Managing Turnover:

Pre-Analysis Plan for a Survey of World Bank Staff

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Abstract

International Organizations (IOs) frequently implement staff rotation policies to promote impartiality, prevent corruption, and disseminate best practices. However, these policies come with operational trade-offs. Turnover can weaken institutional memory, disrupt relationships with counterparts, and undermine project continuity. We argue that the costs of turnover are not uniform, but conditional. Turnover is most damaging when departures are unplanned, handovers are poorly managed, or when turnover severs existing relationships–especially in complex or fragile environments. However, these costs can be mitigated when successors bring relevant experience or when turnover is embedded within a predictable rotation system. We will test our hypotheses by conducting a survey experiment targeted at thousands of World Bank implementation staff, the staff most directly responsible for project design and implementation. The Bank's central role in global development and its current reorganization make it an ideal setting to identify when rotation protects legitimacy at an acceptable cost, and when it undermines program effectiveness.

1 Introduction

Most large international organizations (IOs) maintain staff rotation policies, particularly for internationally recruited professional staff. These rotational mandates are not arbitrary–they serve important political and institutional purposes. Rotation is intended to limit corruption and clientelism, prevent the consolidation of long-term patronage networks, and ensure staff accountability to the organization rather than to local interests (Woods (2006); Abbink (2004)). While mainly focused on managerial practices, they are actually central to how IOs maintain legitimacy and impartiality in politically contested environments (Barnett and Finnemore (2004)).

Yet research in organizational behavior and public administration underscores the operational downsides of frequent turnover. High rates of managerial rotation reduce institutional memory, depress staff morale, and increase transaction costs, all of which undermine organizational capacity (Hong 2025; Wynen et al. 2019). This tension is especially acute for IOs like the World Bank, where staff continuity is critical to the success of complex, multi-year development projects.

Indeed, while turnover is often assumed to be problematic in the Bank, empirical evidence is surprisingly limited. Within their larger studies on project performance, Denizer et al. (2013) and Bulman et al. (2017), find that turnover of task team leaders (TTLs) is associated with weaker project outcomes in the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank. These findings point to the operational costs of turnover but leave us with little understanding of the mechanisms that lead to these weaker outcomes. Further, existing studies find turnover to be uniformly problematic.

We believe that this argument is incomplete. Turnover is not inherently harmful, it's effects are conditional on a number of institutional and contextual things. In some cases, rotation can refresh stagnant teams, diffuse knowledge, or reinforce accountability to the IO. But in others, it can derail ongoing work and weaken relationships with local stakeholders, leading to negative outcomes. We hypothesize and test the conditions under

which turnover can harm outcomes, and identify the mechanisms that generate these effects.

Our main argument is that turnover is particularly damaging when it is poorly managed, undermines local knowledge and relationships and occurs in difficult implementation environments. First, the management of rotation is crucial. Turnover will be worse if it is unplanned or if the handover is badly organized. Second, when turnover undermines existing relationships and local knowledge it weakens program continuity. Third, turnover is especially problematic when projects are complex or are implemented in countries that have low state capacity, as they depend more heavily on consistent leadership and trust. Taken together, turnover alone should not have a negative impact on outcomes, but the institutional, organizational, and local context matter for translating turnover into positive or negative results.

To test these hypotheses, we will conduct an elite survey experiment with World Bank staff. Respondents will see four hypothetical project vignettes and we will independently randomize six treatments in a factorial design. These treatments will allow us to estimate how unplanned turnover, poorly managed handovers, undermined relationships, local knowledge, high-complexity projects and fragile contexts shape the impact of turnover. We will estimate the effects of these factors on two dependent variables: project outcomes and disbursements.

Our study will look to understand the trade-off that IOs face where rotation is politically and institutionally functional, but operationally costly. Our goal is to move beyond asking whether turnover matters and identify the conditions under which turnover is most damaging to project outcomes. By doing so, we contribute to broader debates on how management shapes the performance of development aid and IOs more generally.

2 The logic of rotational mandates

A central fear among IO principals is that staff stationed too long in a given location will develop overly close relationships with local actors, eroding impartiality and risking capture (Woods (2006); Abbink (2004)). To address this fear, the vast majority of IOs have developed formal or informal rotation policies: 45 of the 54 main IOs active in international development make reference to rotation policies or mobility mandates in publicly available documents. By enforcing regular staff transfers between countries and projects, IOs attempt to prevent corruption and clientelism by disrupting the "cozy relationships" that might otherwise take root between officials and those they supervise or regulate.

Rotation thus functions as a safeguard against the emergence of long-term patronage ties. In contexts where clientelism and personalized networks often structure state–society relations, IOs rely on rotation to avoid reproducing these dynamics within their own organizations. Officials are prevented from consolidating local networks that could undermine their impartiality or distort decision-making in ways that favor entrenched elites over broader developmental goals (Fišar et al. 2019, Mele et al 2016).

