

Multiskilling and job satisfaction in outsourcing

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Companies who provide Facilities Management through an integrated solution have to commit to multiskilling of their staff in order to be effective. Multiskilling is an effective way of organising jobs to boost productivity, flexibility and quality of service. The theory is that multiskilling increases job satisfaction and thereby reduces employee turnover and absenteeism, and improves overall contract performance. If the theory holds true then multiskilling means significant tangible and intangible benefits for the service provider, the employee as well as the customer.

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Table of Contents

Executive Summary	3
Introduction	4
Multiskilling	5
Job Satisfaction	8
Our Survey	10
Implementation of Multiskilling	15
Conclusions	18
References	19

Executive Summary

Companies who provide Facilities Management through an integrated solution have to commit to multiskilling of their staff in order to be effective. Multiskilling is an effective way of organising jobs to boost productivity, flexibility and quality of service. The theory is that multiskilling increases job satisfaction and thereby reduces employee turnover and absenteeism, and improves overall contract performance. If the theory holds true then multiskilling means significant tangible and intangible benefits for the service provider, the employee as well as the customer.

The link between multiskilling and job satisfaction has so far been largely theoretical, meaning that there has been little research to establish that the link actually exists in practice. Within outsourcing, research is almost non-existent. So, we conducted a two-phase survey among ISS employees to test the link between multiskilling and job satisfaction using questionnaires and interviews.

Our survey concludes that multiskilling does indeed increase job satisfaction if – and only if – the process of introducing multiskilling is handled properly. A significant number of multiskilled employees reported low job satisfaction due to the way the new job designs had been introduced. Good people management skills are vital throughout an outsourcing project. The survey also concludes that if introduced properly, multiskilling can increase job satisfaction significantly.

Multiskilling must be approached as a win/win potential for all stakeholders and not only as a way of reducing costs and improving profitability; improving job satisfaction and motivation for individual employees is equally important. This White Paper suggests a best practice four-stage implementation process in which change management and project management receive equal attention.



Introduction



Every company faces two critical challenges; (1) to find and retain qualified employees, and (2) to improve profitability and quality of service. The battle for talent is set to intensify in future and extend to all types of work, at all levels. This is especially true in Western Europe where the number of people entering the job market will be far below the number leaving the job market for the next many years. HR deliverables consequently become distinct competitive advantages. This is especially true in businesses where people skills are vital for product delivery, such as in the facility management industry.

Job satisfaction is an important metric for monitoring progress in terms of both challenges in that it correlates well with both employee performance and retention. Increased job satisfaction stimulates a more positive attitude to the employer, to co-workers and supervisors and consequently decreases employee churn while increasing employee motivation for performing to best ability.

Multiskilling is an effective way for facility management companies to organise jobs in such a way that profitability, flexibility and quality of service improves. The theory is also that multiskilling creates a better workplace and enhances employee job satisfaction. However, little research has been done to document the link between multiskilling and job satisfaction. Conversely, a greater body of research has documented the benefits of multiskilling for the service provider and the customer – especially the tangible benefits. For example, research within healthcare in the UK and Canada suggests that multiskilling is worthwhile both in terms of cost and quality. But as this White Paper will discuss, unlocking the potential of multiskilling for all parties is no easy task.

This White Paper seeks to answer two key questions:

1. Does multiskilling lead to enhanced job satisfaction and better performance?
2. What steps should be considered when introducing multiskilling?

To help answer these questions, a survey was conducted to test the claim that job satisfaction levels increase through multiskilling, and to identify best practices for companies about to implement multiskilling.

Multiskilling

Multiskilling is defined in this White Paper as “designing jobs to enable people to perform two or more traditionally separate job functions”. This definition implies that if a job function is to be ‘multiskilled’ a degree of training will be necessary to enable the individual to carry out the job. A similar concept, but one which does not necessarily involve training, is multitasking.

Three dimensions of multiskilling

Multiskilling can be considered in terms of three dimensions

1. Vertical multiskilling – where the employee takes on supervisory or administrative tasks such as overseeing or leading a self-managed team. This has the potential of empowering an employee with managerial aspirations and demonstrates a greater level of trust in the individual.
2. Horizontal multiskilling – this is where the employee takes on another task (service) at the same level of his or her original task. For example: if an outsourcing contract requires two employees for cleaning services and one part-time employee for catering functions, then two jobs could be created through multiskilling so that cleaning could be done in the morning and afternoon, and catering functions could be performed mid day.
3. Depth multiskilling – where a set of complex skills are acquired within the same job function in order to offer a better overall service to the customer. For example, a pest control worker, who empties and cleans rat traps, might be trained to repair a defect alarm or maintain the pest control technology used on-site, which would be value-adding for the customer.

