

REFRAMING JOB ROTATION THROUGH ORGANIZATIONAL ANTHROPOLOGY: A CRITICAL CONCEPTUAL REVIEW OF LIVED WORK EXPERIENCE AND THE MEANING OF SOCIAL WELL-BEING AMONG PUBLIC SERVANTS

Aiman Nadzwa Jilis
Ramlah Daud*
Jalihah Md Shah
Nurhaidah Azlan
Bryan Blasius

Universiti Malaysia Sabah
*Corresponding Author

ABSTRACT

Job rotation is widely recognised as a strategic Human Resource Management (HRM) practice that strengthens employee competencies, organisational flexibility, knowledge sharing, and administrative effectiveness. Consequently, most existing studies have examined job rotation from a functionalist perspective, focusing on measurable outcomes such as performance, productivity, job satisfaction, and organisational commitment. While this body of work has made important contributions, it offers comparatively limited insight into how employees experience and interpret organisational transitions in their everyday working lives. This paper presents a critical conceptual review that repositions job rotation through the lens of organisational anthropology. Drawing primarily on Geertz's interpretive anthropology, while incorporating perspectives from social well-being, social capital, and sensemaking, it argues that job rotation should be understood not simply as an administrative practice but as a culturally embedded organisational transition. During this process, public servants negotiate professional identities, reshape workplace relationships, and develop new forms of organisational belonging. The paper further argues that social well-being extends beyond an individual psychological outcome. Instead, it is constructed through employees' experiences of trust, recognition, reciprocity, participation, and social integration within organisational communities. Building on these perspectives, the paper proposes an interpretive anthropological process model that explains how organisational culture, identity reconstruction, social capital, and social well-being interact throughout job rotation. By shifting attention from organisational performance to lived organisational experience, this review broadens prevailing understandings of job rotation and provides a stronger theoretical foundation for future qualitative and interpretive research within public sector organisations.

Keywords: job rotation; organizational anthropology; social well-being; lived work experience; public servants.

1.0 Introduction

Job rotation has long been recognised as a strategic Human Resource Management (HRM) practice that enhances employee competencies, organisational flexibility, knowledge sharing, and career development (Campion et al., 1994; Ortega, 2001; Eriksson & Ortega, 2006). In the public sector, it is commonly implemented to strengthen administrative capacity, reduce work monotony, minimise integrity risks, and develop a workforce capable of responding to increasingly complex governance challenges. Consequently, much of the existing literature has examined job rotation in terms of measurable organisational outcomes, including employee performance, productivity, job satisfaction, organisational commitment, and work motivation.

Although this body of research has generated valuable insights into the effectiveness of job rotation as a managerial intervention, it is largely grounded in functionalist assumptions that view employees primarily as organisational resources whose attitudes and behaviours can be managed to improve institutional performance. This perspective has contributed significantly to HRM scholarship, yet it provides only a partial understanding of job rotation. Comparatively little attention has been paid to how employees themselves experience, interpret, and negotiate organisational transitions within the social and cultural contexts of their everyday working lives. As a result, the emphasis on measurable outcomes has often overshadowed the lived experiences through which employees construct meanings of organisational change, professional identity, workplace relationships, and social well-being.

This limitation is particularly evident in public administration research. Public organisations are not simply formal bureaucratic systems governed by rules and procedures; they are also cultural settings shaped by shared meanings, values, informal norms, and social relationships that influence how employees interpret and respond to organisational policies (Smircich, 1983; Yanow, 2006). Viewed from this perspective, job rotation involves more than an administrative transfer between departments or functional units. It also entails movement across different organisational cultures, leadership practices, informal networks, and communities of practice, requiring employees to renegotiate workplace relationships, reconstruct professional identities, and adapt to new ways of working.

The implications of these transitions extend beyond individual performance or organisational efficiency. Employees who experience job rotation often face disruptions to established social networks, the loss of accumulated expertise and organisational status, unfamiliar workplace norms, and the challenge of establishing trust and legitimacy within new environments. These experiences raise important questions about employees' social well-being, particularly their sense of belonging, recognition, social integration, interpersonal trust, and participation within organisational communities. Despite their importance in everyday organisational life, these relational dimensions remain underexplored within mainstream HRM research, where well-being is more commonly conceptualised in terms of psychological health, job satisfaction, or

work engagement rather than broader social and cultural experiences (Keyes, 1998; Grant et al., 2007).

An organisational anthropology perspective offers an alternative lens for understanding these experiences. Rather than viewing organisations solely as systems for coordinating work, organisational anthropology conceptualises them as cultural worlds in which individuals continuously create and negotiate meaning through interaction, interpretation, and shared symbolic practices (Geertz, 1973; Van Maanen, 2011). Clifford Geertz's interpretive anthropology is particularly relevant because it argues that human action can only be understood by examining the meanings individuals attach to their experiences within specific cultural contexts. Applied to job rotation, this perspective shifts the analytical focus from evaluating organisational outcomes to understanding how public servants interpret organisational transitions, negotiate changing professional identities, and construct meanings of social well-being throughout their everyday work experiences.

Building on this interpretive perspective, social capital theory further explains how workplace relationships, trust, reciprocity, and professional networks influence employees' ability to adapt to organisational transitions (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988; Putnam, 2000; Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998). Job rotation has the potential both to disrupt existing social capital and to create opportunities for developing new relational resources. Social well-being, therefore, is better understood as a dynamic process of cultural adaptation and relationship building rather than as a fixed organisational outcome.