Rotational mandates also reinforce accountability to the IO itself. When staff stay in a single country office for extended periods, they may gradually identify more with the local government or NGOs they work with than with headquarters. This dynamic, sometimes described as "going native," can make staff less responsive to institutional priorities and more inclined to negotiate compromises with local actors that dilute organizational mandates (Woods 2006). Frequent movement back to headquarters or to new postings reduces the risk that staff become too autonomous or develop loyalties that conflict with institutional directives. From the perspective of IO legitimacy, this accountability is crucial. Member states fund and oversee IOs on the premise that they will act as impartial actors, not as captured bureaucracies swayed by local interests (Barnett and Finnemore (2004)). Rotational mandates are therefore part of the organizational toolkit for preserving the credibility and impartiality of IOs.

Rotation also makes sense from an organizational standpoint. By moving staff across countries, sectors, and functions, IOs create opportunities for the diffusion of knowledge and the spread of organizational culture. Staff carry with them skills, networks, and tacit knowledge from prior postings, which can strengthen institutional coherence (Argote (2013); Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995)).

Taken together, these political and institutional rationales explain why IOs persist in maintaining rotational mandates–they help to maintain the legitimacy of the organization, foster cohesion and maintain uniform standards of policy design and implementation. At the same time, these benefits create trade-offs. Disrupting potential clientelist networks also interrupts relationships with local partners. Reinforcing accountability to headquarters risks undermining the embeddedness necessary for effective project implementation. Thus, the functionality of rotation may be at cross purposes with operational effectiveness.

3 Operational Costs of Turnover

One of the most consistently identified consequences of high staff turnover is the erosion of institutional memory. In organizations where projects are long-term, context-specific, and highly dependent on relationships, staff departures can result in a loss of critical, tacit knowledge about project history, local conditions, and stakeholder dynamics (Heinzel, 2022; Gibson et al., 2005). A great deal of project level knowledge is embedded in individuals and their networks, making transfer difficult, even when turnover can be documented (Argote (2013); Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995)).

In donor organizations, this problem can be particularly problematic. Sustained donor presence is central to maintaining trust and continuity in development projects. When donor representatives turnover frequently, subnational governments and NGOs must rebuild relationships and educate international staff on local realities. This can slow project

cycles and undermine the local ownership of projects (Hancock et al. (2013); Shaw (2011)). This turnover is further detrimental in aid implementation, as project continuity and specialized expertise often depends on relatively small teams with highly contextual knowledge (OECD 2021).

Turnover also imposes direct operational costs. When staff leave, organizations must divert resources toward recruitment, onboarding, and training, which can slow progress and create temporary capacity gaps (Fernandez and Rainey (2006)). Turnover can strain both internal teamwork and external collaboration by interrupting established working routines. Remaining staff often face increased workloads while replacements are being recruited and trained, further straining morale and efficiency (Holtom et al. (2008)).

In the World Bank, task team leaders (TTLs) play a central coordinating role: they oversee procurement, manage disbursements, and mediate between headquarters and recipient governments. The departure of a TTL mid-project can stall procurement processes, delay disbursements, and introduce uncertainty into project oversight. While the institution can appoint successors, the transition rarely occurs without costs to timeliness and effectiveness (Heinzel and Liese (2021); World Bank (2001)).

Turnover often goes beyond efficiency concerns and can impact the morale of staff facing rotations as well as staff left behind. Knowing that a post is short-term or ending prematurely can reduce the incentive to invest in a current position, as employees expect to be rotated out or replaced before their efforts fully bear fruit. Organizational behavior research finds that frequent changes in team composition undermine the psychological safety necessary for collaboration and innovation (Argote and Darr (2000)).

For example, Wynen et al. (2019) show that high turnover correlates with declining morale and weaker performance in public organizations. Similarly, Holtom et al. (2008) highlight a contagion effect, where one departure increases uncertainty and dissatisfaction among those who remain. For development agencies, high turnover could be seen by recipients as instability or lack of interest in the project—leading to both internal and

external credibility problems.

Perhaps the most damaging consequence of turnover in donor organizations is the disruption of relationships with local partners. Development effectiveness often depends less on formal contracts than on the trust, credibility, and networks established between donor representatives and recipient governments, NGOs, and communities (**??**). Frequent staff rotation forces local counterparts to repeatedly re-establish relationships, reorient new staff to existing projects, and renegotiate understandings of priorities. These rotations then, not only consume scarce time and political capital, but can also undermine trust among local partners who may perceive frequent changes in staff as a sign that the donor is unreliable or disinterested (see e.g. **?**Holtom et al. (2008)). In development contexts where implementation often depends on small teams navigating politically sensitive environments, these issues are likely to be especially problematic.

