

port and Analysis division, said results show that while companies are embracing new markets, they give short shrift to the threats business travelers' face. "They feel exposed to danger and need necessary support," she said.

According to the U.S. business travelers who responded to the CRG survey:

- Forty-six percent said there is no clear travel security policy at their firm, and 23% said they get no security support from their firm.

- Thirty-six percent has little confidence that their company would be able to give reliable advice in the event of an emergency while they

were abroad.

- Eighty percent believes their company has a legal obligation to advise and support them, and 52% would consider legal action in the event of an emergency being mishandled.

CRG says the threat of legal action is real from travelers who feel unprotected and notes there have been civil cases against corporations and many out-of-court settlements. Legal action has financial costs for corporations, but CRG says the more serious damage can be internal, to morale and confidence in management.

The attitude of U.S. business trav-

elers suggests that issues relating to travel safety are only going to grow more important, as can be seen from the following:

- Thirty-five percent feels that business travelers are becoming more attractive targets for extremists and terrorists than other travelers.

- Forty-three percent thinks the world will become a more dangerous place for business people to travel in the next five years.

- Business travelers are most concerned about a war zone (89%), terrorism (86%), and health issues such as malaria (73%) when they travel abroad. □

RETENTION

Energize & Enhance Employee Value With Job Rotation

Job rotation is best known and used for training new entrants to an organization or bolstering the development of high-potential employees. However, it can be used for other purposes as well, including to foster innovation, to cushion a company against loss of key employees, and to reinvigorate the workforce.

SHARE & SHARE ALIKE

"Most companies don't effectively move talent within the organization," said John Sullivan, professor of management at San Francisco State University. "Instead, most business units manage their own workforce like a closed system. There is little conscious 'trading' of talent between business units."

While line managers may initially resist rotations—fearing disruptions and turf threats—it is important to consider the benefits of building skills, cross-pollination of ideas, greater systematic understanding of the business, and enhanced productivity. These benefits can far outweigh the possible costs. (A list of reasons to consider job rotation is in the accompanying sidebar.)

"It keeps people fresh and energized and contributing," said Graham Lowe, a Toronto-based HR consultant.

Cross-training can also mitigate boredom and monotony, according to Tom Miceli, professor of economics at the University of Connecticut. "There is a lot of anecdotal evidence

that fresh eyes on a problem lead to new ideas."

The broad knowledge gained by job rotation also insulates both the company and the employee from the shock of change, Miceli added. "If you only do one thing and that thing gets eliminated, you're expendable," he said. If each employee has mastered many aspects of a company's operations, both are more flexible and agile in a competitive world.

In an era of talent shortages, job rotation may be a better option than sending employees for formal education, Sullivan noted. "Studies have shown that 75% of all learning occurs on the job," he said.

Job rotation can be a workable option for employees ranging from

new entrants to manager-level:

- **New hires.** Perhaps the most common use of job rotation is for new college-graduate hires. Often seen at professional services firms, such programs give new hires the chance to get a taste of different areas of specialization or services to which they can later commit on a full-time basis.

- **Midcareer management development and succession planning.** Rotating high-potential individuals through various departments and functions is frequently used as a part of the promotion and development process.

- **Retirement planning and knowledge retention.** Employees moving toward retirement are also often ideal candidates for flexible career arrangements such as job rotation.

Such roles allow veteran or “plateaued” employees to mentor and coach newer employees and to download their knowledge base while still on the job.

TYPES OF PROGRAMS

Variations of job rotation programs include:

- **Project rotation.** Although most traditional job rotations are “whole-job positions,” there is no reason employees cannot maintain their day jobs. This model is familiar to most professional firms that operate on project or team models, according to Lowe.

Virtual rotations also allow employees to maintain their regular jobs while rotating through various special projects. During a virtual rotation, employees might rotate between projects without having to leave their workstations, Sullivan said.

- **Partial/one-day-a-week rotation.** Rotations can also be based on an allocation of time where employees work at their regular jobs for specific periods and rotate to another department or project for

the rest of the day.

A variation is a split-week rotation where, for example, employees spend four days on their regular jobs and Fridays in their rotation departments.

- **Cross-functional rotation.** Most traditional job rotations move people between tasks in a single department. A cross-functional rotation moves people between distinct business units to allow a wider range of experiences. A common example would be moving a technician or engineer into a business position such as sales to increase his or her awareness of customer needs.

- **Cross-region rotation.** Rotation between business units in different regions or countries helps to increase an employee’s understanding of different cultures and business strategies, Sullivan said, and can help headquarters staff un-

derstand on-the-ground conditions in the regions.

- **Internship prior to a rotation.** For new college-graduate hires, an employer can dramatically improve success rates for rotations by requiring candidates to complete an internship prior to college graduation. This allows initial on-the-job prescreening that will help identify candidates with the most potential to succeed in a rotation program.