There is no universal best practice in multiskilling, since the type of service offering, the structure of the customer’s organisation and the individual employee will determine what is best. In most cases, the ideal solution will be a combination of all three dimensions.

Implications of multiskilling

Multiskilled jobs have many implications for the service provider, the employee and the customer.

Table 1: overview of benefits and drawbacks of multiskilled job design

	Service provider	Employee	Customer
Benefits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personnel cost reduction • Enhanced quality of work • Faster response time • Higher retention rates • Unlock hidden personnel talents 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Job variety • Higher pay • Better promotion prospects • Increased job satisfaction and motivation • Additional skills acquisition 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lower contract costs • Improved service quality
Drawbacks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Higher training costs • Disruption to organisation • Contract risk 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some employees may lose jobs • Role conflicts • Inability to perform new job 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contract risk

Source: Aspector A/S

Benefits for the service provider

From the service provider's perspective, the main benefits are lower costs and increased flexibility. Overall personnel costs are reduced through a) layoffs due to better utilisation of existing personnel, b) lower temporary personnel recruitment costs, as employees will be better able to stand in for each other and c) increased flexibility and improved productivity.

Personnel costs probably constitute the most cited and well-documented arguments in favour of multiskilling. One study of 131 US companies by the Texas Center for Productivity and Quality of Work Life showed that profits increased by up to 40% as a result of multiskilling and other innovative work practices.

Flexibility increases because more employees are able to stand in for each other. One documented benefit is that flexibility results in increased customer satisfaction and enhanced work quality. In several case studies, added flexibility is highlighted as the no. 1 benefit of multiskilling.

Training costs are likely to increase, though. However tempting it may be to implement new job designs without investing in training, this is a mistake. Without proper training, quality will decrease, thus reducing customer satisfaction. The employees are also likely to experience reduced job satisfaction if they are asked to do jobs without having the requisite skills.

One common concern is that multiskilling may make 'jacks-of-all-trades' out of employees who formerly mastered one specialised job. Without careful consideration, a lack of specialised employees may impair service quality and also safety and effectiveness.

Benefits for the employee

From the employee's perspective the main benefits are better use of skills, increased job variety, higher pay and increased job motivation.

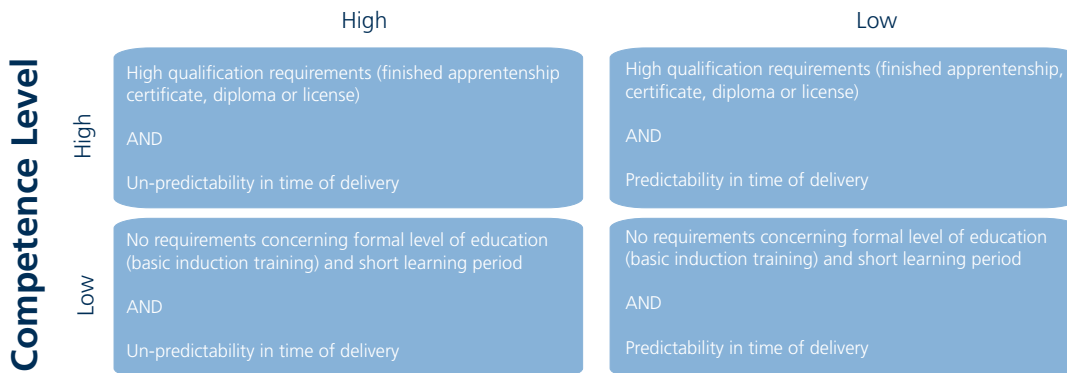
The employees may receive higher pay as a result of the company's increased productivity and higher profit on multiskill contracts. At any rate, our survey suggests that for some types of multiskilling, employees will demand higher pay for the 'added' jobs or tasks.

Employee promotion prospects often improve as the employee receives more training and often supervisory and management training where vertical multiskilling is introduced.

Job variety will by definition increase. If multiskilling is introduced properly this will be viewed as a benefit by the employee. Many employees will undoubtedly worry about their ability to take on the new jobs and the people skills of the management team will have decisive influence on whether employees take a positive or a negative view of job variety.