In sum, while rotational mandates serve important political and institutional purposes, their operational downsides are substantial. High turnover undermines institutional memory, strains morale, imposes additional costs, and disrupts vital relationships. Thus, the rotational mandates, adopted to protect the legitimacy and impartiality of IOs carry signifcant operational costs, creating a trade-off between political functionality and program effectiveness. Yet, these consequences are not uniform across organizations or contexts. We argue that the costs of turnover are conditional. These costs depend on the timing of departures, the quality of knowledge transfer, the degree of relational embeddedness of staff, and the complexity of the tasks at hand. A departure in the middle of a complex project in a fragile state is quite different from a routine and planned rotation in a low-stakes environment with strong handover protocols. In other words, we specify when turnover is damaging to projects to better understand how IOs might maintain the political benefits of rotation, while minimizing some of the costs. Although our empirical focus is the World Bank, these mechanisms generalize to most IOs that relay on programmatic staff rotations.

4 Hypotheses

4.1 Timing and Knowledge Transfer

The first set of conditions that we believe shape the consequences of turnover concerns the timing of staff exits and the quality of knowledge transfer that follows. Organizational theory emphasizes that the impact of staff departures depends not only on who leaves, but also on how and when transitions occur (Mobley (1977); Holtom et al. (2008)). In bureaucracies, timing and handover determine whether knowledge is effectively retained or lost, and whether monitoring gaps can be anticipated and mitigated.

Timing matters because staff departures change the distribution of information between principals, agents, and sub-agents. International organizations rely on especially long delegation chains from headquarters (the principal) to oversight to staff in the field (agents), to implementing partners (sub-agents) (Barnett and Finnemore (2004); Hawkins et al. (2006)). When departures occur on a predictable cycle, principals can plan for succession, and agents can prepare handover materials. But when exits occur unexpectedly, information asymmetries occur. The departing staff member takes with them tacit knowledge about ongoing negotiations, compliance risks, and operational bottlenecks (Argote (2013); Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995)).

In such cases, oversight weakens precisely when monitoring is most needed. Recipient governments and implementing partners may take advantage of gaps in supervision to deviate from agreed standards. Evidence from the World Bank supports this claim: Heinzel and Tobin (2025) show that unanticipated turnover among TTLs is associated with worse procurement practices and more Inspection Panel complaints. These findings underscore that unplanned exits create shocks that disrupt accountability and oversight. This leads to our first hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1. *Turnover is worse when it occurs out of cycle (unplanned).*

Yet, even when departures are anticipated, the quality of the handover helps deter-

mine whether knowledge is preserved or lost. Tacit knowledge, the information accumulated through experience, embedded in relationships, and shaped by context, is difficult to codify (Argote (2013); Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995)). Effective handovers can mitigate this problem by transmitting information on project history, local political dynamics, and ongoing risks. Poorly managed transitions, however, leave successors with little more than written documentation, forcing them to reconstruct knowledge from scratch. This leads to our second testable hypothesis:

Hypothesis 2. *(H2): Turnover is worse when handovers are poorly managed.*

4.2 Staff Relationships and Experience

Our second set of conditions that we argue shape the consequences of turnover concern the relationships and experiences of staff in their positions. IOs, especially those involved in the implementation of development projects, depend not only on formal procedures, but on the tacit knowledge and embedded relationships that staff build over time. When staff turnover disrupts these relationships, project outcomes can suffer.

Staff who build trust with recipient governments, implementing agencies, and community leaders often serve as crucial intermediaries between recipients and the IO (Evans (1995); Mansuri and Rao (2013)). The relational capital that staff accumulate, such as credibility, trust, and informal channels of communication, are vital for effective project implementation. Turnover severs these ties. Departing staff take with them not only institutional memory but also the personal relationships that underpin cooperation. Their successors must start from scratch. These new links can consume a great deal of time, and they may have difficulty reestablishing credibility. A sustained donor presence is central to maintaining trust and ensuring continuity in project implementation (**?**). This leads to our third hypothesis:

Hypothesis 3. *(H3): Turnover is worse when rotating staff members have strong relationships*

with recipient stakeholders.

Yet, not all turnover is equally disruptive. The costs of losing embedded relationships can be mitigated when incoming staff possess relevant experience in similar contexts. Staff who have worked in similar countries, sectors, or organizational roles are better positioned to grasp local dynamics quickly and maintain project momentum. For example, experienced successors can reduce transition costs and maintain performance levels despite turnover (Fernandez and Rainey (2006)). In the World Bank, for example, task team leaders with prior regional or sectoral experience are better able to rebuild trust with local stakeholders and avoid major disruptions to procurement and implementation (Heinzel and Liese, 2021). This leads to our 4th testable hypothesis:

Hypothesis 4. *(H4): The negative impact of turnover is mitigated when the incoming staff member has prior experience in similar contexts.*

4.3 Project and Contextual Demands

Our third set of conditions shaping the costs of turnover lies not in the characteristics of staff, but in the demands of the projects and contexts where agents are deployed. Because some tasks and environments require continuity and tacit knowledge more than others, IOs are likely to experience variation in the impacts of turnover depending on project complexity and contextual fragility.