Against this backdrop, this paper argues that existing research has largely conceptualised job rotation as an HRM practice designed to enhance organisational effectiveness while paying insufficient attention to its cultural, relational, and experiential dimensions. By integrating organisational anthropology, interpretive perspectives, and social capital theory, the paper reframes job rotation as a culturally situated organisational experience through which public servants negotiate identity, relationships, belonging, and the meaning of social well-being. In doing so, it broadens prevailing understandings of job rotation beyond managerial effectiveness and establishes a stronger theoretical foundation for future qualitative and interpretive research within public sector organisations.

2.0 Job Rotation as a Human Resource Practice: Dominant Perspectives and Their Limitation

Job rotation has long been recognised as a core Human Resource Management (HRM) practice aimed at improving organisational effectiveness through the planned movement of employees across different positions, departments, or functional areas. Traditionally, organisations implement job rotation to broaden employees' competencies, facilitate knowledge sharing, reduce work monotony, support career development, and enhance workforce flexibility (Campion et al., 1994; Ortega, 2001; Eriksson & Ortega, 2006). Within the public sector, job rotation is also promoted as a strategy for strengthening administrative capacity, preventing the

concentration of power, reducing opportunities for unethical practices, and preparing civil servants for broader leadership responsibilities.

The widespread adoption of job rotation has generated a substantial body of research within human resource management, organisational behaviour, and public administration. Much of this literature reports positive outcomes associated with the practice, including improved employee performance, stronger organisational commitment, greater job satisfaction, enhanced innovation, more effective knowledge transfer, and expanded career development opportunities (Campion et al., 1994; Eriksson & Ortega, 2006). More recent studies have also linked job rotation to organisational resilience, continuous learning, and talent development, particularly in knowledge-intensive organisations and public institutions where adaptability has become increasingly important.

Despite these contributions, the dominant literature continues to frame job rotation primarily as a managerial intervention whose success is measured through organisational performance indicators. Consequently, scholarly attention has centred on measurable outcomes such as productivity, employee engagement, work motivation, organisational commitment, turnover intentions, and competence development. While these studies have significantly advanced understanding of job rotation as an HRM strategy, they generally assume that organisational policies produce predictable behavioural responses that can be assessed using standardised indicators.

This perspective reflects the broader functionalist orientation that has long characterised HRM research. Organisations are commonly portrayed as rational systems designed to maximise efficiency and achieve institutional objectives, while employees are positioned as recipients of managerial interventions. Within this framework, job rotation is treated primarily as a tool for improving organisational performance rather than as an experience that employees actively interpret and negotiate. As a result, much of the existing literature has focused on what job rotation achieves instead of exploring what it means to those who experience it.

The predominance of quantitative research has further reinforced this orientation. Most empirical studies rely on survey-based designs to examine relationships between job rotation and variables such as job satisfaction, work engagement, organisational commitment, or employee performance. Although these approaches have produced valuable evidence regarding organisational outcomes, they offer only limited insight into how employees interpret organisational transitions, renegotiate professional identities, or rebuild workplace relationships after moving to different organisational units. Consequently, the cultural and relational dimensions of job rotation remain largely overlooked within mainstream HRM scholarship.

This limitation is particularly significant in public sector organisations. Unlike many private organisations, public institutions are characterised by formal bureaucratic structures, multiple professional subcultures, hierarchical authority, and deeply institutionalised organisational norms. Employees who undergo job rotation are therefore not simply changing job

responsibilities; they are entering organisational communities with different leadership styles, communication practices, informal rules, and established social relationships. Navigating these environments requires more than acquiring new knowledge or skills. Employees must also interpret unfamiliar organisational cultures while rebuilding trust, legitimacy, and professional identity.

These observations suggest that, although HRM research has greatly enriched understanding of the organisational outcomes associated with job rotation, it provides only a partial account of the phenomenon. Its primary concern with organisational effectiveness leaves comparatively little room for understanding employees' lived experiences and the cultural processes through which organisational transitions are interpreted and negotiated. In particular, limited attention has been given to how public servants construct meanings of belonging, recognition, interpersonal trust, and social well-being as they move across different organisational settings throughout their careers.

Recognising these limitations does not diminish the contributions of HRM research. Rather, it highlights the value of complementing managerial explanations with interpretive approaches that are better equipped to capture the subjective, relational, and cultural dimensions of organisational life. Such a perspective shifts the analytical focus away from asking whether job rotation "works" and towards understanding how public servants experience organisational mobility and how those experiences shape their interpretations of work, identity, workplace relationships, and social well-being. This shift provides the conceptual foundation for the following section, which examines job rotation as a lived organisational experience from an interpretive anthropological perspective.

3.0 From Human Resource Practice to Lived Organizational Experience: An Interpretive Anthropological Perspective

The preceding discussion has shown that research on job rotation has been largely situated within the Human Resource Management (HRM) tradition, where its value is typically assessed through organisational outcomes such as employee performance, competence development, job satisfaction, organisational commitment, and productivity. Although this body of research has produced important insights into the managerial benefits of job rotation, it leaves a fundamental question insufficiently explored: How do employees themselves experience and interpret job rotation within the social and cultural contexts of organisational life?

Addressing this question requires a different analytical lens. Rather than viewing organisations solely as formal administrative systems that implement human resource policies, interpretive perspectives understand organisations as socially constructed cultural environments in which individuals continuously create, negotiate, and reinterpret meaning through everyday interaction (Smircich, 1983; Yanow, 2006). From this standpoint, organisational policies do not carry fixed or universal meanings. Instead, their significance emerges through employees'

lived experiences, interpersonal relationships, and situated interpretations of organisational life.

