

Making job share work:

Australian women share their success secrets

A Qualitative Research Report

© Horizons Unlimited 2009

For further information, please call

1300 88 40 49

Email us at

info@horizonsunlimited.com.au

Visit our website

www.horizonsunlimited.com.au

Background - the strategic context for sharing jobs

Flexible work can take many forms and can be arranged formally or informally, but most flexible arrangements give employees greater control over when and where work gets done and how much time they choose to work.

Studies have found that employees with access to flexible work arrangements are more committed to their current employers and willing to work harder than required to help their employers succeed. Deloitte & Touche has estimated savings of \$41.5 million in turnover costs alone through retention of employees who would have left without access to flexible work. Another study found that 70% of managers and 87% of employees reported that working a flexible work arrangement had a very positive impact on productivity ¹.

Work-life programs have been found to improve financial performance and shareholder value, improve ability to attract and retain talent, improve productivity, reduce costs, improve employee satisfaction, engagement and commitment, improve work-life effectiveness, improve employee health and well-being, and help meet important social needs ².

Job sharing is a process that allows two part-time employees to do the work required of one full-time position.

A Hudson survey in 2006 reported that 40% of Australian companies surveyed offered a job share program for employees ³. Job share programs were most prevalent in education, government and financial services industries.

Figures released by the Australian Bureau of Statistics revealed that in 2003, 185,000 or 9% of part-time workers were in job sharing arrangements in Australia ⁴. This is roughly 2.5% of our workforce.

This compares with UK statistics – in 2000, 200,000 people were sharing jobs (about 1% of the total workforce), most of whom were women with dependent children.

Reason for the research

Job sharing appears to be an under-utilised strategy for retaining employees that want to work part-time but stay on a meaningful career track. It is not well understood and is surrounded by myths. The purpose of this research was to uncover the success secrets of people who had made job share work for them.

1. VanDeusen, F., James, J., Gill, N., & McKechnie, S. P. (2008). *Overcoming the Implementation Gap: How 20 Leading Companies Are Making Flexibility Work. Executive Summary*: Boston College Center for Work & Family.
2. VanDeusen, F., Ladge, J., James, J., & Harrington, B. (2009). *Building the Case for Work-Life Programs*: Boston College Center for Work & Family.
3. *Hudson Report, HR Insights. Jobsharing: A Fresh Look at Flexible Working*. (2006). Hudson.
4. workplace.gov.au. What is job sharing? Retrieved 13 February 2009, from <http://www.workplace.gov.au/workplace/Programmes/WorkFamily/Jobsharing/htm>

What was done

Telephone or face-to-face interviews with 19 women from the following companies:

- IBM
- Campbell Arnotts
- Westpac
- St George
- Woolworths
- Corrs Chambers Westgarth
- Coca Cola
- Diageo
- ASDA (UK)

The discussion covered:

- Details of the job share arrangement
- How the arrangement came into being
- Benefits and disadvantages to the job sharer, organisation and other stakeholders
- Making the arrangements work
- Critical success factors

Interviews were conducted between January and April 2009, and were of 40 – 60 minutes duration. Job roles ranged from Receptionist to Head of Finance/ senior sales.

Findings

Common job share arrangements: responsibility

There are three kinds of job share arrangements:

- Shared responsibility
 - Two employees share all responsibilities
- Divided responsibility
 - Responsibilities are divided by client or project, or geography
- Unrelated responsibility
 - Two partners perform different and sometimes unrelated tasks



There were examples in this study of the first two and a hybrid between them. Some started with shared responsibility and found over time that some responsibilities could be divided, reducing time for handover.

Common job share arrangements: work schedules

Alternative work schedules include:

- Split week - each partner works 2.5 days.
- Split day (with or without some overlap time).
- Overlapping week – each partner work three days so there is one overlap day.
- Simultaneous for two to three days per week – each partner works the same days which is good for communication but not so useful from a customer perspective.
- Alternate week – useful when time and cost of travel are significant.
- No fixed schedule.

The overlapping week was the most commonly adopted model in this study, with each partner working three days. Some partners split the week between them, one working two days the other three days. Remuneration was based on days/ hours worked, pro rated to a full-time equivalent.

Who initiated the job share and how well documented are the arrangements?

Just over half of the job share arrangements in this study were initiated by the job sharers' manager,

- Someone who understands the two people and suggests they might work well together

The rest were either initiated by the partners themselves (joint application) or one partner filled a vacancy created by a job share partner leaving.

Most arrangements are not well documented:

- Arrangements initiated by sharers themselves are better documented because they were required to present a business case
- Few had a formal review process of the progress of arrangements

Communication mechanisms

Partners usually have a written handover/ work in progress document

- May be an email or series of emails
- May be a hard copy in a folder

Most have conversations on their overlap day

- Usually quite a short one if written document is thorough
- They would rather use this time for discussing issues/ brainstorming

Many have conversations between handover days

- Usually on one partner's unscheduled work day or on the weekend. Some speak daily.
- Most have separate emails – some share one email address or desk.

Troubleshooting

Cover for holidays and sick leave

- Most do not cover for one another, but remain flexible if it is really needed e.g. will log on more often from home
- When one is on holidays there is still some part-time cover which benefits the organisation (vs when a full-timer is away)

When one leaves

- Most went on to find another partner to replace one that leaves (e.g. goes back to full-time, into another role, or on maternity leave)

Lack of support from boss

- This was unusual
- In one case, the problem was expectation that two people could do more work
- In another case, the boss played one against the other.