Projects vary in their degree of complexity. Some are relatively straightforward, involving standardized processes and a limited number of stakeholders. Others are highly complex, requiring coordination across multiple implementing agencies, navigating political sensitivities, or adapting to shifting institutional environments, and these complex projects can be more demanding (Honig 2018; Buntaine 2015). In these complex settings, turnover is especially costly. Successors face steep learning curves, and local knowledge is not easily transferred through formal documentation. Without continuity, projects risk

delays, inefficiencies, or even collapse. By contrast, turnover in routine or standardized projects may be less consequential, as procedures and outputs are easier to replicate. This leads to our 5th hypothesis:

Hypothesis 5. *(H5): Turnover is more damaging in high-complexity projects.*

4.4 Hardship Posts and Fragile Contexts

Finally, context matters. In fragile or hardship environments, international staff face difficult working conditions, weak local capacity, and heightened risks. Here, continuity is particularly valuable, as projects rely heavily on trust, tacit knowledge, and sustained engagement to compensate for institutional weaknesses (OECD 2021). Frequent or unplanned turnover in such contexts compounds fragility and the lack of local capacity. This not only slows implementation but may weaken local ownership if repeated turnover signals instability or donor disengagement. Research on aid effectiveness underscores that fragile contexts are the most sensitive to disruptions in donor engagement, where even modest shifts can undermine outcomes (Andrews et al. (2017)). This leads to our final testable hypothesis:

Hypothesis 6. *(H6): Unplanned turnover is more damaging in hardship posts than in non-hardship contexts*

5 Why the World Bank and Why Now?

The World Bank offers the ideal context to test our arguments. First, as the largest source of concessional finance for low-income countries, it is the most central International Development Organization (IDO). The Bank's portfolio spans nearly every sector, region, and level of country fragility. This breadth gives us the variation we need to test our conditional hypotheses within a single institution. Moreover, its technical and procedu-

ral standards often spillover to other IDOs both through adaptation and by virtue of the Bank's role as lead financier, extending its influence well beyond its lending portfolio (

Second, rotational mandates are well-established at the Bank and an important feature of how they govern their professional staff in order to maintain impartiality, prevent capture, and sustain legitimacy with recipients and donors. Bank management has emphasized the importance of mobility, noting that staff rotation between headquarters and the field is central to the effectiveness of its global footprint (World Bank 2018). Rotation within the Bank is guided by the 3-5-7 rule, which requires staff to rotate after fixed periods within a vice-presidential unit. They should remain a minimum of three years in assignment; seek reassignment (often to a different VPU) by five; and after seven years, managers actively facilitate rotation (World Bank 2015). This system creates identifiable variation between planned and unplanned turnover, as well as in the quality of handovers and the experience of successors.

Third, TTLs at the World Bank are ideal for analyzing the costs and benefits of rotation. TTLs play a central role in the Bank's operations–they are the principal point of contact for borrowers and oversee projects from initial design and approval through negotiations and implementation. They serve as the principal mediators between headquarters and local actors, draft the key documents that shape procurement and disbursement, and produce the progress reviews that determine whether projects stay on track. In doing so, TTLs must cultivate deep relationships with national and local leaders while acquiring detailed knowledge of project context and history (World Bank 2013 and Heinzel & Liese 2021).

Finally, this is an ideal moment to offer a policy-relevant evaluation to the Bank. The institution is currently focused on decentralizing their operations, shifting regional management to hub offices and relocating a growing share of operational staff to the regions they serve (World Bank [year/report]). At the same time, President Banga has placed reforming implementation and accelerating delivery at the center of his agenda (e.g. Fi-

nancial Times, 2023; World Bank, 2024). This reorganization makes the management of rotation and handovers more salient than ever, creating a rare opportunity to assess when turnover undermines effectiveness and how the Bank can mitigate these costs.

6 Research Design

6.1 Survey recruitment

To test our hypotheses, we will conduct a survey experiment with World Bank staff members. We are considering three recruitment strategies. First, we will contact the World Bank to ask them whether they are willing to distribute our survey among staff. Internal distribution increases the credibility of the request and, typically, attains substantially higher response rates than other recruitment methods (Dietrich et al., 2021; Kertzer and Renshon, 2022; Heinzel et al., 2025b). The main downside is employer satisficing if respondents are worried that their responses will be seen by their employer. We will mitigate this risk by clearly stating that none of the responses will be shared with the World Bank in disaggregated form and that their responses are fully anonymous. Moreover, we believe that the risk of employer satisficing is relatively minor in our case, as we are not asking staff to relay their opinions on the overall effectiveness of the Bank or on specific Bank policies.