This interpretive orientation draws heavily on Clifford Geertz's (1973) conception of culture as "webs of significance" that people themselves have created. For Geertz, culture is more than a collection of organisational rules or observable behaviours; it is a system of shared meanings through which individuals make sense of their social world. Consequently, the researcher's task extends beyond explaining behaviour through causal relationships. It also involves interpreting the meanings that individuals attach to their experiences within specific cultural contexts. His concept of *thick description* highlights the importance of understanding context, symbolism, language, and everyday practices rather than relying exclusively on measurable organisational outcomes.

Viewed through this lens, job rotation takes on a different meaning. Rather than being understood simply as the movement of employees between departments or functional roles, it can be seen as a transition between distinct organisational cultures. Although employees remain within the same organisation, individual departments often develop their own patterns of interaction, leadership styles, informal norms, communication practices, professional identities, and social relationships. Job rotation therefore involves far more than learning new tasks; it requires employees to interpret unfamiliar cultural environments while simultaneously renegotiating their place within them.

These organisational transitions are inherently social. Employees entering a new work unit often encounter uncertainty regarding accepted behaviours, informal expectations, and existing social networks. Professional identities that were firmly established in one setting may no longer hold the same legitimacy, while recognition and credibility frequently need to be rebuilt within a different community of practice. Adapting to a new role therefore extends beyond acquiring technical knowledge. It also involves learning local meanings, developing trusting relationships, and becoming part of a new organisational community.

This understanding aligns closely with Weick's (1995) theory of sensemaking, which argues that employees actively interpret organisational events rather than passively accepting managerial decisions. Individuals draw upon previous experiences, social interactions, and cultural expectations to make sense of changing organisational environments. In the context of job rotation, sensemaking enables public servants to redefine professional identities, negotiate new social roles, and understand how organisational change influences their perceptions of belonging, recognition, and well-being.

Insights from organisational ethnography further reinforce this perspective. Studies have consistently shown that everyday organisational life cannot be fully understood through formal structures and official procedures alone (Van Maanen, 2011; Watson, 2001). Informal practices, workplace narratives, symbolic interactions, and shared routines often shape employees' experiences as profoundly as formal policies. Consequently, the experience of job rotation varies across organisational contexts because each workplace possesses its own

cultural meanings that influence how newcomers are welcomed, supported, or, in some cases, marginalised.

Viewing job rotation as a lived organisational experience also redirects scholarly attention towards employees' social worlds. Rather than asking whether job rotation improves organisational performance, interpretive approaches encourage questions such as: How do employees experience leaving established workplace communities? How do they rebuild interpersonal trust after organisational relocation? How do they negotiate changing professional identities? How do they develop a sense of belonging within unfamiliar organisational cultures? These questions illuminate dimensions of organisational life that remain largely invisible within traditional HRM research but are central to understanding employees' everyday experiences.

This shift in perspective also has important implications for understanding social well-being. Employees' experiences of job rotation are shaped not only by organisational policies but also by the quality of workplace relationships, opportunities for social integration, informal support networks, and the meanings they assign to their place within the organisation. Social well-being therefore emerges as a culturally embedded and relational process rather than simply an individual psychological outcome. Understanding these experiences requires an analytical framework capable of examining how organisational culture, everyday interactions, and shared meanings shape employees' interpretations of work and organisational change.

An interpretive anthropological perspective provides such a framework. It moves beyond the managerial concern of whether job rotation achieves organisational objectives and instead focuses on how public servants experience organisational mobility, negotiate changing cultural environments, and construct meanings of belonging, recognition, and social connectedness throughout their working lives. This perspective lays the theoretical foundation for the following section, which examines social well-being as a culturally and relationally constructed dimension of organisational life.

3.1 Why Organizational Anthropology Matters for Understanding Job Rotation in Public Organizations

Public organisations have traditionally been examined through the perspectives of public administration, organisational behaviour, and human resource management, with primary attention given to institutional effectiveness, administrative efficiency, policy implementation, and organisational performance (Rainey, 2014; Denhardt & Denhardt, 2015). These perspectives have significantly advanced understanding of how public institutions operate. However, they tend to privilege formal organisational structures, managerial practices, and measurable performance indicators, while giving comparatively less attention to the everyday experiences of the people who work within these institutions. Consequently, public organisations are often portrayed as rational bureaucratic systems rather than as complex cultural environments in which meanings, identities, and social relationships are continually produced and negotiated.

Organisational anthropology offers a complementary perspective by viewing organisations not simply as administrative systems but as cultural worlds constituted through shared meanings, symbols, rituals, narratives, and everyday social practices (Smircich, 1983; Geertz, 1973). From this standpoint, organisational life cannot be fully understood by examining formal policies or institutional structures alone. Employees' interpretations of those policies are shaped by the cultural contexts in which they work, meaning that organisational practices—including job rotation—derive their significance through experience, interaction, and interpretation rather than through their formal objectives alone.

This perspective is especially relevant to public sector organisations, where formal bureaucratic structures coexist with diverse professional subcultures and informal organisational practices. Although government agencies operate under common regulations and administrative procedures, individual departments and work units often develop distinctive workplace cultures characterised by their own communication styles, leadership practices, professional identities, informal norms, and interpersonal relationships. Employees who undergo job rotation therefore experience more than a change in job responsibilities; they also enter new cultural environments that require them to understand unfamiliar expectations, rebuild professional credibility, and establish new social relationships.

Anthropological research has long demonstrated that culture is embedded in everyday organisational practices rather than solely in formal institutional arrangements (Van Maanen, 2011; Watson, 2001). Informal conversations, workplace rituals, shared stories, unwritten rules, and routine interactions frequently shape employees' understanding of organisational life more profoundly than official policies or organisational documents. Entering a new organisational unit should therefore not be viewed simply as an administrative relocation. It is equally a process of cultural adaptation in which employees learn local meanings, interpret symbolic practices, and become familiar with new social expectations.

