

A photograph of an offshore oil rig at sunset. The rig's complex structure of steel beams, pipes, and cranes is silhouetted against a sky with soft orange and yellow light. The ocean is visible in the background. A decorative graphic of white, curved lines with small white dots is overlaid on the right side of the image.

## It's time for rotators to come out of the shadows

Crown World Mobility recently held a seminar on the rotator population in Aberdeen, Scotland, which has a large population from the oil and gas industry. It was a well received seminar, debating what could be done to bring rotators into global mobility schemes and how to improve retention rates. We discussed possible mentoring programmes using older rotators to help younger recruits acclimatise when they arrive into a new location.

There's a new focus in the industry. Rotators in the oil and gas industry have been working in the shadows, outside of 'the system' and out of mind. But things are about to change.

Working on short-term assignments – perhaps two months on, two months off – and following the dollar from one location to another, many rotators live a nomadic lifestyle. Despite being well paid, rotators have traditionally enjoyed few of the benefits other employees take for granted.

In the past, nobody took responsibility for where - or even if - rotators paid tax. There have been no pension schemes, career advice or even help with acclimatisation. In fact, the system seemed perfectly designed to keep them 'off the books'.

For some, that system still works. Both the money and freedom on offer is enough to make an alternative way of working seem attractive.

But in many multi-national corporations, across several industries including the pharmaceutical, engineering and on oil rigs, there is a real desire for change.

A survey by Deloitte in 2013 reported that, compared to 2008, more than 50 per cent of companies were offering hardship allowances, danger pay or location allowances in a bid to improve retention rates for rotators, and starting to think about temporary workers in a different way. At least 40 per cent were leveraging rotator talent into other positions in their organisations, too.

Now, recent evidence suggests further growth in this area as Millennials demand international work as part of their development and want to experience different cultures and environments. As a result, short-term assignments are being looked at in a different light by employers.

Some of our clients in the United States are using rotator opportunities as a way to uncover talent – sending high potential employees on a series of short-term assignments to key locations as part of their development.

It means the world of the rotator is about to change dramatically. In the near future, opportunities on rigs and engineering projects could be offered to those on the high potential track or as part of normal talent development for the graduate programme. And most importantly, they will be treated as employees not as nomadic workers who are somehow out of the system.

The rotator of 2017 is likely to be very different - probably a graduate in their 20s, entering the work environment expecting to broaden their horizons. They will demand international development and will see rotator opportunities as a real positive.



At present, the average rotator is much older, and primarily in it for the money. They are skilled but not always educated to degree level. They work on rigs or in engineering, and in many ways live a half-shadow life, spending a quarter or a half of their time at home and the rest on the road.

It's a world that not many mobility companies talk about too often. Perhaps that's because rotators are often provided with very little help. Nobody takes responsibility for their tax affairs and it is often unclear where they should be paying tax. It's a system that can leave them with a very big bill or even a legal problem in future.

It is certainly not an easy lifestyle, either. There can typically be separation issues for families because rotators are away for long periods of time, and the divorce rates in the sector are high.

This article was authored by Joanne Danehl of Crown World Mobility's Consulting Group. If you have any questions regarding this article or would like to find out more about other services provided by Crown World Mobility's Consulting Group, please contact Joanne Danehl at [jdanehl@crownww.com](mailto:jdanehl@crownww.com).

There can be issues for the employer too because rotators have no ties and few incentives to show loyalty. It wouldn't be unusual for a rotator to arrive at the airport for a job, be offered more money to go elsewhere and simply disappear. In fact, Deloitte's survey revealed 44 per cent of respondents reported the most common cause of failed rotational assignments as losing talent to competitors during a project.

But very soon, companies are going to have to think carefully about how to coax those same mercenaries into a new system that looks very different.

Future rotators will want far more from their employer – more perks, more services, tax equalisation, help with travel and acclimatisation. They will want universal benefits.

It can't happen instantly, but there's no doubt that things are moving fast. The industry is coming out of the shadows and into the spotlight.

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