

ATTITUDE TOWARDS JOB ROTATION IN KENYAN UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES

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ABSTRACT

Job rotation is widely practiced in academic libraries. However, continued complaints from staff may affect the services being offered if the complaints are not addressed. This study assessed the factors that influence the attitudes of library staff towards job rotation through analysis of perceptions, opinions and thought. Structured questionnaires were used to collect data at the University of Nairobi and Kenyatta University libraries in Kenya using a sample of 57 respondents. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the responses from the respondents using SPSS. Using data collected by a questionnaire, respondent's views on the subject matter were sought and analyzed using frequency counts and percentages. The results showed that >50% of the respondents agreed that job rotation was important while less than 5% suggested that job rotation helps to acquire new skills. Good working environment for library staff ranked highest followed by salary and allowances as factors that motivate staff to participate in job rotation. Based on the results, library personnel should enhance job commitment in order to solve library related problems. This study recommends the management of Kenyan University libraries to consider adequate staff job design, description and employees' participation in decision making.

KEY WORDS: Job rotation, Attitude, Academic Libraries.

INTRODUCTION

For an academic library to stay dynamic and deliver quality services, it ought to have adequate and well-trained employees. This is for the reason that staff in such libraries play a critical role as they provide a link between the library users and information resources (Saka and Salman, 2014). They should therefore have relevant professional qualifications and practical hands on skills for effective service delivery. The supervisory responsibility of staff is also vital to the efficient operations of the library. Library managers should therefore be concerned with recruiting, training, and retaining qualified and experienced staff (Järvi and Uusitalo, 2004; Saka and Salman, 2014). Such staff should be carefully selected with due consideration for the key role and functions to be performed.

Effective staff organizational strategies will therefore ensure best quality service delivery to the users (Olorunsola, 2000). In the library setting, the skills and expertise of librarians can be restricted if they become familiar only with working in their own section as career requires

individual growth involving improvement of one's expertise and technical skills (Järvi and Uusitalo, 2004). Therefore the progress of a staff from a position of greenhorn to a competent librarian is strengthened by the use of job rotation (Malinski, 2002; Adomi, 2006). As a technique, job rotation assists staff transfer knowledge to library users (Malinski, 2002)

Malinski (2002) described job rotation as the placements of employees made primarily for purposes of enabling on-the-job training. During the exercise, the employee is interchanged through several jobs at regular intervals (Malinski, 2002; Bennet, 2003). It is therefore worth noting that JR can speed up the growth of newly hired staff when deployed in diverse sections in the library where they gain knowledge and experience. Rotation therefore, supports staff by providing enabling environment for generation of fresh ideas.

Scholars have attempted to divide job rotation in some forms (Ekere, 2012). For example “within functional rotation” staff rotates between jobs of

similar levels of responsibility. An example of this kind of rotation in libraries, involves the rotation of staff between say a service counter and short loan section since the two perform more or less related functions. In “cross-functional rotation”, staff is moved between a numbers of jobs in different departments over a period of time. This form of rotation helps individual staff gain more experience and therefore raises the level of responsibility. (Bennett, 2003). “Lateral rotation” on the other hand is concerned with the training of managers. Such managers go through different work environment that help them develop competencies in areas such as management, decision making and other related exposures (Grobler, et.al.2003; Adetoro, 2014; Ekere, 2012). Examples of this form of rotation include circumstances where section heads rotate between service counter and acquisitions. Lower higher levels rotation involves movement of staff for a short time in a particular section for example staff can rotate for two hours or a few days in different areas in the library. But the same rotation at higher level may take a much longer period because training may

involve complex functions. This form of rotation may sometimes take several years (Grobler et al., 2003).

Librarians are trained to work in different divisions and departments. This intent is achieved through a regular staff rotation program in academic libraries. Even as rotation is regularly used in libraries, its successful implementation often provokes mixed feelings amongst the staff affected. Most studies have shown that library staff may express unwillingness to participate in the rotation exercise citing different reasons for their action (Shoran, 2006; Järvi and Uusitalo, 2004). Such views may be a demonstration of attitudes towards the exercise (Shoran, 2006). Additionally, staff perceptions at times make library managers reluctant to rotate staff for fear of affecting their moral at work (Järvi and Uusitalo, 2004). Little movement of staff on the other hand may hinder the career progress of the individual staff, which may stagnate the staff in one place for too long (Line, 1996; Olorunsola, 2001). It is however not clear on the various problems associated with job rotation in Kenyan universities. This study aimed at

examining the perceptions, opinions, thoughts, reactions and problems associated with job rotation and establish recommendations on best practices in library management.