Second, if we fail to attain direct access to current World Bank staff, we will draw on cold emailing. We will use publicly available data on the names of Bank Task Team Leaders (TTLs) to create email addresses from the Bank's email template. Many scholars have successfully employed this strategy to reach IO staff (Hooghe, 2005; Eckhard and Parizek, 2020; Briggs, 2021; Coen et al., 2022). By doing so, scholars can expect response rates of between 2% and 5%. This response rate is low but comparable to the response rates of typical public opinion surveys (Briggs, 2021; Heinzel et al., 2025c,b).

Third, if both of these strategies fail, we will use LinkedIn advertising to recruit re-

spondents from Multilateral Development Banks (MDBs). LinkedIn advertisements have been developed recently as an innovative method to recruit elite survey respondents working in IOs (Clark, 2021). Recruitment involves sending direct message through LinkedIn's advertisement tool. Responses can be tailored to respondents that claim employment for particular employers. Since the take-up tends to be lower than email recruitment, we would need to broaden the pool of possible respondents for this recruitment strategy. Therefore, we would include the nineteen existing MDBs (ADB, AfDB, AIIB, BDEAC, BOAD, CABEI, CAF, CEB, CDB, EDB, EIB, FONPLATA, IDB, IFAD, EBRD, IsDB, NDB, NIB, TDB). Results from surveys employing LinkedIn are comparable to results from surveys using cold emailing (Heinzel et al., 2025a).

As an incentive, we will offer respondents the option to receive a report with the results from the analysis. We will refrain from providing monetary incentives for survey participants. Research on the consequences of monetary incentives for elite surveys is mixed (Safarpour et al., 2022; Renshon, 2015). However, recent work on World Bank elites shows that monetary incentives can reduce response rates (Heinzel et al., 2025b).

We will exclude the responses of all participants that do not fill out the full experimental section of the survey. However, respondents will not be excluded if they refuse to provide descriptive information about their own backgrounds or their opinions on the Bank's rotation policy.

6.2 Experimental design

We will conduct a factorial survey experiment that probes the impact of different factors that may increase the negative impacts of turnover. All recipients will see the following introductory text:

> "You are serving on an internal World Bank team conducting a mid-term implementation review (MTR) for a series of Bank-financed projects. As part of your review, you are assessing how recent staffing changes may affect the

project's trajectory. Your team's evaluation will inform future staffing and project adjustments."

The introduction will be followed by four short project vignettes that do not vary between respondents. These vignettes are designed to introduce respondents to four typical Bank projects. The first project description is:

"The first project for review is a World Bank-financed energy project aimed at expanding electricity access in rural and underserved regions. The project involves upgrading regional grid infrastructure, scaling up off-grid solar solutions, and supporting reforms in the national energy utility. The project is currently in its core implementation phase."

The second project description reads:

"The second project is a World Bank-financed education initiative focused on improving foundational learning outcomes in public primary schools. The project supports curriculum reform, teacher training, infrastructure upgrades, and expansion of digital learning tools. The project is currently in its core implementation phase."

The third project description is:

"The third project is a World Bank-financed agriculture and food systems initiative aimed at increasing productivity and market access for smallholder farmers. The project includes support for irrigation infrastructure, agricultural extension services, and the development of rural value chains. It is currently in its core implementation phase."

The fourth project description reads:

"The fourth project is a World Bank-financed urban resilience program aimed at reducing disaster risk and improving service delivery in rapidly growing

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cities. The project includes investments in drainage, waste management, and local governance systems. It is currently in its core implementation phase."

After each of the four project descriptions, recipients will see six randomised project features displayed in Table 1. They are independently randomised and each respondent sees all four projects. Therefore, we collect four observations per respondent.

Hypothesis	Treatment A	Treatment B
H1: Turnover is worse when it occurs out of cycle (unplanned).	TTL left unexpectedly mid-assignment.	TTL completed scheduled rotation as planned.
H2: Turnover is worse when handovers are poorly managed.	Comprehensive handover with documentation and field visit.	Limited documentation, no formal handover.
H3: urnover is worse when rotating staff members have strong relationships with recipient stakeholders.	Strong, trusting relationships with government.	Limited engagement with counterparts.
H4: The negative impact of turnover is mitigated when the incoming staff member has prior experience in similar contexts.	New TTL has extensive regional experience.	New TTL is new to the region.
H5: Turnover is more damaging in high-complexity projects.	Large, multi-sectoral, remote, and politically unstable.	Large but single-sector, stable and accessible.
H6: Unplanned turnover is more damaging in hardship posts than in non-hardship contexts.	Country is a hardship location.	Country is not a hardship location.

