

THE REVERBERATING EFFECTS OF JOB ROTATION: A THEORETICAL EXPLORATION OF NONROTATERS' FAIRNESS PERCEPTIONS

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Human resource researchers have long regarded job rotation as a valuable form of job-based experiential learning. However, given the dearth of prior conceptual work in the collection of rotation research and the sparse attention given to rotation's collateral effects, we pursue two objectives in this article. First, to guide future research we develop a general model of the fairness perceptions and responses related to job rotation decisions. In this effort, we apply organizational justice concepts within a social information-processing framework. Second, we advance specific propositions to address the reverberating effects of job rotation on nonrotating employees. Specific recommendations for future research and implications for practice are also discussed.

Researchers and practitioners have long recognized the value of work experience in career development (Hall, 1986; Morrison & Hock, 1986). One of the more widely used career development strategies is job rotation, which is a form of job-based experiential learning (Noe & Ford, 1992). According to one study of 694 U.S. business establishments (with 50 or more employees), at least 43 percent used job rotation (Osterman, 1994). And repeatedly, it has been suggested that rotational assignments are one of the primary tools employed by well-managed organizations for employee development (Brooks, 1996; Burke & Steensma, 1998; Gittleman, Horrigan, & Joyce, 1998; McCauley, Ruderman, Ohlott, & Morrow, 1994; Pearson, 1987; Saari, Johnson, McLaughlin, & Zimmerle, 1988).

As the conventional notion of confining people to narrow career paths and specializations diminishes, the use of nonlinear career moves is congruent with

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the increasingly "boundary-less" career systems emerging in today's firms (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996). And with firms increasingly adopting horizontal structures, cross-unit collaboration, and team-based work strategies (Daft, 1998), lateral rather than vertical career moves are more readily supported. Given current career mobility options in post-modern organizations, the use of rotation will therefore become even more prevalent (Ferris, Buckley, & Allen, 1992; Leibowitz, Kaye, & Farren, 1990; Noe & Ford, 1992).

Of the research that exists on job rotation, most focuses on rotation's proposed benefits. For example, London's (1989) evaluation of a job rotation program for scientists and engineers indicated that employees participating in job rotation had a greater understanding of the rewards associated with collaboration, the value of initiating and comparing different problem solutions, and the value of other functional viewpoints. Campion, Cheraskin, and Stevens' (1994) study of 255 finance employees in a large pharmaceutical firm indicated job rotation produces several benefits: personal development (self-assessment and awareness of managerial styles), stimulating work (skill and task variety), organizational integration (transfer of culture and increased networks), and career affect (career involvement and satisfaction). As such, the collection of rotation research has primarily concentrated on gains for rotating employees and neglected the circuitous effects of job rotation strategies, especially on nonrotating employees.

Due to the dearth of prior conceptual work in this collection of research and the sparse attention given to rotation's collateral effects, our present objectives were: (1) to develop a general model of the fairness perceptions and responses related to job rotation decisions and (2) to advance specific propositions regarding the unintended consequences of rotation on nonrotaters. We apply organizational justice concepts as well as social information-processing theory to develop our model. Based on this general model, propositions are then specifically developed to predict nonrotaters' responses to perceived inequity in job rotation decisions. Lastly, specific implications for future practice and research are discussed.

JOB ROTATION

Job rotation provides employees with a series of lateral assignments throughout a company and a meaningful change in job content (Wexley & Latham, 1991). Rotation differs from cross-training strategies, in which employees learn their coworkers' jobs to provide increased worker flexibility. Furthermore, as a means of internal staffing, job rotation is distinct from promotion. Career promotions involve vertical movements within a career trajectory accompanied by a modification in compensation grade and an increase in responsibility (Vardi, 1980), whereas job rotations generally preclude changes in compensation (Campion et al., 1994).

A primary objective of rotation strategies is the enhancement of employees' experiential database (Morrison & Hock, 1986). As such, job rotations are

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