METHODOLOGY

Participants

This study was carried out in two Kenyan public Universities; University of Nairobi and Kenyatta University. The research sample was 57 (30 male, 27 female) staff. The research was conducted at the University of Nairobi and Kenyatta University libraries in Kenya. Study participants were professional librarians (15) Para-professional (37) and non-professional (5). Participants were male and female librarians who had worked between 1-30 years in the library and information sciences career

Instrument

To meet the aims of the study, questionnaire was designed for library staff. Items in the questionnaire were divided into two sections. Section one focused on demographic items and items in section two sought the views of staff using score. They asked about both negative and positive effects of job

rotation. Schedule interview was also conducted on selected university management staff to correlate the information obtained from library staff and ascertain factors that motivate productivity.

Data Analysis

This study employed descriptive statistics using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) which is a software tool for data analysis. Descriptive statistics was used to analyze the responses from the respondents' questionnaires. Mean values for each research question was summarized as percentages and presented in tables.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The implementation of job rotation in academic libraries has numerous effects on members of staff. Esharenana (2006) noted that staff who had gone through a rotation exercise, reported having acquired new skills by working in new environment. Findings from the collected data revealed the general views held by staff on skills and responsibilities. Majority of the respondents representing over 93% of the sample population agreed that job

rotation prepares staff for new knowledge. Those that were uncertain, responsibilities and enables individuals represented 4 %, and 4 % disagreed to update their professional skills and with this question (Table 1).

Table 1. Agreement Level to Pro- Staff rotation

Importance of Job rotation	Score		
	Agree (%)	Uncertain (%)	Disagree (%)
Acquire new Skills	92	4	4
Ready to embrace	75	9	16
Escape from routine	63	16	21
Foster inter-personal relations	77	11	12
Identify incompetent staff	55	25	20

The majority of respondents thought that Job rotation helps one to know the in-house practices in all sections of the library, which was similar to findings from Admit (2006). On whether staff is ready to embrace reshuffle, 76% of the respondents agreed and 16 % disagreed that staff were always ready to accept reshuffle whenever implemented. Since staff rotation has been noted to speed up staff development and avail room for staff to generate fresh ideas (Bennet, 2003; Baro, 2012), majority of the respondents in this study noted that rotation is a management responsibility and therefore staff have to accept it so

long as it is not used as a punitive measure.

Olorunsola (2000) noted that it is the responsibility of library managers to deploy staff with appropriate skills to different service points at the right time. Participation in rotation is therefore an

indication of loyalty especially bearing in mind that staff are capable of working in all sections in the library. There was however a feeling among some staff that one needs to be prepared well psychologically incase of job rotation. Some respondents commented that abrupt deployment can sometimes leave one with little skills gained in a section. Scheduled interviews with

management team in both universities revealed similar sentiments. It was noted that most of the respondents had spent an appreciable period of time working in the libraries. Majority of the respondents that had been rotated gained skills in different sections of the library. This was an opportunity that helped them to acquaint with other operations of the library departments. It was also noted that library staff could work in any section but this depended on their attitude and how they performed. These responses clearly supported the view that staff were positive about staff reshuffle, as far as the exercise can offer new challenges and learning environment and correlated the findings by Esharenana (2006) in Nigerian university libraries. On the issue of boredom, respondents clearly felt that staff rotation helps solve problems of routine and boring jobs. 63% agreed and 21% disagreed that rotation helps solve problems of boredom. However, only 16% were uncertain. According to Admit (2006), staff rotation in libraries reduces boredom and increases motivation through diversification of jobs and other activities. These changes motivate staff

and help to overcome monotony of routine operations in service areas (Akanbi, 2011; Admit, 2006). Some respondents in other studies feel that all library work is boring and therefore reshuffle has little effect (Esharenana, 2006). Therefore staff rotation is viewed as an important activity that reduces boredom and expose library staff to all the operations in other departments.

Several respondents (77%) agreed that rotation helps staff develop interpersonal relations with only 13% disagreeing that this does not happen. These views show that there is need for job rotation exercise to be evaluated in terms of benefits and its impact on staff attitudes and library services. According to Mullins (1993), if tasks to be performed are very similar and routine, then once the person gets familiar with the new task, the work may quickly prove boring again. This observation is an indication of the value staff attaches to good human relations in the libraries they work. Interpersonal relationship at place of work binds staff and enhances good communication among staff. It also promotes good customer care and therefore contributes

to good relations among the employees who mix with people at different cultural backgrounds.