- **“Fill-in,” temporary, or team assignments.** Rotation programs can also be used to fill short-term needs, such as maternity, sick, and vacation leaves or to fill vacancies before a replacement is hired. Assignments to departmental or cross-functional teams are another form of job rotation that can help individuals develop faster, Sullivan said.

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28 Reasons to Consider a Job Rotation Program

1. Retention tool
2. Recruiting tool
3. Individual growth
4. Prepare employees for promotion
5. Skill development and learning
6. Breaking down trust barriers, eliminating the “us/them” mentality
7. Breaking down silos between departments
8. Cross-pollination of ideas
9. New people asking “why” questions spark greater understanding
10. Job preview
11. Spreading best practices rapidly
12. Exposing employees to the “big picture”
13. Exposing employees to real-life diversity
14. Filling jobs
15. Preventing job boredom or burnout
16. Involving managers more in the training process
17. Identifying bad managers
18. Bringing “fresh eyes” to problems
19. Exposing employees to diverse or international environments
20. Assessing employees for promotion or demotion, even termination
21. Backfill protection
22. Cross-training
23. Reinvigorating and motivating
24. Alternative employee for FMLA, disability, or military leaves
25. Building, reinforcing, or spreading culture
26. Redeployment tool for urgent business needs
27. Redeployment to avoid layoffs in a group
28. Information sharing

(Source: John Sullivan, San Francisco State University)

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• **Interdepartmental mentoring or coaching assignments.** This arrangement allows seasoned employees to transfer their functional expertise across disciplines, Lowe said. For example, a veteran writer, lawyer, or engineer may coach employees in several different departments.

GETTING STARTED

Sullivan identified two basic types of job rotation arrangements:

- Formal programs that are centrally administered; and
- Formats offered to managers as optional tools for their workgroup.

In either case, the key to success is support from top management, according to Lisa Cheraskin, retired director of leadership development for Eli Lilly and Co. (Indianapolis).

The best argument in support of job rotation, she said, can be made through emphasizing “the need for general management talent.” A robust job rotation program is also “a real draw for recruiting.”

Cheraskin emphasized, however, that “somebody needs to be paying attention” to ensure optimal performance of the program.

The tension in a job rotation program is the balance between breadth and depth, she said. Rotating employees through positions too quickly, especially if they move through so rapidly that they do not experience a full business cycle, can rob participants of

a chance to see the consequences of their decisions. Take care in designing the programs to make sure the jobs are “deep and rich enough.”

In addition, rotations must not only match an employee’s need for experience but also meet the employer’s business needs. In both cases, the decision should include calculating whether the need is great enough “to justify a six-month learning curve,” Cheraskin said. Technical and development goals should be clearly defined by both the employee and managers at the beginning of rotations, she said.

Internal resistance to job rotations can occur even in a company with an ingrained culture of job rotation, Cheraskin noted. One of the top issues is that managers often “don’t want to give someone up,” especially an employee who is “so critical in a role or area that they cannot be spared.”

On the other side, the manager who receives a rotation “may be hesitant” both to spend the time training the new employee and to welcome a stranger.

Among the other pitfalls to watch for when establishing a job rotation program, Sullivan warned that turf wars may erupt with development or recruiting departments that view job rotation as an inexpensive way to develop talent and as a threat to their areas of responsibility.

In addition, employees may want to try something they are not good

at and waste their time and employer resources. The company could lose rising stars if they gain skills and experience the company can’t accommodate or compensate.

MEASURING SUCCESS

The benefits of having established robust job rotation programs may be difficult to quantify, Miceli said.

“I would expect to see intangible benefits, like increased morale,” he said, which might show up in a measurable metric such as increased productivity and innovation or reduced job turnover and absenteeism.

Enhanced job satisfaction and interest might be demonstrated in measures such as performance evaluations and employee surveys, Miceli added. “But it may be hard to separate and attribute this to one particular cause,” he said.

“Job rotation typically appears as a component of a bundle of attributes that also includes lifetime tenure, work participation in decision making, and distribution schemes that include some form of profit-sharing,” Miceli said in a 1998 paper co-authored by Metin Cosgel, also a University of Connecticut economics professor.

Miceli and Cosgel found that organizations with robust job rotation programs “receive a distinct set of benefits” from them and “tend to be innovative.” The authors warned, however, that “job rotation by itself does not guarantee innovation.”

The reason: Job rotation innovation is worker-initiated, so employees need an environment to implement their ideas. “In particular the firm must have an organizational structure that allows workers a degree of autonomy and participation in decision making. The workers must have the right and independence to experiment with ideas and also the opportunity to share information and seek the implementation of ideas into reality.” □

Future issues:

- The Social Networking Phenomenon—and How It May Change Recruiting and Training Forever
- *Exclusive Survey Results:* New Data on HR Pay Trends Help HR Professionals Assess Their Compensation
- What Can U.S. HR Professionals Learn From Their Overseas Peers?
- Employee Surveys: What to Ask, What to Tell
- Privacy Protection Update: How HR Departments Have Responded to the Challenge

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