This insight is particularly important for understanding job rotation within public organisations. Existing HRM research has largely evaluated whether job rotation enhances employee competencies, organisational flexibility, or career development. While these studies have made valuable contributions, they provide only limited insight into how employees experience leaving established workplace communities, negotiate acceptance within unfamiliar social environments, or reconstruct their professional identities after organisational mobility. These experiences are fundamentally cultural because they involve interpreting new symbolic systems, developing trust, understanding informal organisational norms, and learning how to participate meaningfully within different workplace communities.

Interpretive anthropology therefore redirects attention from organisational outcomes to organisational meanings. Rather than assuming that employees respond uniformly to managerial policies, interpretive approaches recognise that individuals construct different meanings from similar organisational experiences depending on their personal histories, social relationships, and cultural contexts (Geertz, 1973). Two public servants subjected to the same job rotation policy may therefore experience the transition in very different ways. One may

regard it as an opportunity for professional development and broader organisational engagement, whereas another may perceive it as the loss of established social networks, professional identity, and workplace belonging. Such differences cannot be adequately explained through performance indicators or standardised survey measures alone; they require careful attention to employees' lived experiences.

Recent developments in interpretive organisational studies reinforce this argument by emphasising that organisational realities are continuously produced through sensemaking, interaction, and social interpretation (Weick, 1995; Yanow, 2006). Employees do not simply implement organisational policies; they actively interpret them, negotiate their meanings, and integrate them into their everyday working lives. Understanding job rotation therefore requires attention not only to organisational objectives but also to the ways in which public servants experience organisational transitions, reconstruct workplace relationships, and make sense of changing organisational environments.

Within this context, organisational anthropology provides an important conceptual bridge between job rotation and social well-being. Social well-being should not be understood merely as the absence of stress or the presence of job satisfaction. Instead, it emerges through employees' ability to establish meaningful relationships, experience belonging within organisational communities, receive recognition from colleagues, and participate fully in workplace life. These relational and cultural dimensions are difficult to capture through conventional HRM frameworks but are central to anthropological understandings of organisations and organisational experience.

Adopting an organisational anthropology perspective does not diminish the contributions of HRM research. Rather, it complements existing managerial explanations by foregrounding the cultural and interpretive dimensions of organisational life that have received comparatively limited attention in the dominant literature. This perspective enables job rotation to be understood not simply as an administrative mechanism for improving organisational performance but as a culturally situated process through which public servants negotiate identity, relationships, belonging, and, ultimately, the meaning of social well-being.

4.0 Organizational Culture, Identity, and Sensemaking during Job Rotation.

The preceding discussion has argued that job rotation extends beyond the administrative transfer of employees between organisational units. From an interpretive anthropological perspective, it represents a transition between distinct organisational cultures, each characterised by its own patterns of interaction, leadership practices, informal norms, values, and systems of meaning. As employees move into new organisational settings, they must do more than acquire new technical competencies. They are also required to interpret unfamiliar social environments, renegotiate professional identities, and establish meaningful relationships within different workplace communities. Understanding these cultural processes is essential for explaining how job rotation shapes employees' experiences of social well-being.

Organisational culture has long been recognised as a key influence on employees' perceptions, behaviours, and workplace experiences. Rather than treating culture as something an organisation possesses, interpretive scholars conceptualise it as the shared system of meanings through which organisational members understand and organise their everyday experiences (Smircich, 1983; Geertz, 1973). Culture is continually reproduced through daily interactions, stories, rituals, language, symbols, and informal practices that shape what is regarded as appropriate, legitimate, and meaningful within a particular organisational setting.

This understanding is especially relevant in public organisations, where formal bureaucratic structures coexist with diverse occupational subcultures. Although departments operate within the same institutional framework, they often develop distinctive communication patterns, decision-making processes, leadership expectations, and informal norms. Consequently, employees transferred between departments encounter not only new responsibilities but also different social expectations that require substantial cultural adaptation.

The process of adapting to these new environments can be understood through Weick's (1995) concept of sensemaking. He argues that organisational members actively construct meaning when confronted with uncertainty and change rather than simply responding to organisational events. Employees draw upon prior experiences, social interactions, and contextual cues to interpret unfamiliar situations and determine how to act within them. During job rotation, sensemaking enables employees to understand new workplace expectations, interpret organisational norms, and redefine their roles within changing organisational contexts.

Sensemaking is closely connected to identity construction. According to Weick (1995), the way individuals interpret organisational events is inseparable from how they understand themselves within those environments. Similarly, identity scholars argue that professional identities are continuously negotiated through workplace interactions rather than remaining fixed over time (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Pratt, 2000; Alvesson & Willmott, 2002). Job rotation therefore creates circumstances in which employees must reconstruct professional identities that were previously established within familiar organisational settings.

For many public servants, professional identity extends well beyond formal job descriptions. It is shaped by long-standing relationships with colleagues, accumulated organisational knowledge, established reputations, and the informal recognition earned through everyday interactions. When employees move into a new organisational unit, many of these symbolic resources are temporarily disrupted. Expertise that was highly valued in one department may need to be demonstrated again in another, while existing networks of trust and collegial support are no longer immediately available. As a result, employees often experience a period of identity reconstruction as they seek recognition, legitimacy, and acceptance within unfamiliar organisational communities.

From an anthropological perspective, these transitions should not be viewed simply as organisational adjustments but as processes of cultural participation. Becoming a member of a new organisational community involves learning local meanings, understanding symbolic

practices, and participating in the shared routines that define membership within that community (Geertz, 1973; Van Maanen, 2011). Employees gradually become integrated not only through formal orientation programmes but also through informal conversations, collaborative work, workplace rituals, and shared experiences. These everyday interactions allow newcomers to understand how organisational life is actually lived rather than merely how it is formally prescribed.

