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“What’s one man’s meat is another man’s poison”—a truism that organizations neglect to their peril when they succumb to the myth of the average man and standardize their approaches to jobs and job holders. Lawler points out the peril and describes the alternatives.

For a More Effective Organization— Match the Job to the Man

Edward E. Lawler III

*O*f all the ways society serves the individual, few are more meaningful than providing individuals with decent jobs. And it is not likely to be a decent society for any of us until it is for all of us.—John Gardner, 1968.

Work can be made a more rewarding place to be and organizations can be made more effective if approaches to organizational design treat employees as individuals. This important and optimistic statement is supported by a number of recent studies; however, it is often overlooked in the national debate over employee alienation and job satisfaction, a debate that has been preoccupied with what in many ways is the least important issue: whether job dissatisfaction and alienation are increasing.

Twenty, thirty, even forty years ago, social scientists were pointing out that the way organizations and jobs are designed frequently creates dissatisfying and alienating work experiences. They were also noting such serious social consequences of work aliena-

tion and job dissatisfaction as physical illness, mental illness, alcoholism, drug abuse, and shorter life spans. A more recent concern has been that when job dissatisfaction is high, individuals do not grow and develop. And there is no doubt that because work is still dissatisfying for many, everyone in our country is worse off. Thus, we need to concentrate our energies on searching for better ways to design work organizations, rather than on debating whether the situation is worsening.

The research that I have been involved in over the past ten years on organization and job design suggests a number of approaches that organizations can take to make work more satisfying, interesting, involving, and sometimes more motivating. All of these efforts have a common aspect: They all recognize that for the work experience to be a positive, growth-producing one, the work situation must be designed to fit the differences that exist among people in their skills, needs, and abilities.

Unfortunately, many organization 19

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