

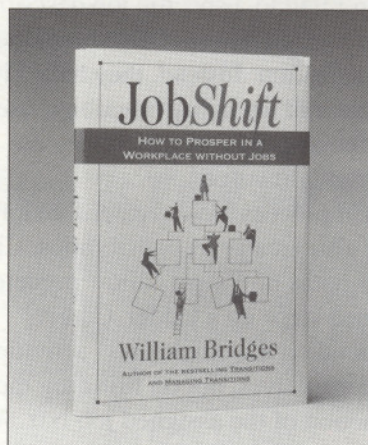
# SOUNDVIEW Executive Book Summaries™

FILE: PERSONAL

## *How to Prosper in a Workplace Without Jobs*

# JOB SHIFT

By William Bridges



### THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

Henry has a job. Like most jobs, Henry's job comes with a title (accountant), a location in the organization (in the accounting department), and a specific function (accounting). In another department — say marketing — more urgent tasks may need to be accomplished. But that's not Henry's concern. That's not his job.

Sound familiar? Henry works in a traditional workplace where the work that needs to be done is broken up into specific jobs. But the traditional workplace is disappearing fast. In fact, Henry himself may be history as his company downsizes, reengineers, or decides an outside firm can do the accounting more efficiently.

Many organizations trying to cut costs and become more efficient are simply cutting jobs. The more innovative companies, however, aren't just reducing their workforces. They are changing the ways employees work. They're moving away from work divided among specific functions (jobs) to work based on teams and projects. Teams of employees, and perhaps independent contractors, come together to build a new product, much like neighbors in farm towns came together to put up a barn. When the product is finished, the team breaks up — just like those groups of neighbors.

These types of work arrangements already exist in many high-tech companies. And they are coming soon to a company near you.

So what should you do? You could start sending out résumés. Of course, you'd only be exchanging one vulnerable job for another.

Or you can decide to survive, and even thrive, by breaking out of your job box. Forget about the job position. Find the needs that are not being met in the company. Find ways to increase your contribution to your company. Create new projects. Join cross-functional teams. In other words, find the barns that need fixing.

This summary will show you how.

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## The 'Dejobbing' of the Workplace

Jobs are disappearing — and this time for good. It's not a question of the economy. Even in periods of recovery, lost jobs aren't returning. And workers are being permanently (not temporarily) laid off.

Where are the jobs going? In some companies, the question is simply mathematical. The number of jobs is being reduced.

But in more and more companies, jobs are not just being cut down. They are being transformed. Through modern technology and innovative organizational restructuring, companies are creating more efficient, productive ways to organize the work. The resulting reduction in the number of jobs is one of the by-products of these efforts.

### Technology and Work

The increasingly rapid technological advances of recent decades have been a driving force behind the transformation of the workplace.

In today's workplace, data are inserted between the worker and the product. At a television station in Boston, for example, there are no camera operators manipulating the cameras. One technician runs six cameras from a PC.

Such automated manipulation of data requires less manpower than traditional physical manipulation. Five workers at the TV station have lost their jobs. But more important, the worker who remains is an information worker.

"There will always be enormous amounts of work to do, (but) the work will not be contained in the familiar envelopes we call jobs."

Information-based work challenges traditional rules of the workplace. Long production runs, extended chains of command, and fixed job descriptions don't apply to a world of instant networking and communication of data.

Instead, the emergence of information systems in the workplace has brought unprecedented flexibility. Workers can now be located in their homes (or in planes, or at customers' workplaces) and still be directly connected to the central office.

Divisions of a company can be dispersed geographically and still interact fully. (Philadelphia-based Rosenbluth Travel, for example, located its data-entry operations in Linton, North Dakota.)

Another development involves non-technological reorganization of processes. Reengineering projects are creating more efficient processes to carry out the tasks in a company.

## The New Look of Jobs

How do these changes create the "dejobbed" workplace?

Since the industrial revolution, multi-hour chunks of work known as "jobs" have been the foundation of employment. Not any more.

First, more and more employees are not working in multi-hour chunks. Instead, they are working part-time, in temporary positions, or as freelancers.

But more important, the *idea* of jobs as the core unit of employment is disappearing.

Employees in organizations are being defined by what they do rather than what position they hold. The specific functional responsibilities and rigid hierarchies of the past are being replaced by shifting responsibilities in flat organizations.

Under the new rules, employees aren't tied to a specific job description located in a specific slot in the organization. Instead, they have different and changing functions based on the activities in which they are currently involved.

Employees have greater freedom, but also greater responsibilities. Career paths no longer follow predetermined steps up a ladder. Careers depend on the employees' activities and initiatives, not on fulfilling the function of the assigned job box. ☆

## Jobshift by William Bridges

*Selected by Soundview as an Outstanding Book for Business People*

**The author:** Consultant and best-selling author William Bridges, formerly a professor of English, made a shift to the field of transition management in the mid-1970s.

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