

Overview on Job Swapping Practices in the Public Procurement Context in OECD and EU Countries

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1. Background and methodology for the study¹

Job swapping, secondment or job rotation, is defined as a system or a procedure which allows an employee to spend time in another organisation or in another internal position to learn and get a wider perspective of his/her tasks and various functions related to it.

The aim of this study is to identify the ways and existing practices of job swapping which have been implemented in the public sector and more specifically in the context of public procurement.

Typically, job swapping is applied to develop i) personnel, and/or, ii) the organisation through comparative learning (eOsmo 2017). To serve its purpose as a driver for development, the specific goals of each job swapping program should always be well defined with clear goals. The desired benefits of a job swapping programme are the following (UKEssays 2015):

- On a personal level: job enrichment, development (career, leadership abilities etc.),
- On an organisational level: better alignment of competencies with organisation's needs and performance improvement.

From the employees' perspective, job swapping enables learning new skills, benchmarking and sharing competences. From the organisations' perspective, personnel becomes familiar with the operations of different units, different working methods and gains an overall understanding of the organisation's processes (eOsmo 2017).

There are three different types of job swapping practices: i) internal, ii) a loan (one person transfers), or, iii) exchange (two people swap positions) (eOsmo 2017). Job swapping is either mandatory or voluntary for employees. Other aspects to define are the swap's duration and effect to the employee's salary and other contract terms during the time spent in another position.

Several benefits from the HR perspective have been recognised. These are: i) the availability of new talent as resources enables reacting to needs faster, and, ii) job swapping opportunities improve the attractiveness of the employer. Furthermore, internal job swapping enables recruiting internally for more demanding positions and hiring more at entry level which is less risky and more cost efficient (UKEssays 2015).

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Methodology for the study

In this study a comparative analysis is applied analysing different practices.

More specifically the study relies on:

1. Compilation of already existing information and studies from open sources.
A list of sources can be found at the end of this study.

2. Job swapping in practice

In this section, practical examples of job swapping practices from two national contexts, Finland, and the UK, are presented.

In Finland, various public sector organisations have applied job swapping in its different forms as means for driving individual and organisational development. Job swapping programmes have remained mostly internal.

Compared to the Finnish government, Britain's government is an active enabler of different job swapping opportunities. Job swapping opportunities for civil servants include: i) a secondment to an external organisation (salary from Civil Service), and, ii) a loan to a different government department or agency (salary and terms of the host typically apply). A civil servant can apply to the programme by pitching a business case to HR. The business case must entail the following:

- the skills, knowledge, or experience one needs to acquire or develop,
- how your secondment or loan fits in with Personal Development Plan (PDP),
- the sort of secondment that would best meet these requirements,
- how the department would benefit from the secondment,
- what skills, knowledge or experience the civil servant could offer a host organisation, and,
- which department is primarily targeted (Civil Service 2014).

The host organisation is required to provide the civil servant a clear brief on the role, a full induction programme to support the entry into the organisation and feedback on performance during and after the placement. Upon return to the original position, the civil servant is obliged to share what he/she has learnt with colleagues and senior staff (Civil Service 2014).

In addition to job swapping opportunities, the UK government has established a programme to create career tracks within the central government and the National Health Service (NHS Executive Fast-Track Programme). The government's civil service fast stream is discussed in more detail below.

It is worth mentioning that job swapping is also applicable in the international context. Job swapping has been discussed as an option between the governments'

centralised purchasing bodies that are in close contact (for instance Finland, Austria and Denmark), but it seems it has not been implemented yet. What has been thus far established is a loan between a Finnish and Swedish municipality.

In the following four relevant examples are presented. The first three are from Finland and the fourth from the UK.

2.1. Case health care: City of Kouvola

Job swapping is a known and widely applied practice within the health care sector, especially in the context of specialised care. It is only logical as patients also move from one specialty to another and the employees are expected to be open to changes (Hankonen 2015).

A Finnish medium-sized city, Kouvola, implemented a job swapping strategy within its health service function. The trigger for the job swapping programme was a project establishing a new health care centre for delivering the services. In the new centre, the current eight units will become five with specific specialty. The goal of the job swapping program is to ensure that nurses and care assistants have adequate competences needed for the organisational change. The pilot on the program was initiated between the fall of 2014 and summer of 2015. It concerned 15 people from 8 different departments. As a result, the professionalism of the personnel was developed as they learned new methods. The swap gave the personnel new ideas on their own positions and they further learned to understand and respect the work carried out in other positions. The rotation will continue on a three month rotation until all employees of the hospital wards have participated. The new centre will open in 2018.

2.2. Case: Development of City's Management

The city of Raasepori initiated an internal job swapping program in 2014 to strengthen and clarify the city's leadership on facilities and social and health care. A further motivation arose from the city's new strategy, which was to remove possible overlapping functions.

The program concerned the director and the manager of social and health care, the manager of internal services and the facility manager. Thus, the director of social and health services (an economist) became the manager of internal services, the manager of internal services (a construction engineer) became the facility manager, and, the facility manager became a project manager responsible within the same field. As the former division of management responsibilities had caused issues in social and health care, the former manager now became the director and the position of the manager was not filled (Raasepori 2014).

