



## Ergo Tip of the Month - February 2008

### A New Reason to Rotate

Job Rotation has been a useful means of reducing employee's exposure to ergonomic risk factors. By limiting the amount of time a worker performs tasks with high ergonomic impact and also providing periods of low impact work, we can contribute to the safety and well-being of the employee. The benefits to Job Rotation span beyond just the reduction of physical exposure to certain task demands, as a number of psychological benefits have also been reported..

Before implementing any job rotation scheme, you should take time to evaluate the work environment and tasks assigned to employees to see if job rotation could work. The benefits associated with job rotation can be easily lost if not implemented properly or in the correct environment.

#### **The Benefits**

The main benefit of implementing Job Rotation can be described by the concept of Job Enlargement. As a person performs the same repetitive tasks day in and day out, especially in an assembly environment, they are more likely to lose focus on the task and morale can worsen. If you add additional tasks to the person's workload, or introduce a new stimulus to their work day, they are more likely to concentrate on their work. The worker's job satisfaction can also improve because, either the worker has successfully completed a new set of tasks, or because their job has become more interesting.

It should also be noted that there is an additional benefit from the cross training that takes place as part of Job Rotation. Cross training increases the skill set of the employees and makes it easier for employees to cover different operations if a coworker is absent. In some cases, Job Rotation has included inspection or quality operations, which can lead to improved product quality since employees have a better understanding of how mistakes in their tasks can affect downstream operations.

#### **The Disadvantages**

Unfortunately, there are some disadvantages associated with Job Rotation. There is a learning curve associated with job rotation, which can lead to temporary reductions in production or increased quality problems. Job Rotation may not always be a viable option in your organization if there are many highly specialized tasks or the work is not repetitive (e.g. a job shop that builds unique pieces). It may also be difficult to justify implementing a Job Rotation scheme without being able to show management potential savings from preventing Ergonomic injuries. Lastly, the effects of Job Enlargement through Job Rotation may not be permanent, after a while it is possible that employees will return to feeling that the work is monotonous and their morale could begin to decline again.

## **Things To Try at Home or Work**

Here are some task modifications which can help demonstrate some of the benefits of Job Enrichment. Although none of these involve Job Rotation, they may help you appreciate that increasing the attention required to perform tasks can help break up everyday monotony.

- Brush your teeth with your eyes closed or using your non-dominant hand
- Try eating while using silverware in your opposite hand.
- Use your computer mouse with the opposite hand

During these tasks you'll find that you need to concentrate to make sure you can perform the tasks properly. If you were to do these tasks repeatedly you would become better at it and more efficient.

## **Reference**

Greenberg, J. and Baron, Robert A. Behavior in Organizations: Understanding and Managing the Human Side of Work. Prentice Hall:New Jersey. 2003. pp. 212-219

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