The experience of job rotation is therefore fundamentally relational. Successful adaptation depends not only on employees' technical competence but also on their opportunities to build trusting relationships, gain access to informal knowledge, receive collegial support, and participate meaningfully within workplace communities. These relational experiences shape how employees interpret organisational transitions and whether they perceive their new environments as supportive, inclusive, or socially isolating.

Viewed through this interpretive lens, organisational culture, identity, and sensemaking become key mechanisms linking job rotation to employees' broader experiences of organisational life. They help explain why individuals exposed to the same job rotation policy may interpret their experiences differently depending on the quality of social relationships, organisational support, cultural acceptance, and opportunities for participation. Such variation cannot be fully understood through managerial variables alone because it emerges from employees' lived experiences within particular organisational contexts.

Recognising these cultural and interpretive processes provides an important foundation for understanding social well-being. Experiences of belonging, trust, recognition, and social integration do not arise automatically from organisational policies. Rather, they are gradually constructed through participation in everyday organisational life. Social well-being should therefore be understood not simply as an outcome of job rotation but as an ongoing process of cultural adaptation, identity reconstruction, and relational engagement within changing organisational environments.

5.0 The Meaning of Social Well-Being: An Anthropological Perspective

Within Human Resource Management (HRM), employee well-being has traditionally been examined through individual-level outcomes such as job satisfaction, work engagement, psychological health, motivation, resilience, and burnout prevention (Grant et al., 2007). This body of research has significantly advanced understanding of how employees respond to workplace conditions and organisational practices. Nevertheless, it largely reflects an individualistic orientation in which well-being is treated as a personal psychological state or as an indicator of organisational effectiveness. Although these dimensions remain important, they provide only a partial understanding of employees' experiences because they give comparatively less attention to the social and cultural contexts in which well-being is experienced and constructed.

The concept of social well-being offers a broader perspective by focusing on individuals' relationships with others and their participation within social communities. Keyes (1998) conceptualises social well-being as a multidimensional construct comprising social integration, social acceptance, social contribution, social actualisation, and social coherence. Rather than concentrating solely on individual emotions or psychological functioning, this perspective asks whether individuals experience themselves as valued members of a community, perceive their social environment as meaningful and trustworthy, and believe they can contribute constructively to collective life. Within organisational settings, these dimensions are reflected in employees' experiences of belonging, collegial support, mutual recognition, interpersonal trust, inclusion, and meaningful participation in workplace communities.

From an anthropological perspective, however, social well-being extends beyond interpersonal relationships alone. It is culturally produced through the shared meanings, symbolic practices, and everyday interactions that constitute organisational life. Geertz (1973) argues that people understand themselves and others through systems of shared meaning, suggesting that well-being cannot be separated from the cultural environments in which individuals live and work. Employees therefore experience social well-being not simply because supportive relationships exist, but because they interpret those relationships as expressions of belonging, legitimacy, respect, and participation within particular organisational communities.

This perspective highlights an important distinction between psychological well-being and social well-being. Psychological well-being primarily concerns individuals' internal evaluations of their lives, including autonomy, personal growth, purpose, and emotional functioning (Ryff, 1989). Social well-being, in contrast, focuses on individuals' relationships with the social world in which they are embedded. Within organisations, employees may be satisfied with their work while simultaneously feeling socially isolated, excluded from informal networks, or disconnected from colleagues. Conversely, individuals working in demanding environments may still report strong social well-being because they experience trust, solidarity, mutual support, and a genuine sense of belonging within their workplace communities. These distinctions suggest that organisational life cannot be fully understood through psychological indicators alone.

The relevance of this distinction becomes particularly apparent in the context of job rotation. Employees undergoing organisational transitions often leave behind established professional relationships, trusted colleagues, accumulated reputations, and familiar workplace cultures. Entering a new organisational unit therefore requires more than acquiring technical competencies. It also involves rebuilding social relationships, establishing professional credibility, learning local cultural norms, and negotiating membership within unfamiliar workplace communities. Employees' experiences of social well-being following job rotation consequently depend not only on individual resilience but also on their capacity to reconstruct meaningful social connections within these new organisational environments.

Interpretive anthropology provides a valuable framework for understanding these processes because it emphasises that meanings are socially negotiated rather than individually possessed

(Geertz, 1973). Employees do not simply experience organisational change; they actively interpret what those changes signify for their professional identities, workplace relationships, and sense of belonging. A transfer to another department, for example, may be understood as recognition of competence, an opportunity for professional growth, or the disruption of valued social relationships. These interpretations are culturally situated and shaped by everyday interactions with colleagues, supervisors, and organisational practices.

Accordingly, social well-being should not be viewed as a static outcome of organisational policies but as an ongoing cultural accomplishment emerging from employees' participation in organisational life. Experiences of trust, recognition, reciprocity, inclusion, and belonging are continually negotiated through workplace interactions and shared organisational practices. From this perspective, the consequences of job rotation cannot be fully understood by examining organisational performance or individual job satisfaction alone. Instead, understanding social well-being requires attention to how public servants experience organisational transitions, interpret changing workplace cultures, and construct meaningful social relationships within evolving organisational communities.

This interpretive understanding of social well-being provides the conceptual foundation for examining the role of social capital in organisational transitions. As employees move between organisational communities, their ability to establish trust, access social resources, and develop supportive relationships becomes central to how social well-being is experienced and sustained. The following section therefore explores social capital as the relational mechanism linking job rotation, organisational adaptation, and the construction of social well-being.

