentation, and coordination of services, it was surprising that job redesign had not been explored as a potential intervention. The QIC-WD study will provide evidence to address this important area of need.