Management Decision

GARBAGE JOBS

Glancing at the newspaper machine in the lobby, you are happy to see the headline proclaiming the end of the garbage collectors’ strike in a nearby city. That kind of strike tends to have a ripple effect on neighboring areas, and as the manager of a private waste collection company in the region; you breathe a sigh of relief.

Nonetheless, as you walk to your office, you can’t help thinking about the job of your garbage collectors. It’s repetitive, hot (or cold, depending on the season), anonymous, and relatively thankless. Your employees work in pairs, so each truck has one driver and one “thrower”—not much variety for either worker. There’s not much on-the-job interaction either, as the driver is in the cab and the thrower rides on the back of the truck. And with the company looking into purchasing newer trucks that automatically lift and dump the garbage cans, you may even go to one person per truck.

In addition, to minimize the time it takes to collect the trash, you assign each team to the same neighborhood week after week. That ensures maximum efficiency: drivers subconsciously time traffic lights, pace themselves for starts and stops, and know the route without needing to consult a map. Even when collectors know the route, the work can be grueling. Each route has to be finished each day; no one will tolerate garbage left on the curb after the assigned pickup day. So even if a traffic accident or construction brings traffic to a standstill, the garbage has to be collected each day according to schedule.

The more you think about it, on paper the job sounds dull—and somewhat stressful. As you fire up your computer and begin to look at your favorite industry blog, you wonder if you can make the job more interesting for your employees. Scanning the screen, you link to an article about a region in Britain that is putting defibrillators in garbage trucks to complement the ambulance service in rural areas. Well, that’s not quite what you had in mind for making garbage collecting interesting for your employees, but still, it’s something.


Questions
1. Can you use the job characteristics model (JCM) to redesign the job of the trash collector to be internally motivating? How?
Please read the fact patterns before class. We will answer the questions in our case teams during class.

2. Assume that the trash collection job is not internally motivating. Identify areas where you can strengthen the job’s core characteristics and give specific examples.

3. Is it possible to redesign the very specialized job of a garbage collector to make it more satisfying? Is a redesign feasible? In other words, do you redesign the job or keep it as is? Explain your reasoning.