6.0 Social Capital as the Relational Mechanism Linking Job Rotation and Social Well-Being

The preceding discussion has argued that job rotation is best understood as a culturally situated organisational transition rather than merely an administrative human resource practice. This raises an important question: How do employees adapt to these transitions, and through what processes do they reconstruct their experiences of social well-being? This paper argues that social capital provides a valuable explanatory mechanism because it highlights the relational resources through which employees navigate organisational change, rebuild workplace relationships, and re-establish a sense of belonging within new organisational communities.

Social capital has become one of the most influential concepts for understanding the value of social relationships in organisational settings. Although scholars conceptualise the construct in different ways, there is broad agreement that social capital refers to the resources embedded within social relationships that facilitate trust, reciprocity, cooperation, and collective action (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988; Putnam, 2000). Unlike economic or human capital, social capital is generated through interactions among individuals and sustained by networks of mutual recognition, shared norms, and interpersonal trust.

Bourdieu (1986) conceptualises social capital as the resources individuals derive from durable social networks that provide access to opportunities, recognition, and support. Coleman (1988) emphasises the functional value of social relationships in facilitating coordinated action, while Putnam (2000) highlights trust, civic participation, and reciprocity as essential characteristics of healthy communities. Within organisational research, Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998) further demonstrate that social capital strengthens knowledge sharing, collaboration, organisational learning, and innovation by fostering productive relationships among organisational members.

Viewed from an organisational anthropology perspective, however, social capital represents more than a resource for improving organisational performance. Workplace relationships are not simply channels for exchanging information; they are also cultural resources through which employees experience trust, recognition, legitimacy, and belonging. Employees' ability to establish and sustain meaningful relationships therefore plays a central role in shaping how they interpret organisational life and how they experience social well-being.

Job rotation inevitably reshapes employees' social capital. When employees leave one organisational unit, they also leave behind established professional networks, trusted colleagues, informal communication channels, and relational resources that may have developed over many years. These forms of social capital cannot simply be transferred to a new organisational environment. Instead, employees often experience a temporary disruption of workplace relationships and must gradually rebuild networks of trust and support within unfamiliar organisational communities.

This process is not merely structural; it is also interpretive. Entering a new department requires employees to understand unfamiliar organisational norms, establish professional credibility, negotiate acceptance among colleagues, and develop new reciprocal relationships. From Geertz's (1973) interpretive perspective, these experiences involve making sense of the symbolic and cultural meanings embedded within everyday organisational interactions. Employees continually assess whether they are accepted, respected, trusted, and recognised by their new colleagues. These interpretations shape how they understand their place within the organisation and whether they experience meaningful social integration.

The distinction between bonding, bridging, and linking social capital further enriches this perspective. Bonding social capital refers to the close relationships that provide emotional support and mutual trust among colleagues within familiar work groups. Job rotation frequently disrupts these established ties, requiring employees to rebuild supportive relationships in new organisational settings. Bridging social capital enables employees to establish connections across departments, occupational groups, and professional communities, thereby facilitating knowledge exchange and organisational learning. Linking social capital, meanwhile, concerns relationships across hierarchical levels, including trust between employees and organisational leaders, which may substantially influence employees' experiences of organisational support, inclusion, and professional recognition during periods of transition.

From this perspective, successful adaptation following job rotation depends not only on employees' technical competence or organisational experience but also on their capacity to cultivate new forms of social capital within changing organisational contexts. Employees who are able to establish trusting relationships, participate in informal workplace networks, and gain acceptance within new organisational communities are more likely to experience belonging, recognition, and meaningful participation in organisational life. By contrast, limited opportunities to develop social capital may contribute to feelings of social isolation, uncertainty, weakened professional identity, and diminished social well-being, even when job performance remains satisfactory.

These observations reinforce the central argument of this review: social well-being is fundamentally relational. It is not produced solely by organisational policies but emerges through employees' participation in socially meaningful organisational relationships. Job rotation therefore influences social well-being indirectly by reshaping employees' opportunities to develop, maintain, and reinterpret social capital within evolving organisational environments.

Accordingly, social capital functions as the relational mechanism linking organisational transition and social well-being. Integrating social capital theory with interpretive anthropology offers a richer understanding of job rotation by demonstrating that organisational mobility involves more than changes in work responsibilities. It is also a process through which employees continually reconstruct workplace relationships, trust, professional identity, and organisational belonging. This perspective extends existing HRM research beyond managerial outcomes and provides a more holistic understanding of how public servants experience organisational transition in their everyday working lives.

7.0 Toward an Interpretive Anthropological Framework of Job Rotation and Social Well-Being

The preceding review demonstrates that research on job rotation has been dominated by perspectives from Human Resource Management (HRM), Organisational Behaviour, and Public Administration, where the practice is primarily evaluated in terms of organisational performance, employee competence, work motivation, job satisfaction, and organisational commitment. Although these perspectives have substantially advanced understanding of job rotation as a managerial intervention, they provide only a partial explanation of employees' experiences because they place greater emphasis on organisational outcomes than on the meanings employees construct throughout organisational transitions.

This review proposes that job rotation should instead be understood as a culturally situated organisational transition rather than merely as a human resource practice. From an interpretive anthropological perspective, employees do not simply move between organisational positions; they move between organisational cultures characterised by distinctive values, informal norms, leadership styles, workplace relationships, and symbolic practices. Job rotation therefore represents an ongoing process of cultural adaptation through which public servants negotiate

changing professional identities, reconstruct workplace relationships, and interpret their place within evolving organisational communities.