An important precondition for having motivated, capable and multi-skilled service employees is the notion that you should always seek to up-skill people and if possible avoid down-skilling employees to perform service tasks.

Flexibility in Service set-up



Source: ISS A/S

The Competence Matrix shown above is a tool to evaluate the task suitability for multitasking. The philosophy is that services with no or limited educational requirements and with no time constraints, can be performed effectively by multi-skilled employees. However, a basic level of induction and introduction training is always a requirement.

Organisational changes are inevitable when multiskilling is introduced. Some employees will see colleagues lose their jobs; new jobs and job titles will be introduced; and employees will be assigned to work with new colleagues. Change management is a central but often neglected discipline in this context.

Interestingly, multiskilling may even be demanded by employees in the future. Today, work is central to employees' professional and personal identity and multiskilling is one way of improving the status of a job and hence quality of life. The current challenge is to make employees feel emotionally attached to the job as much as to the company, and multiskilling does just that.

Benefits for the customer

The customer will benefit through cheaper cost of service (the financial benefits should be shared between the service provider and the client), better quality of service and faster response time. The fact that service employees can stand in for each other means that the client will experience significantly fewer disruptions to the overall service. If the customer organisation decides to introduce multiskilling itself (i.e. there is no service provider involved) all the benefits listed in 2.2.1 accrue to the customer as well.

But note that these are the benefits in theory; little research has been done to document these customer benefits in practice.

Job Satisfaction



Job satisfaction is one of the most frequently used metrics in industrial psychology – and with good reason. It is stable over time, well documented and it correlates well with performance, employee turnover, customer service and absenteeism.

Job satisfaction is defined as “a measure of how employees feel about their work on the basis of a cognitive evaluation of the job”. Various aspects of the job may contribute to the sense of job satisfaction and these are often surveyed to arrive at a better and more complete understanding of the employee’s job satisfaction. Common aspects are pay, promotion prospects, supervision, co-workers, security, communication, job conditions and the nature of the actual work.

Antecedents of job satisfaction

What makes employees satisfied with their jobs? This simple question has attracted a great deal of interest and justifiably so given the obvious benefits to employers and employees alike. The leading theory suggests that job satisfaction is a combination of the characteristics of the job itself and the employee’s personal values.

The characteristics of the job – based on the Job Characteristics Model (JCM) – show that job satisfaction is predicated on five job characteristics:

- Task identity – the degree to which the job involves completing a whole, identifiable piece of work rather than simply a part
- Task significance – the extent to which the job has an impact on other people, inside or outside the organisation
- Skill variety – the degree to which the job requires different skills
- Autonomy – extent to which the job allows jobholders to exercise choice and discretion in their work
- Feedback – extent to which the job itself (as opposed to other people) provides jobholders with information on their performance

JCM is the most reliable model for measuring and predicting job satisfaction levels in a workforce and the model is also the most tested and validated in international surveys.

The second determinant of job satisfaction is the individual’s personal values. This determines what part of the job must be satisfactory.

Many other variables can affect the level of job satisfaction. One significant variable is nationality. Countries vary considerably in the level of overall job satisfaction among employees, with the level being high in Denmark and low in countries such as Spain, France, Japan and the UK. It is not clear why this is the case, but the results are stable over time.

Outcomes of job satisfaction are all positive

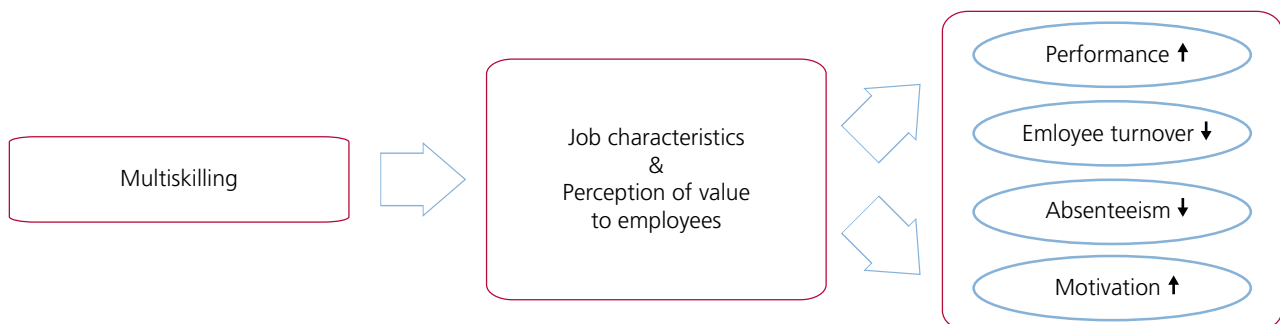
Everybody benefits from a high level of job satisfaction. The service provider and the customer will experience higher productivity and better performance. In addition, overall personnel costs will be significantly lower as a result of reduced absenteeism, employee churn and other negative behaviour such as lateness or even substance abuse, which may impact the quality of service delivered.

