

# JOB ROTATION

## OVERVIEW OF RESEARCH

### Key Points

- **Why research?** Questions raised about whether regional staff should change assigned counties periodically to minimize potential risks that could stem from aligning with local staff.
- **What did we find?** Research suggests that job rotation:
  - May prevent some in-group favoritism.
  - May jeopardize intellectual capital (i.e., program knowledge, experience, relationships).
  - May improve both employee and employer learning, but probably will not improve employee motivation.

### Research Summary

- **Job Rotation** is the planned movement of personnel between positions (both functionally and geographically) and has been used for a number of different purposes.
  - **Within-function rotation** refers to rotation between positions with similar levels of responsibility and in the same operational or functional area. Within-function rotation is often used to increase levels of motivation and ensure optimum staffing.
  - **Cross-functional rotation** refers to movement between positions in different parts of the organization and typically involves a sequence of enhanced scope and responsibility. Cross-functional rotation is often used to increase the knowledge and skills of the individual an aim at leadership development and career advancement.
- **Three theories of job rotation:** Some research found evidence to support employee learning theory and employer learning theory but little evidence to support employee motivation theory.
  - **Employee Learning Theory:** Employees who rotate through several different positions within an organization have the opportunity to develop new skills and knowledge that they would not otherwise develop. As employees rotate through positions, they develop a broader and deeper understanding of the organizational structure and outputs. With well-trained, knowledgeable employees, organizations can be more flexible in how they assign tasks and responsibilities, potentially enhancing their ability to meet the needs of clients.
  - **Employer Learning Theory:** Job rotation provides employers an opportunity to assess the strengths and weaknesses of employees across a variety of contexts. Specifically, it allows employers to assess which strengths/weaknesses are due to an employee's general ability versus those that are due to position-specific factors. Knowledge of both general abilities and position-specific factors that affect performance allow employers to make more effective personnel decisions.
  - **Employee Motivation Theory:** Employee motivation is increased through job rotation because the act of moving positions keeps work interesting, new, and challenging for the employee and tends to elicit higher levels of engagement and innovation.

- **Rotation may protect against in-group favoritism:** Job rotation has been shown to be an effective strategy for decreasing the negative effects that in-group favoritism can have on performance while increasing collaboration. It may be particularly valuable to organizations with high task interdependence.
  - **In-group favoritism** describes a group's tendency to prioritize the needs and success of its members before the needs and success of those that exist outside of the group. In organizations that require high interdependence, in-group favoritism can decrease collaboration at critical interface points, thereby decreasing overall system performance.
  - In organizations where **task interdependence** is high, personnel must be highly responsive to the work and needs of others to ensure no gaps in production or service.
  
- **Job rotation may present a risk to intellectual capital:** "Whereas the job rotation process can be viewed as advantageous for IC management, it also entails risks. The change from the predecessor to the successor is a critical stage. If no knowledge was documented by the predecessor the 'newcomer' needs to fight his or her way to necessary knowledge to fulfill tasks satisfactorily."
  
- **Resources**
  - Bennet (2003). Job Rotation: Its role in promoting learning in organizations. *Development and Learning in Organizations: And International Journal*. 17(4). 7-9.
  - Burnold, J., Durst, S. (2012). Intellectual capital risks and job rotation. *Journal of Intellectual Capital*. 13(2). 178-195.
  - Erikson, T. & Ortega, J. (2006). The Adoption of Job Rotation: Testing the Theories. *Industrial & Labor Relations Review*. 59(4). 653-666.
  - Wagner, J.P., Grigg, N., Mann, R. Mohammad, M. (2017). High task interdependence: Job rotation and other approaches for overcoming in-group favoritism. *Journal of Manufacturing Technology Management*. 28(4). 485-505