Drawing together Geertz's (1973) interpretive anthropology, Weick's (1995) theory of sensemaking, Keyes' (1998) conceptualisation of social well-being, and social capital theory (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988; Putnam, 2000; Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998), this paper advances an integrated conceptual framework for understanding job rotation. Rather than viewing organisational mobility as a direct predictor of employee outcomes, the proposed framework conceptualises job rotation as the starting point of a series of interconnected interpretive and relational processes through which employees construct the meaning of social well-being.

Within this framework, job rotation initiates an organisational transition by exposing employees to unfamiliar cultural environments that require continuous interpretation and adaptation. As employees navigate these new settings, they engage in sensemaking to understand organisational expectations, reconstruct professional identities through everyday workplace interactions, and gradually establish new patterns of trust, reciprocity, and collaboration. These processes facilitate the development of new forms of social capital, which subsequently shape employees' experiences of belonging, recognition, participation, and social integration. Social well-being therefore emerges not as an immediate consequence of job rotation but as the outcome of employees' sustained participation in culturally meaningful organisational relationships.

This conceptual reframing contributes to the literature in three important ways. First, it extends job rotation research beyond its dominant managerial orientation by placing employees' lived experiences and interpretive processes at the centre of analysis. Second, it integrates organisational anthropology with social capital theory to explain how organisational transitions are experienced through culture, identity, and workplace relationships rather than solely through organisational performance indicators. Third, it reconceptualises social well-being as a culturally and relationally constructed phenomenon, offering a richer understanding of employee well-being in public organisations than approaches that focus exclusively on psychological or behavioural outcomes.

The proposed framework also opens several avenues for future research. Empirical studies should move beyond predominantly cross-sectional survey designs and examine organisational transitions over time using qualitative methodologies such as organisational ethnography, interpretive phenomenology, participant observation, and narrative inquiry. These approaches would enable researchers to explore how employees interpret organisational mobility, reconstruct workplace relationships, and negotiate social well-being within the cultural contexts of public organisations.

Ultimately, understanding job rotation requires a shift in analytical perspective. Rather than asking whether job rotation improves organisational performance, researchers should ask how public servants experience organisational transition, interpret changing organisational cultures,

and construct meanings of belonging, recognition, and social well-being throughout their everyday working lives. Viewed through this interpretive anthropological lens, job rotation becomes more than an administrative practice; it emerges as a fundamentally human experience shaped by culture, relationships, identity, and meaning. This perspective not only broadens contemporary understanding of job rotation but also provides a stronger theoretical foundation for future interpretive research in organisational anthropology and public administration.

Figure 7.1: An Interpretive Anthropological Process Model of Job Rotation and the Construction of Social Well-Being



Source: Author's conceptual synthesis based on Geertz (1973), Weick (1995), Keyes (1998), Bourdieu (1986), Coleman (1988), Putnam (2000), Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998), and the literature reviewed.

The model proposes that job rotation initiates a culturally situated process of organizational transition in which public servants engage in meaning-making, reconstruct professional identities and workplace relationships, develop new forms of social capital, and ultimately construct experiences of social well-being.

8.0 Discussion: Reframing Job Rotation through an Interpretive Anthropological Perspective

This review has critically examined the dominant literature on job rotation and argues that the phenomenon has largely been understood through the theoretical lenses of Human Resource Management (HRM), Organisational Behaviour, and Public Administration. Within these traditions, job rotation is commonly conceptualised as a managerial intervention intended to enhance organisational effectiveness by improving employee competence, facilitating knowledge transfer, increasing organisational flexibility, and supporting career development. As a result, scholarly attention has primarily focused on whether job rotation produces desirable outcomes such as higher productivity, stronger organisational commitment, greater work engagement, and increased job satisfaction.

While these perspectives have made significant contributions, they also reveal an important limitation. Much of the existing literature privileges organisational outcomes over organisational experience. Employees are frequently portrayed as recipients of management practices rather than as active participants who interpret, negotiate, and construct meaning from organisational change. Consequently, comparatively little attention has been given to the everyday cultural processes through which public servants experience organisational mobility, reconstruct professional identities, rebuild workplace relationships, and develop new forms of belonging following job rotation.

This review proposes organisational anthropology as a complementary conceptual lens capable of addressing these limitations. Rather than viewing organisations solely as formal administrative structures, organisational anthropology conceptualises them as cultural systems constituted through shared meanings, symbolic practices, social relationships, and everyday interactions (Geertz, 1973; Smircich, 1983). From this perspective, job rotation is more than the movement of employees between organisational positions; it is a transition between distinct organisational cultures, each characterised by its own values, informal norms, leadership practices, and workplace routines.

Viewing job rotation as organisational transition fundamentally changes the focus of analysis. Instead of asking whether job rotation improves organisational performance, attention shifts to how employees experience organisational transition and construct meaning from those experiences. Public servants are therefore understood not as passive recipients of organisational policies but as active meaning-makers who interpret changing organisational environments through processes of sensemaking, identity reconstruction, and relational adaptation. Organisational transition, in this sense, is not a single administrative event but an ongoing cultural process through which employees negotiate legitimacy, recognition, trust, and belonging within evolving workplace communities.

This reinterpretation also offers a broader understanding of social well-being. Whereas HRM research has often conceptualised well-being in terms of psychological health, job satisfaction, or work engagement, an interpretive anthropological perspective highlights employees' experiences of social integration, workplace recognition, reciprocal relationships, and meaningful participation within organisational life. Social well-being therefore emerges through employees' ability to establish supportive relationships, develop trust, reconstruct professional identities, and become active members of organisational communities.

Social capital theory further strengthens this interpretation by explaining the relational processes through which organisational transition shapes social well-being. Job rotation simultaneously disrupts established networks of trust while creating opportunities to develop new relationships that support organisational adaptation and cultural integration. Employees' experiences of belonging, recognition, and participation are therefore influenced not only by organisational policies but also by the quality of the social capital they develop throughout organisational transition. In this way, social capital functions as the relational mechanism linking organisational culture, lived experience, and social well-being.