There are benefits for the employee too. Performance and motivation improvements will create better promotion prospects – where these exist. A high correlation between job satisfaction and general life satisfaction has been widely reported in numerous studies.

Multiskilling can improve job satisfaction and performance

How then can an organisation improve employee job satisfaction through job design? The answer depends on the type of organisation, the job involved and many other variables. However, because multiskilling directly impacts the primary antecedents of job satisfaction, the link is clear. Figure 1 illustrates the connection. The figure also suggests that job satisfaction is a useful indicator for measuring progress in implementing multiskilling.

Figure 2: Connection between multiskilling and job satisfaction



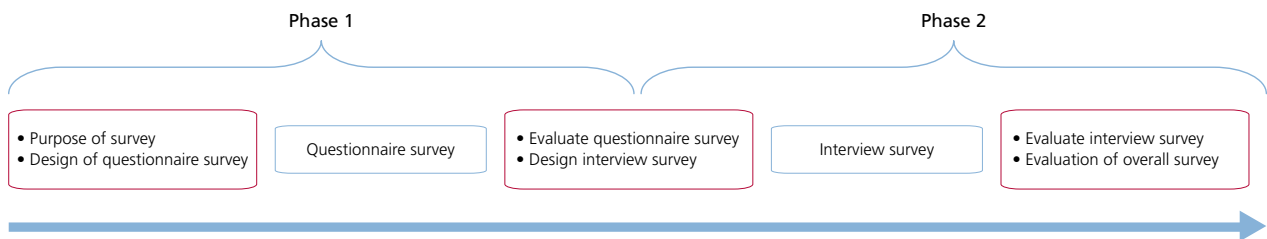
Source: Aspector A/S

Multiskilling can improve job satisfaction due to its impact on job characteristics and on the employee's personal value perception. Multiskilling may for example improve task significance because the worker is adding more value to the customer. Skill variety is almost certain to increase as a result of multiskilling. Other factors such as task identity, autonomy and feedback will be affected positively if implemented properly. The process throughout the implementation phases and the involvement of staff determines overall success.

Our Survey

To find out if multiskilling actually improves job satisfaction in practice, as the theory suggests, we conducted a two-phase survey among ISS employees. In the first phase we used a questionnaire to measure job satisfaction among multiskilled employees and single-skilled employees. We also wanted to measure satisfaction in terms of various facets of work by comparing the effect on two groups of multiskilling. The second phase consisted of an interview survey in which our analysis of responses was guided by the results of the questionnaire-based survey. However, only interview data give us the full picture.

Figure 3: Survey process



Questionnaire survey

The Job Descriptive Index (JDI) was used to measure job satisfaction. This was selected due to its strong test viability, its ease of use for employees with a range of educational backgrounds and language skills, and because it is the most commonly used.

JDI measures both overall job satisfaction and five facets of the job. The five facets are:

1. **Pay** – measures the difference between actual and expected pay. Employee expectations regarding pay are based on perception of personal contribution and how it measures up to that from other employees in similar jobs. External factors such as the health of the national economy, personal financial situation and what other companies are offering are also influential
2. **Work** – measures satisfaction with the work itself
3. **Promotion** – reflects perception of the promotion policy and how this is administered
4. **Supervision** – measures satisfaction with work supervisor(s). Generally, a supervisor is evaluated in terms of consideration and level of competence on the job
5. **Co-workers** – reflects the quality of interaction with co-workers on private and professional matters

200 questionnaires were sent out to 14 contracts/workplaces across Denmark. The questionnaires were equally divided between single-skilled and multiskilled employees. The response rate was 66%. Table 2 shows the profile of the responses.