Table 1: Hypotheses and Treatment Conditions

6.3 Dependent variables

We use two key dependent variables: development outcomes and disbursements. The primary variable of interest is development outcomes (Kilby, 2000; Dreher et al., 2013; Girod and Tobin, 2016; Honig et al., 2022). Development outcomes are central to the World Banks mandate to alleviate poverty. As discussed, research shows that rotation is a key determinant of project outcomes and is associated, on average, with substantially lower performance evaluations by the Bank's Independent Evaluation Group (Denizer et al., 2013; Bulman et al., 2017). Thus, we focus on project results as our main variable of interest.

However, results are not the only outcomes that matter for the World Bank. Many scholars have described a 'disbursement culture' at the organization that prioritizes it over results (Wapenhans, 1992; Weaver, 2008; Buntaine, 2016). Despite many attempts at reform (Nielson et al., 2006), disbursement is still the main metric that determines whether projects are seen as high-performing and staff are rewarded (Briggs, 2021). Disbursement and results can diverge and we include disbursement as a secondary dependent variable to capture the incentives of staff to adjust their behavior to conform to rotation policies.

Specifically, respondents will be asked to answer the following three questions for each of the four profiles:

> "Based on this scenario, how likely is it that this project will achieve its intended development outcomes? [Very unlikely, unlikely, likely, very likely]"

> "Based on this scenario, how likely is it that this project will disburse all of its funds? [Very unlikely, unlikely, likely, very likely]"

Finally, we will ask respondents to elaborate in an open response question:

> "What is the main reason for your responses?"

6.4 Additional questions

We will also ask respondents a number of descriptive questions to understand their views on rotation within the World Bank. These questions will be displayed after the experimental questions to prevent priming. Respondents will indicate their agreement to the following statements:

"Rotation increases the ability to learn from best practices [Strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree]"

"Rotation increases the impartiality of staff [Strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree]"

"Rotation decreases good working relationships with recipients [Strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree]"

"Rotation decreases knowledge about recipient country conditions [Strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree]"

"Rotation increases workload from recruitment and training [Strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree]"

Then, we will ask them for an overall assessment of rotation:

"Overall, do you think rotation helps or hurts the ability of the World Bank to deliver on its mandate: [Strongly helps, helps, hurts, strongly hurts]"

And ask them to elaborate on their answer in an open response question. Finally, we will request some basic demographic information to be able to understand the distribution of our sample. These information will include whether they are currently working in a hardship location; whether they are nationals from a HIC, UMIC, LMIC or LIC; how much experience they have; and what the primary sector of their work is.

6.5   Power analysis

We conducted a power analysis to estimate the minimum detectable effect sizes for our experimental design, in which the primary outcome is measured on a four-point scale ranging from 1 to 4. The experimental design includes six binary treatment variables, each independently randomized with equal probability (50/50). All six variables are included simultaneously as predictors in a linear regression model. The primary aim of the power analysis was to determine the smallest effect size, expressed in raw outcome units, that could be reliably detected at conventional levels of statistical power (0.7, 0.8, and 0.9) across a range of total sample sizes. We evaluated a range of total sample sizes from 100 to 3000 in increments of 100. For each sample size and power level, we calculated the smallest regression coefficient (in raw units on the outcome scale) that could be detected with the specified power. To convert the standardized slopes produced by the command into raw outcome units, we used expected values for the standard deviation of the outcome and the predictors. If the outcome is evenly distributed across the 1–4 scale, it has an approximate standard deviation of 1.12. Each binary predictor has a standard deviation of 0.5, due to equal probability assignment. Using this conversion, we obtained the minimum detectable effect size in the same units as the outcome variable.
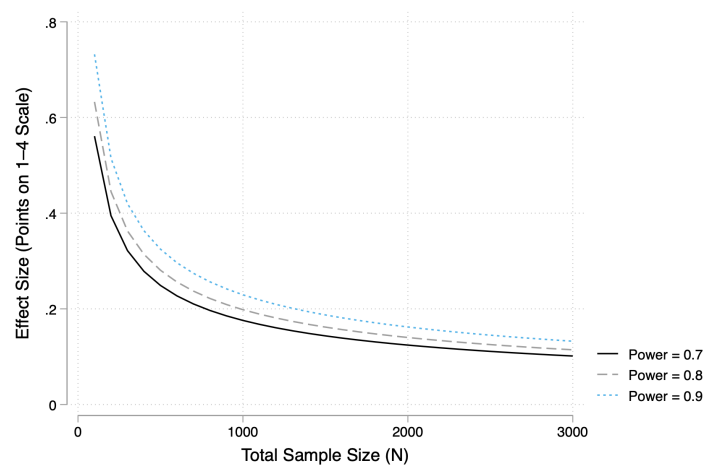
Figure 1: Minimum Detectable Effect Size (OLS, Raw Units)