Taken together, the literature reviewed suggests that job rotation should no longer be understood exclusively as an HRM intervention. Instead, it should be conceptualised as a culturally situated organisational transition through which public servants continually interpret changing organisational environments, reconstruct professional identities, rebuild workplace relationships, and negotiate the meaning of social well-being. This conceptual reframing does not reject the contributions of HRM research. Rather, it complements existing managerial explanations by incorporating cultural and relational dimensions of organisational life that have received comparatively limited scholarly attention.

The implications of this conceptual shift are both theoretical and methodological. Theoretically, it broadens existing understandings of job rotation by integrating organisational anthropology, social capital, and social well-being into a coherent interpretive framework. Methodologically, it highlights the limitations of predominantly quantitative and cross-sectional research designs while demonstrating the value of qualitative approaches such as organisational ethnography, interpretive phenomenology, participant observation, and narrative inquiry for examining employees' lived experiences. From a practical perspective, the review suggests that public organisations should evaluate the success of job rotation not only in terms of administrative efficiency or performance outcomes but also by considering employees' cultural adaptation, relationship building, and social integration throughout organisational mobility.

9.0 Conclusion

This paper has critically reviewed the dominant literature on job rotation and argued that existing scholarship has primarily conceptualised job rotation as a Human Resource Management (HRM) intervention designed to enhance organisational performance, employee competence, organisational commitment, and workplace productivity. Although this body of research has made substantial contributions to understanding the managerial value of job rotation, it has largely been shaped by a functionalist perspective that privileges measurable organisational outcomes over employees' lived experiences. Consequently, comparatively little attention has been devoted to understanding how public servants experience organisational transitions, interpret changing workplace cultures, reconstruct professional identities, and negotiate the meaning of social well-being throughout the process of job rotation.

To address this conceptual limitation, this paper has proposed an alternative interpretive anthropological perspective that reframes job rotation as a culturally situated organisational transition rather than merely an administrative human resource practice. Drawing upon Geertz's (1973) interpretive anthropology, the review argues that organisations should be understood not only as formal bureaucratic structures but also as cultural systems in which employees continually construct meaning through everyday interactions, symbolic practices, and shared social experiences. Viewed from this perspective, job rotation represents movement between organisational cultures that requires employees to interpret unfamiliar social environments, adapt to different workplace norms, establish new interpersonal relationships, and reconstruct their sense of identity and belonging.

The review further argues that social well-being should not be conceptualised solely in terms of individual psychological outcomes such as job satisfaction, work engagement, or emotional well-being. Instead, it is better understood as a culturally and relationally constructed phenomenon that emerges through employees' experiences of belonging, trust, mutual recognition, social integration, and meaningful participation within organisational communities. This reconceptualisation broadens prevailing understandings of employee well-being by emphasising that organisational life is fundamentally social and that employees' interpretations of workplace relationships are central to how well-being is experienced.

By integrating interpretive anthropology with social capital theory, this paper proposes that the relationship between job rotation and social well-being is mediated through processes of organisational adaptation, identity reconstruction, and the rebuilding of workplace relationships. Job rotation inevitably reshapes employees' social networks, requiring them to reconstruct trust, legitimacy, and professional recognition within unfamiliar organisational environments. Social capital therefore functions as the relational mechanism through which employees navigate organisational transition and gradually develop renewed experiences of social well-being. This integrative perspective extends existing HRM research by demonstrating that organisational mobility cannot be fully understood without considering the

cultural meanings and relational processes that shape employees' everyday organisational experiences.

The paper makes three principal conceptual contributions. First, it challenges the dominant managerial framing of job rotation by shifting the analytical focus from organisational outcomes to employees' lived organisational experiences. Second, it integrates organisational anthropology, interpretive perspectives, and social capital theory into a coherent conceptual framework that explains how public servants construct the meaning of social well-being throughout organisational transition. Third, it positions social well-being as a dynamic cultural accomplishment that emerges through participation in workplace communities rather than as a static individual outcome, thereby enriching contemporary understandings of employee well-being within public organisations.

These contributions also point towards important directions for future research. The review highlights the need to move beyond predominantly quantitative and cross-sectional approaches and adopt qualitative methodologies capable of capturing employees' lived experiences and meaning-making processes. Organisational ethnography, interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA), participant observation, and narrative inquiry offer particularly valuable approaches for examining how public servants experience organisational mobility, negotiate workplace identities, and develop social relationships across different organisational settings. Such methodologies have the potential to reveal dimensions of organisational life that remain largely overlooked within conventional HRM research.

The review also has practical implications for public sector organisations. The effectiveness of job rotation should not be evaluated solely through administrative efficiency or performance indicators. Equal attention should be given to employees' experiences of cultural adaptation, relationship building, social integration, and organisational belonging. Supporting these relational processes is likely to strengthen not only employees' social well-being but also the long-term sustainability of organisational learning, collaboration, and public service effectiveness.

Ultimately, this paper argues that understanding job rotation requires a fundamental shift in analytical perspective. Rather than asking whether job rotation improves organisational performance, future research should also consider how public servants experience organisational transition, interpret changing organisational cultures, and construct meanings of identity, belonging, and social well-being through their everyday working lives. Viewing job rotation through an interpretive anthropological lens transforms it from a managerial technique into a deeply human organisational experience. In doing so, this paper broadens contemporary understandings of job rotation, extends the theoretical boundaries of HRM scholarship, and provides a stronger conceptual foundation for future interpretive research on organisational culture, employee experience, and social well-being in public sector organisations.

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