Table 2: profile of responses from the survey

		Percent		Percent		Percent		
Sex	Men	47%	Type of work	Single-skilled	52%	Born in	Denmark	75%
	Women	53%		Multiskilled	48%		Other	25%
Age	<20	1%	Education	3rd form lower-secondary school	5%	Years with ISS	0-1	30%
	20-29	24%		4th form lower-secondary school	15%		1-2	14%
	30-39	34%		5th form lower secondary school	26%		2-4	18%
	40-49	24%		Upper-secondary education	28%		>4	38%
	>50	17%		Other	26%			

Source: ISS A/S

The results of the job satisfaction survey are shown in table 3. A reading between

- 37-45 indicates satisfaction
- 22-32 indicates neutral satisfaction
- 15-20 indicates dissatisfaction with the job/facet of the job.

Table 3: Job satisfaction scores for multiskilled and single-skilled service workers at ISS Denmark

	Overall job satisfaction	Pay	Promotion	Work	Supervision	Co-workers
Multiskilled employees	41.2%	27.2%	24.4%	37.2%	42.8%	39.6%
Single-skilled employees	41.6%	28.5%	21.1%	36.9%	41.1%	42.1%
Difference (multi-single)	-0.4%	-1.3%	3.3%	0.3%	1.7%	-2.5%

Source: ISS A/S

The overall job satisfaction rate for both multiskilled and single-skilled employees is above 41, indicating a high level of job satisfaction.

The two main conclusions from the questionnaire survey:

1. **At an overall level, multiskilled workers and single-skilled workers have the same job satisfaction.** Even looking at the individual workplaces there are no differences – the spread between the most satisfied and the least satisfied is the same.
2. **Multiskilled workers form two distinct groups; one with very high job satisfaction and one with low job satisfaction.** For some employees, multiskilling results in a very high level of job satisfaction while for others it has the opposite effect. The spread in overall job satisfaction is much higher among multiskilled employees than among single-skilled employees.

The questionnaire survey identified a number of other interesting aspects concerning the difference between single-skilled and multiskilled work:

- Single-skilled workers have lower job satisfaction the higher their level of educational attainment. For multiskilled workers the reverse is true. The higher the level of educational attainment, the higher the job satisfaction. This result is to be expected as multiskilled workers have more complex tasks, more autonomy and are using more skills.
- Multiskilled workers score lower on satisfaction with pay than single-skilled workers. The reason may be that multiskilled workers do not receive significantly higher pay than single-skilled workers - but feel that they should. Pay is an important component of job evaluation. In fact, for low-level workers with little education, it is often considered the most important component. Generally, employees feel that the greater skills base they possess and the more training they have undergone, the more value they are adding to the customer and the more responsibility they are given – to name but a few – the higher their salary should be.
- Multiskilled workers are more satisfied with their promotion prospects than their single-skilled colleagues. This was expected and is one of the potential benefits of multiskilling highlighted in table 1.
- Workers transferred to ISS through an outsourcing contract are significantly more satisfied than those hired directly by ISS and are indeed the most satisfied segment out of all those surveyed. This is perhaps not surprising, since the people who have stayed with ISS in spite of the cultural and organisational changes they have been through, are also likely to have been the ones who were satisfied with their job throughout. This also suggests that the service provider has an added incentive for easing transition in outsourcing¹.

Despite the many interesting conclusions, the overall conclusion is that multiskilling significantly increases job satisfaction for only about half of the employees. The questionnaire survey does not reveal why that is the case.

¹ See also Morten Kamp Andersen and Peter Ankerstjerne's report on "Successful transition in outsourcing" for suggestions for how this may be achieved

Interview survey

We conducted an interview survey with the purpose of finding out why some employees experience an increase in job satisfaction when introduced to multiskilling, while others experience no increase or even lower job satisfaction.

We designed a semi-structured interview guide for the interviews based on the findings of our questionnaire. We interviewed a number of employees who had recently have been through a transitional process and had their job remits extended. The interviewees were selected from four different countries (Denmark, Finland, Singapore and Australia). The interviewees represented different age groups and a wide range of job functions within the blue-collar facility management industry and were selected at random from randomly selected contracts in pre-specified countries. The job satisfaction interviews took an average of 1 hour and 12 minutes and included a number of questions about their experience with the transition management process.

Approximately 60% of the interviewees had experienced positive job satisfaction as a result of their job change, 20% expressed (very) negative experience, and 20% felt that the experience had not affected their overall job satisfaction.