The results are presented as a power curve Figure 1, illustrating how the minimum detectable effect size declines as sample size increases, separately for each power level. For example, with a total sample size of 1000 and 80% power, the design can detect an effect as small as 0.2 points on the 1–4 scale. With a normal distribution, our outcome would have a mean of 2.5. We believe that a 10% change from the mean (0.25 points) would be a meaningful minimum detectable effect that could rule out all but a small change in the effectiveness of the outcome. In order to attain that result at conventional 80% power, we would need 600 responses. Since each respondent will provide 4 responses, we would require at least 150 responses to be sufficiently powered—a reasonable goal given the number of responses attained by the most comparable surveys with World Bank staff (Briggs, 2021).

7   Analysis

In this section, we use simulated data to illustrate the analyses we will perform. We present two types of evidence. We initially discuss the results from our descriptive survey questions on the benefits and drawbacks of rotation in the World Bank. Afterwards, we present the results from our survey experiments.
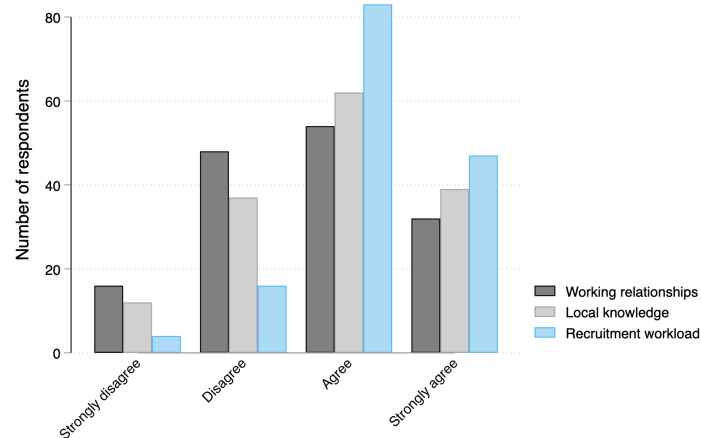
7.1   Descriptive results

We will present two Figures in the descriptive section of the manuscript. Figure 2 will display a histogram of the responses we obtain for the two descriptive questions asking respondents to evaluate to what extent rotation policies increase the learning of best practices in the World Bank offices and whether it increases the impartiality of staff toward local stakeholders. Figure 3 will illustrate the responses we will attain for questions asking about the drawbacks of rotation. Specifically, we will ask respondents to evaluate whether rotation undermines existing working relationships, local knowledge, and

increases workload through recruitment and training.
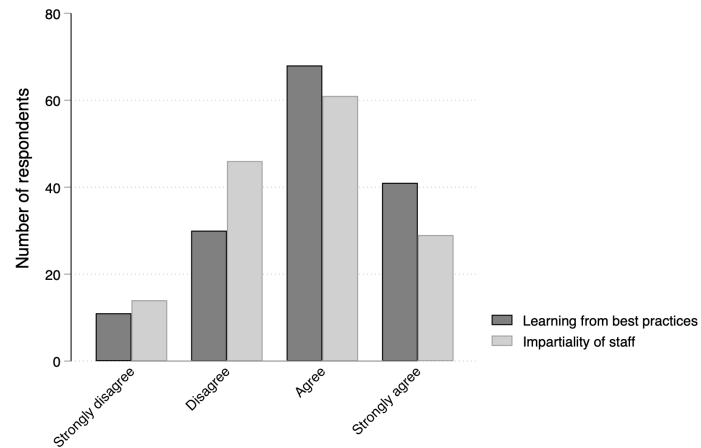
Figure 2: Views on the benefits of rotation (simulated data)

Figure 3: Views on the drawbacks of rotation (simulated data)

We will supplement these descriptive results with open response comments. These comments will be provided by respondents in response to the questions on their overall evaluation of rotation policies. We will use these responses to illustrate the different arguments World Bank staff make on rotation policies.

7.2 Experimental results

We will then turn to our experimental results. We estimate Ordinary-Least-Square regressions with two main dependent variables: evaluations of the impact of rotation on development outcomes and disbursements. As each respondent evaluates four projects, we cluster standard errors at the respondent level. We estimate the models twice. The first model is a pooled estimate that includes both between respondent and within respondent comparisons. The second is a within-subject design that includes respondent fixed effects to isolate differences in respondents evaluations of the different projects. We consider results statistically significant at the $p < 0.05$. level. Table 2 displays the expected directions of the effects for each hypothesis.