Based on the available information, it remained unclear whether this rotation was voluntary.

2.3. Case: Contracting authority in Finland (based on interview)

There is a lot of informal job swapping taking place due to practical needs. The interviewed officer had just started a career after university graduation and lacked practical experience. However, officer's academic knowledge in public procurement was on high level and therefore this person was hired in the first place. The position was in a large contracting authority and on its top level. This position included both conducting procurement processes as well as training and providing guidelines for field units. After familiarizing with the work template in the top unit, the officer had a few weeks training/working period in a field unit, which conducted procurement processes on a daily basis. After this period, the officer remained as this field unit's "special consultant" for a period of time. This allowed for better understanding of the needs of the field units as well as more practical training and guidelines.

2.4. Case: Civil Service Fast Stream, UK

Britain's programme "Civil Service Fast Stream" aims to develop leaders for government positions. Recruiting for government has been based on the model for 65 years. The government promotes the Civil Service Fast Stream on social media extensively to attract top applicants from a variety of backgrounds. The programme is represented in Twitter, LinkedIn and Youtube. Through these channels, the civil servants share their stories and the content of different options is presented (Civil Service Fast Stream 2017). Within the programme there are 15 different stream options such as Finance, HR and Commercial. The commercial option includes roles in procurement category management.

Learning and development within the commercial option include undertaking the chartered Institute of Procurement and Supply (CIPS) Corporate Award programme². Successful completion of the commercial programme results in full membership of CIPS (MCIPS), subject to three years' experience in a responsible procurement role (Civil Service Fast Stream 2017). The commercial option aims to provide knowledge and experience of every aspect of the end to end commercial life cycle. Positions might include contract negotiations with significant suppliers or managing contracts in a specific category. This option offers varying positions from helping in procuring complex goods to enabling markets for SMEs (Civil Service Fast Stream 2017).

From the beginning of the program a permanent contract and a starting annual salary of £28 000 is guaranteed. The program begins with an introduction of the programme and of civil service. The programme includes:

- A combination of formal training courses and on-the-job learning,
- Regular feedback and performance reviews,
- A mentor or a fellow fast streamer to provide support,

² Information on the CIPS Programme is available at: <https://www.cips.org/en/>

- Job shadowing and other types of learning, and,
- A change for supported study to achieve qualifications (Civil Service Fast Stream 2017).

The first two years include a series of six-month postings to give a broad base of experience. After two years, two longer postings are offered.

External candidates are required to have a formal degree, but internal candidates are welcomed to apply based on current position within UK civil service (Civil Service Fast Stream 2017).

3. Evaluation of current practices and identification of best practices

This study concludes by presenting best practices in job swapping and suggestions of wider application of job swapping practices in the context of public procurement.

From the examples discussed above, two stood out as particularly suitable for developing public procurement professionals through comparative learning: Case Civil Service Fast Stream and Case City of Kouvola. The Civil Service Fast Stream's Commercial option is a good example of how to provide a career track which results in professionalism in public procurement. The example of City of Kouvola demonstrates how a public organisation can share knowledge and enable internal learning to meet changes in organisations' skills demand.

A programme, similar to the Civil service fast stream, could provide benefits for other EU -countries as well. In many countries, such as Finland, in some organisations there is a lack of professionalism, or lack of professionals, in public procurement. A fast career track might increase the appeal for graduates to specialise in procurement as more specialists are needed.

In the UK, the programme includes receiving the CIPS certificate which is required for many positions in public procurement. The idea of supporting the achievement of the certificate is sensible as otherwise the number of people qualifying might be lower; less motivation for the effort could exist without a guaranteed position.

In addition to the UK government, similar career track programmes are applied in many multinational companies to develop committed and skilled employees. As mentioned in the introductory section of this study, the motivation of implementing these programmes are to enable internal recruiting for demanding positions and hiring more on the entry level which entails less risks (see UKEssays 2015).

Job rotation, as demonstrated in the context of Health Care by the City of Kouvola, would be applicable similarly in the public procurement context. Job rotation could serve a purpose when learning to apply new national legislation based on the procurement directive 2014/24/EU, or, the directive itself in the context of new member states. Individuals involved in preparing the law or otherwise advanced in applying it, could be loaned to agencies to spread new knowledge, and learn about emerging issues in different contexts.

In the procurement context, the job swapping scheme should be external, ie. including several organisations (or agencies), as the procurement function is typically centralised to one unit within a public organisation. A successful programme to support individual and organisational learning could be a job swap between a centralised purchasing body and a contracting authority. New skills would be gained as centralised purchasing bodies and individual contracting authorities typically purchase different subject matters. Centralised purchasing bodies are contracting framework agreements of subject matters such as computers and electricity, and, individual contracting authorities purchase specialised software and other subject that might be related to their specific field of operations. In Finland government's purchasers' would learn a great deal of purchasing complex services if loaned to municipalities as the government organisations generally do not procure health or social services.

The results of this study recognise that job swapping can be a useful tool to further develop professionalism in public procurement. Ideally countries should start nationally with the option, after gaining positive experiences, moving onto international job swapping programmes. International job swapping programmes between member states could enable individual and organisational learning, and, possibly even improve opportunities for national companies to submit cross-border tenders as an understanding of another country's procurement system could be gained.

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