The interview survey concluded that:

- 1. Employees are generally positive towards the concept of multiskilling.** All our interviewees stated that they were open to multiskilling and had been so when introduced to it during their outsourcing process. This was also the case for the people who subsequently experienced a negative effect on their job satisfaction. Some expressed that they would definitely not do certain types of jobs but that they would be open to doing all other types. The jobs that some interviewees would not do were jobs they considered below their 'rank' or status. An example would be a highly skilled technical person who did not want to do a significant amount of cleaning.
- 2. Poor people management is the primary reason why multiskilling does not improve job satisfaction.** In all four instances where multiskilling had no or a negative effect on job satisfaction it was down to a poor planning process and not least people skills. A forced change in a job is a major and very personal event for the employee involved and the process must be managed effectively, professionally and above all with great people skills. This is not always the case and when it fails, multiskilling often leads to lower job satisfaction.
- 3. If multiskilling involves supervisory tasks or a significant increase in skills employees expect to be paid more.** Employees are very aware of when they feel multiskilling should result in increased pay. Horizontal multiskilling will often not result in demands for higher pay whereas vertical and depth multiskilling often will.

In summary, our two-phased study concludes that multiskilling leads to higher job satisfaction if – and only if – the process of introducing multiskilling is handled properly. Employees are generally positive towards multiskilling but this initially positive attitude is damaged by poor people management which then leads to significantly lower job satisfaction.

Implementation of Multiskilling

It is beyond the scope of this White Paper to discuss and offer a concrete implementation plan. However, given that our survey concluded that the quality of the implementation process was the most important factor for an increase in job satisfaction a few points will be highlighted.

It is undoubtedly important for the service provider to approach multiskilling as a win/win potential for all stakeholders and not only as a way of reducing costs and improving profitability. Improving job satisfaction and motivation for the individual workers is equally important.

A best practice implementation process depends on two key factors:

1. **Change management.** Our survey showed that employees are generally positive towards multiskilling but the people-management side of the process often lets them down. Change management issues such as communications, involvement and people management must be carefully considered.

Communication must be honest, comprehensive and meaningful. Honest communication about the process and the likely implications such as headcount reductions, job change and pay and benefits changes is essential. It must be comprehensive otherwise rumours, gossip and speculation will prevail. Finally, the communication must be meaningful and related to the employees' situation.

The employees must be involved throughout the entire process. Studies have demonstrated a direct (negative) link between the level of employee involvement and level of resistance to a change project. Employees are simply more likely to embrace and appreciate a change if they are actively involved.

The employees also have valuable knowledge about the day-to-day work and insights into which jobs can be combined and how. Customers must also be involved, as they will be experiencing the actual changes at their sites and may have knowledge about limitations and possibilities in a multiskilling process.

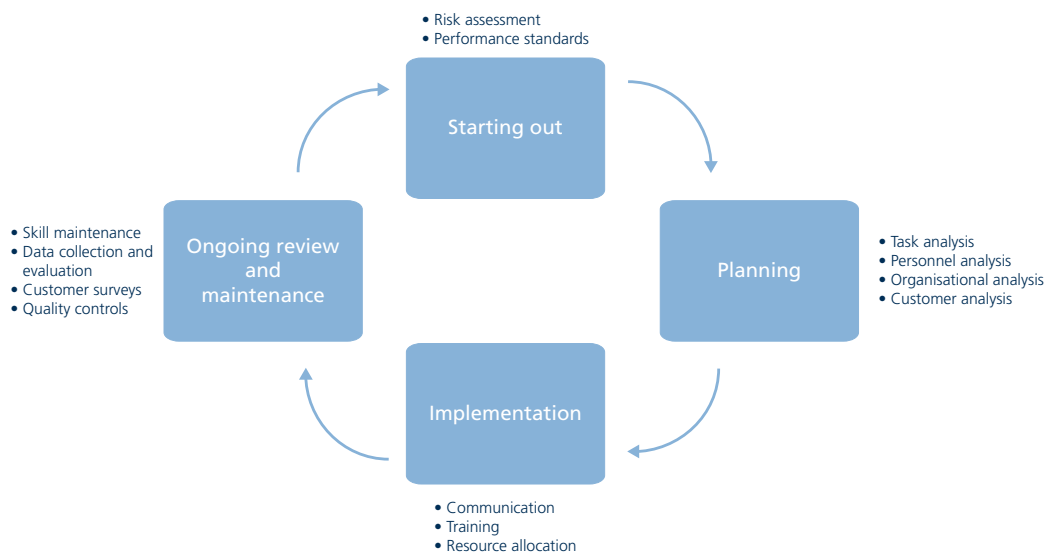
Finally, managers must display strong people management skills. This includes listening to worker concerns and dealing with them on a one-to-one basis as well as considering each individual's needs in the design process.

