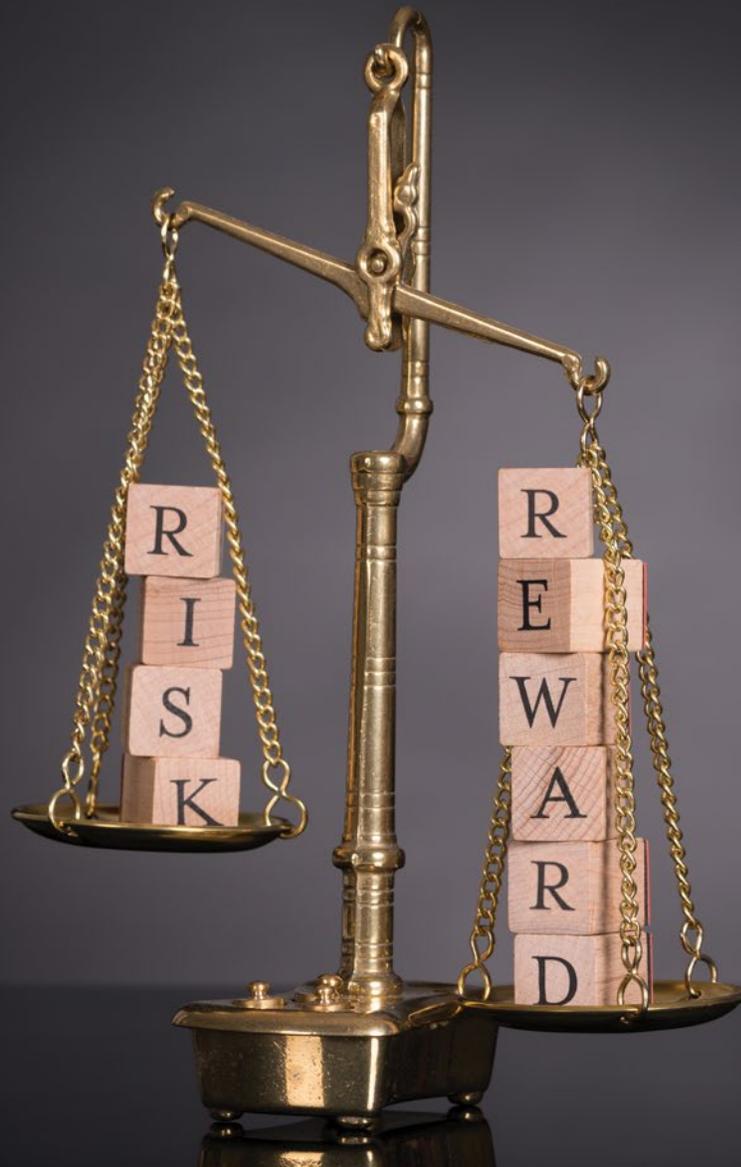


Employee Impact: Weighing the Effects of Cross-Utilization



Generally, cross-training and cross-utilizing employees is considered to be positive on many levels. Hotels gain labor efficiencies, and employees experience and develop in a new job and are able to understand the operations better. However, there are opponents to cross-training that will try to argue against the practice and point out the barriers, such as the presence of unions in the organization.

One common argument is that there will be a loss of focus from being overworked. To my knowledge, this argument has never been supported by research; it exists only as an opinion provided to keep employees in place. In fact, cross-training increases an employee's understanding of the overall business operations. In many employee surveys, a common issue is that employees either do not feel part of a team in their department or they feel that not all departments in their organization work together. Hotels have found that cross-training employees helped reduce this feeling of isolation, both within the department and across departments. When employees have cross-trained, worked with other employees in a different environment, and experienced a new job, they are more likely to understand the demands of other jobs and departments.

Another argument against cross-utilization is that it results in poor employee morale, resulting from internal competition and loss of job security. Not only is this not supported by research but there's research that refutes this argument, and perhaps the greatest benefit of cross-training is through improved employee morale and engagement. A key indicator of employee engagement is that the employee feels he/she is accomplishing personal and professional goals. Items that are strongly correlated with this aspect



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of employee engagement include training, professional development, and the possibility of advancement through promotion within the organization, all of which can be achieved through cross-training. When an employee is cross-trained within a department, he/she is introduced to other jobs and builds a foundation of understanding for a variety of jobs. This understanding strengthens the employee's skillset and opens the door for advancement to higher positions. At the department-head level, the opportunity to cross-train in other departments again strengthens the foundation of skills and makes the employee a more likely candidate for advancement into executive committee roles. Job security is also increased by the fact that an employee is more able to perform multiple duties of multiple jobs instead of just one job.



A third argument is that an employee should be paid more since they are doing more work. However, the employee is not, "doing more work;" they are simply doing different work. Certainly, if within a union agreement, one position gets paid more than another, an employee should receive the pay differential while cross-training. Generally, employees want to learn more and they desire to

do different jobs; pay, therefore, is not an issue. If an employee feels that they are being forced into cross-training and wants more money, he/she probably isn't a good candidate for the investment and should be encouraged to remain exclusively in their current job. The key is for employers to understand and identify these two different employee types. There may be no greater demoralizer than to keep an employee who wants development, limited

to a single job. The employee isn't gaining the skills he/she craves and will most likely be unengaged and seek employment elsewhere.

A final argument is that many unions stipulate that an employee has one job. Those of us who have worked in union hotels certainly know this and how this impacts our business. As a contract stipulation, it must be honored. Similar to the previous argument, there are employees who have the one job and only want to perform the one job. That is understandable, and as long as performance is positive, the union stipulations must be honored. But, as described above, it's important that employees who desire additional job skills be allowed the opportunity to cross-train and develop new skills. This will increase the engagement and commitment to the hotel as well as the union. If a union agreement strictly stifles this type of learning, they are doing a disservice to the organization and, more importantly, the union employee.



Author's Bio

Dr. Mount has over twelve years of hospitality industry experience. He is a Certified Hotel Administrator (CHA) with a D.B.A. in International Business from United States International University, an M.B.A. from Michigan State University with a specialization in Hotel, Restaurant, and Institutional Management, and a B.S. in Finance from Minnesota State-Mankato. Dr. Mount currently teaches undergraduate and graduate courses in Advanced Hotel Operations, International Hotel Operations and Service Management at Penn State. His major areas of research include service quality, employee satisfaction, and the development of new methods to apply survey data. He has published 35 articles in leading research journals, such as The Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Research, the Journal of Quality Assurance in Hospitality and The Cornell Hotel and Restaurant Quarterly.