

People with boring jobs tend to design dull jobs for their colleagues

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Managers and professional employees who have boring and dull jobs themselves are more likely to design demotivating, disengaging, low-skill and repetitive jobs for others, new research led by Curtin University has

found.

The research, published in the *Journal of Applied Psychology*, examined how individuals, including managers and professionals, make decisions that influence other people's quality of work.

Lead author ARC Laureate Fellow Professor Sharon Parker, from the Centre for Transformative Work Design based at Curtin University's Future of Work Institute, said the research suggested that many managers and other professionals did not have an evidence-based understanding of how to design engaging work.

"It seems that people have a natural view that putting together a group of highly repetitive and similar tasks into a job is the most efficient way to organise work, but previous research suggests this view is rarely correct," Professor Parker said.

"We conducted three studies into how people design jobs for others, as well as how their professional expertise, knowledge, life values, and own job designs contribute to these decisions.

"We found that many participants designed poor quality work for others, and they were more likely to do so if they themselves lacked autonomy in their jobs. It seems that poor work design leads to more poor work design, which could explain why there are many badly designed jobs in the workplace."

The research also showed that managers were no better at designing [jobs](#) for others, and were therefore sometimes more likely than non-managers to design poorer work for their staff members.

Professor Parker explained that managers and other professionals who, by the nature of their positions, can shape the work design of others,

need to put more time and effort into creating effective and engaging work for employees in order to benefit both the individual and the organisation.

"It is important that managers and others learn the value of creating higher quality work, especially if we want to be competitive in a world in which employees need to be innovative, agile, and high performing," Professor Parker said.

"Further research is needed to explore why individuals [design work](#) the way they do and look closely at some of the social and political barriers that influence these decisions."

The research was also co-authored by Dr. Daniela Andrei from Curtin University's Future of Work Institute and Dr. Anja van den Broeck from KU Leuven in Belgium.

More information: Sharon K. Parker et al. Poor work design begets poor work design: Capacity and willingness antecedents of individual work design behavior. *Journal of Applied Psychology* (2019). [DOI: 10.1037/apl0000383](#)

Provided by Curtin University

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