2. **Project management.** This includes using a robust, well-tested project process comprising job planning, training, assessment and skills maintenance. The company will have to analyse the new job designs, the training required, the selection process for employee assignments and the new jobs, as well as monitor any skills attrition.

Both change management and project management may be viewed as two distinct life cycles, and indeed both should be dealt with separately, according to two separate plans. But they should also be considered as one, since they both constitute the combined implementation of multiskilling.

The combined implementation process can be divided into four stages. At each stage there are a different set of items to consider – in the form of checklist (Hornbury & Wright, 2001). This section will only briefly list a few of the important ones.

Figure 4: Implementation plan for multiskilling



Source: Aspector A/S

Starting out

- Which risks will multiskilling entail and how critical are they?
- Will multiskilling impact Health & Safety risks?
- How will performance be assessed?

Planning

- Task analysis
 - Which dimensions of multiskilling will be used (vertical, horizontal or depth)?
 - How will the new jobs be designed and will workers be involved in the process?
 - What is the effect of the work dimensions (task identity, task significance, skill variety, autonomy and feedback)?
 - What will the effects be on employee workloads?
- Personnel analysis
 - Do the workers have the capacity to learn the new skills required?
 - What effect will it have on finding suitable people in the future?
 - How should pay be affected by the new job functions?

- Organisational analysis
 - Will the new job design have any consequences for errors, safety and supervision?
 - How much training is required, what costs are entailed and how will the training be carried out in practice?
 - How will staff be consulted and involved throughout the process?
- Customer analysis
 - How will the changes be communicated to the customer?
 - Are there procedures in place for the customer's input?

Implementation

- Is there a detailed operational plan in place?
- Have sufficient resources been allocated?
 - Financial – training, pay increases
 - Time – for organisational disruptions
 - Management – is top management focused?
- Have all relevant staff been consulted and do they understand what will happen and why? Do they understand their new roles?
- Have all staff received sufficient training?

Ongoing review and maintenance

- Have data been collected to evaluate the effect of multiskilling? Data which can be easily collected include:
 - absenteeism and overtime
 - staff turnover
 - job satisfaction
 - staff complaints
- What effect have the changes had on the customer - both positive and negative?
- Have personnel been trained in the proper areas? Are there signs of skills attrition?

Conclusion

Multiskilling is an effective and practical way of organising work in Facility Service outsourcing. It has the potential to create a win/win situation among all internal and external stakeholders. The benefits include cost reduction, improved service levels, increased job satisfaction, improved pay and conditions for the worker and unlocking of talents in the workforce.

Multiskilling can be designed along three dimensions; vertical, horizontal and depth multiskilling. There is no universal 'best practice' in multiskilling, since the type of service offering, the structure of the customer's organisation and the individual employee will determine what is best. In most cases, the ideal solution will be a combination of all three dimensions.

Job satisfaction as a metric is stable over time, well documented and it correlates well with performance, employee turnover, customer service and absenteeism. Job satisfaction is defined as "a measure of how employees feel about their work on the basis of a cognitive evaluation of the job". Job satisfaction is a combination of five characteristics of the job itself (task identity, task significance, skill variety, autonomy and feedback) and the personal values of each employee.

The link between multiskilling and job satisfaction has so far been largely theoretical, meaning that little research has been done to establish that the link actually exists in practice. Within outsourcing, research is almost non-existent. We conducted a two-phase survey among ISS employees to test the link and to learn more about the dynamics. For the first phase we used a questionnaire to measure job satisfaction among multiskilled employees and single-skilled employees and compared the levels of job satisfaction between the two groups. The second phase consisted of an interview survey in which our analysis of responses was guided by the results of the questionnaire-based survey.

We conclude that multiskilling does indeed increase job satisfaction if – and only if – the process of introducing multiskilling is handled properly and if people feel that they are up-skilled. A significant number of multiskilled employees did not indicate higher job satisfaction than single-skilled employees and the main reason was the way in which the new job designs had been introduced. People management skills are very important throughout the entire project.

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