Table 2. Agreement Level to Anti-Staff Reshuffle

Limitation of Job rotation	Score		
	Agree (%)	Uncertain (%)	Disagree (%)
Punitive tool	12	25	58
Limits specialization	46	18	37
Disrupts planning	34	11	56
Demotes non-performers	12	23	65
Affects specialized staff	26	7	67

Although it has been observed that some managers use rotation in work place as a punitive tool (Olorunsola, 2001), majority of the respondents in our study 58% disagreed that rotation is considered punitive in academic libraries. Others at 14% strongly disagreed and 25% were uncertain. Only 5% agreed and 25% were uncertain that reshuffle is considered punitive (Table 2). In this study the respondents reasoned that staff rotation was a method of improving one's professional skills and should therefore be taken positively by everyone. Comments made by some of the respondents suggested that rotation may be considered punitive perhaps based

on some office disagreements that sometimes lead to transfers. The above data shows that there were mixed perception on specialization. 46% observed that rotation discourages specialization while 37% disagreed.

Some respondents at 18% were uncertain. Subject specialization could be one reason many staff opposed rotation since staff in some circumstances need considerable period to be able to master work in certain sections in the library, hence the feeling that rotation was not favorable for deep understanding in a specific area in the library. Change can really raise motivation and greatly overcome the monotony of routine operations. Adomi

(2006) points out the importance of job rotation as it helps reduce the possibility of boredom and goes a long way to motivate staff through diversification of activities.

About disruption of work schedules, 56% disagreed that rotation interferes with their work schedules. Respondents at 34% declared that rotation disrupted their work and only 11% were uncertain. The explanation given was that staff is normally replaced when others go on leave or are transferred. It is important therefore to note that all staff are well trained to work efficiently in all areas, although it may take a little time for a new staff to get familiarized in the new environment. The respondents were asked to state their opinions on whether highly skilled staff should be retained in their sections. On this, 67% did not support the idea that highly skilled staff should be retained in particular sections. At least 26% agreed and only 7% were uncertain on this statement. However, majority of those

who reacted to this question, held the view that skilled staff should learn about other areas in the library too. The support for rotation may be attributed to the fact that well skilled staff should also transfer their skills to other areas, a factor that was consistent with previous studies (Järvi and Uusitalo, 2004).

Perhaps certain sections would require a skilled staff for continuity of services and especially to train new incoming staff. Respondents' comments compares well with the findings of McLean (2006) when he notes that if staff specialize in one area of work then when gaps appear after staff quits, there may be no staff to temporarily fill such gaps. Every employee therefore requires appropriate skills that can enable him or her to work efficiently and effectively in all sections of the organization.

Table 3: Factors that influence productivity

Motivators	Very Important (%)	Important (%)	Not Important (%)
Good working environment	85	10	5
Opportunity Training	70	30	-
Study leave	65	33	2
Good Salary	83	17	-
Mentoring	50	45	5

Based on findings from scheduled interviews, good working environment for library staff ranked highest (85%) followed by salary and allowances (Table 3). They considered these factors to motivate staff to participate in job rotation. Most of the staff considered promotion, study leave, workshops and on job training as incentives to influence productivity during job rotation exercises. Mentoring by senior staff was ranked as an important factor necessary for high productivity where senior library staff are expected to view support staff as trainees to be nurtured to succeed them but not as rivals. Additionally, the interviews showed that mentoring was important motivator to enhanced productivity and hence

senior library staff must give adequate encouragement to their junior staff.

Job rotation was viewed as one of the many library workplace learning tools. There was agreement that rotations occur amongst employees at the same level of responsibility within the library set-up for a fixed period of time. More of job rotation schemes were used with new graduate employees, in preparation for appointment to a substantive post. These findings were in line with previous studies in some libraries in Nigeria where job rotation was used to promote employee learning as well as employer learning the strengths of individual employees' (Saka and Salman 2014). However, it was suggested that rotation was a better tool for building some skills such as

improving knowledge about the organization more than technical expertise.

Since this study was biased to two Universities in Kenya, the sample size is limited, as we targeted a less than 30% of the total employees. The research findings would also be limited to factors and conditions existing at the two universities, as at the time of the study.

CONCLUSION

This study has revealed that job rotation plays a key role in the career development of individual members of staff in University libraries. This was revealed in the findings when majority of the respondents indicated their willingness to impress the exercise. For staff to gain proper skills, they required active participation in job rotation exercise that takes them through various functional areas of the library. It is therefore imperative that individual staff competencies that can be help them benefit from job rotation are identified so that staff with appropriate skills should be deployed to relevant sections.

Change can really raise motivation and greatly overcome the monotony of routine operations. There is therefore need for library managers to create keen interest in the possible factors that can motivate the staff. The findings also showed that there was no clear policy on job rotation and this was a great concern to many staff. It was particular the job rotation exercise lacked clear time table. To enhance the effectiveness of the use of job rotation in libraries, there is need for the library managers to formulate job rotation policies and ensure these policies are applied for the effective implementation of the program. There is need also to address each of the factors that have influence on staff attitudes towards job rotation as unveiled in this study.

Acknowledgment

We would like to acknowledge the cooperation from University Library staff and management for participating in this study.

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