Hypothesis	Outcome	Disbursements
H1: Turnover is worse when it occurs out of cycle (unplanned).	−	−
H2: Turnover is worse when handovers are poorly managed.	−	−
H3: Turnover is worse when rotating staff members have strong relationships with recipient stakeholders.	−	−
H4: The negative impact of turnover is mitigated when the incoming staff member has prior experience in similar contexts.	0	0
H5: Turnover is more damaging in high-complexity projects.	−	−
H6: Unplanned turnover is more damaging in hardship posts than in non-hardship contexts.	−	−

Note: "+" indicates a positive effect (i.e., improved outcomes or higher disbursements), "−" indicates a negative effect, "0" indicates a null effect.

Table 2: Hypotheses and Expected Direction of Effects on Outcomes and Disbursements
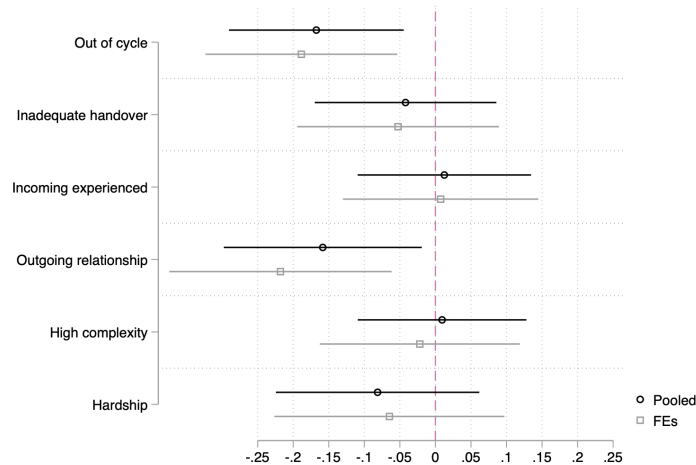
Figure 4: Estimated effect on development objectives (simulated data)

We will display two figures. Figure 4 will illustrate the effect of our six treatments on development outcomes and Figure 5 will show the effect of the treatments on disbursements. We will also supplement the results with statements from an additional open response question. This question will ask respondents to explain their choices to illustrate the rationale behind the responses provided by World Bank staff.

In a final step, we will conduct exploratory analyses drawing on several key demographic questions. We will examine whether results differ for staff working primarily in hardship locations compared to staff that do not. Moreover, we will probe whether the results differ for the primary sectors of respondents' work. We will also investigate whether the randomization leads to balance samples across treatment conditions for each of the demographic factors we collect. If any of the differences is statistically significant, we will control for demographic factors that are unbalanced.
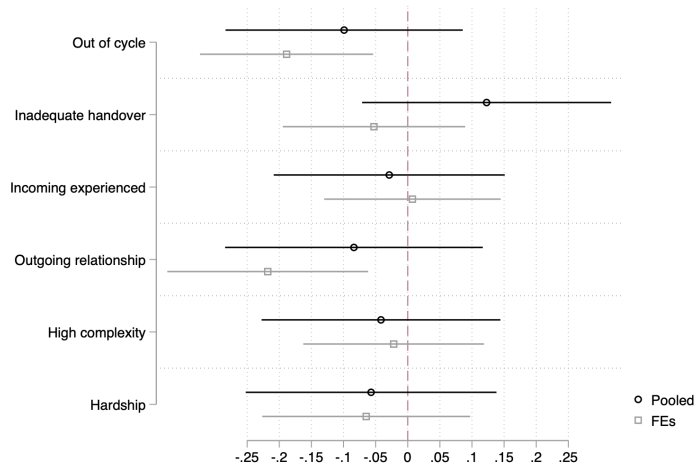
Figure 5: Estimated effect on disbursements (simulated data)

8 Conclusion

Rotation policies embody an impartiality-effectiveness trade-off. In an effort to safeguard the impartiality of their international civil services, IOs complicate their ability to build long-term relationships with stakeholders and to accumulate deep contextual knowledge about the country conditions they operate in. In this study, we specify when that trade-off is most costly. And thereby help scholars and IOs to understand how to reap the benefits of rotation policies without having to pay the costs. To this end, we will conduct an elite survey experiment with World Bank staff. The results of this experiment will illuminate key scope conditions for the negative effects of turnover on the ability of IOs to deliver on their mandates.

We believe that the results will add to key debates on IOs. Studies of multilateral development assistance have increasingly focused on how internal management can shape the effectiveness of development projects. We contribute to this debate by illuminating the effects of rotation management. More broadly, almost all IOs employ rotation policies to maintain impartial international bureaucracies. Our study is the first that helps understand how IOs can mitigate this trade-off to maintain both operational effectiveness and

bureaucratic impartiality.

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