Hardly any had experiences of incompatibilities with a partner. One that did, worked really hard and eventually they came to work well together

Job sharing has many benefits

The literature points to multiple benefits for the organisation:

- Retention of talent.
- Less expensive than hiring new employees.
- Reduced burnout whilst maintaining productivity.
- Better job coverage and reduced absenteeism.
- Peak period coverage.
- Improved performance because job share partners go the extra mile to have a successful job share experience, and their skills may be complementary.
- Two minds and two sets of experience, skills, ideas and enthusiasm for the price of one.

Job sharers in this study could see these benefits and reported one in addition; better and quicker decision-making (two heads are better than one).

Job sharing means less of a juggle for working mothers

Job sharers feel they can occupy a meaningful, line management role that needs full-time cover, and still stay on their desired career track.

Many have tried part-time work and found it too difficult to fit the workload into the days worked, and report that part-time roles often offer less managerial responsibility and less challenge.

Job share means working part-time doesn't become a career limiter.

Job sharers can enjoy their time at home knowing their partners are handling the work, and this reduces stress.

The relationship with a partner is valued for itself and most job sharers appreciate the close contact with a job share partner, something that can be difficult to achieve when working part-time.

They are enthusiastic in their support for the job share concept, and are highly engaged as employees.



The experience is mostly very positive

Except in a couple of cases, the scope of the job was right. The job was either suitable for two people to manage or was re-designed.

Those that had switched from part-time feel less marginalised as job sharers.

They mostly feel supported by manager and peers. Sceptical bosses usually come around once they see results.

Most talk about job sharing enthusiastically

- It's an ideal way to stay on the career track
- The benefits of reduced hours without the downsides of part-time
- A way to achieve greater results (synergy of two people).

Benefits of job sharing outweigh the few drawbacks for the employee

- Reduced hours means reduced pay (as for part-time)
- Lack of availability of job share roles

- Work is required to make the relationship flourish and ensure no communications fall through the cracks
- Loss of control (some feel 'out of the loop') although most successful job sharers are able to give this up for the benefits provided by job sharing
- If one partner was in the role before sharing it, they can sometimes be seen as the 'lead' partner.

Implementation is the most significant obstacle for the organisation

It becomes hard for managers and others to remember who works what days. Also, others may need to copy two people on emails. Job sharers say they can usually solve these.

For those working an overlapping week model there is an issue of additional cost. Job sharers argue strongly that they do not use much overlap time and the organisation gets full value via productivity improvement.

Exploding the myths

Cost

Offset by less absenteeism and increased productivity

Managing two people is too hard

Successful job sharers make sure this is not a problem for their boss

Everyone will want it!

Even though 40% of large companies in Australia say they offer job sharing, only 2.5% currently share. Participants in the study reported that job sharing was still relatively unusual in their companies.

Job sharers won't be accountable

Participants in the study were clear about how performance was assessed and talked about wanting to do a good job for the other person.

Most roles are not suitable for job sharing

Client facing, management and senior roles have been successfully shared. Many participants in this study hold senior roles, one with up to 52 team members.

Some thought that high paced roles in an uncertain environment or roles that demand intense client focus might be hard to share.

Job sharers should be identical

Evidence suggests that complementary skills and styles works best. In this study, having a similar work ethic and values was seen to be critical.

The magic ingredients for success

Must haves:

1. Match people with similar work ethic and commitment to job and career
2. Communicate, communicate and communicate
3. Full support of the manager & other key stakeholders
4. Be able to let go, trust and not compete with one another



There is increased likelihood of success if the two people know one another well or have worked together before. People who had shared with more than one partner could identify these in particular as the key success factors.

Conclusions and recommendations

Conclusions

1. This study replicates findings in the literature that job sharing can work for a range of jobs and circumstances
2. Many organisations put the onus on the employee to find a partner and make the case for job sharing. Yet the study found that around half of these successful job share arrangements had been initiated by a manager. The implication is that organisations must put greater emphasis on manager education to get traction with shared arrangements. This is especially so when shared arrangements outlast manager tenure.
3. There are many myths/ misconceptions surrounding job sharing. Education is key here too.
4. Participants in the study were highly engaged and dedicated employees, and wonderful role models for the job sharing concept. They were not recruited for the study with any success criteria yet almost all had made job sharing work, and had had a positive experience.
5. They could have got there more quickly though:
 - By getting to know their partner better before starting to work together (e.g. work on projects together)
 - By discussing work ethic / style issues up front
 - By analysis of the role to assess what responsibilities could be divided straight away
6. There was a surprising lack of process & documentation in most organisations
 - Makes it difficult to measure and track success and may leave matching up to chance

Recommendations for organisations

1. Do not try to implement job share arrangements without sufficient manager education.
2. Encourage managers to facilitate matching of potential sharers
3. Have some process up-front that helps potential job sharers identify for themselves how the arrangements might work best for them e.g. checklist for key decisions like how the job can be shared, work schedule.
4. Be open and flexible about the kinds of roles that could be shared.
5. Use successful cases to build support for job sharing.



Recommendations for potential job sharers

1. Find out as much as you can about job sharing and your partner before you start the process.
2. With your partner, identify up-front how compatible you are likely to be – discuss your work ethic, attitude to quality of work, career aspirations, and how you would keep one another informed. If you can, “try before you buy” by working on a project together first.
3. Trust and work with your partner – if you compete the relationship is doomed.
4. Ensure your interchange is seamless so no one is disadvantaged by two people in the role, especially your boss.
5. Be a vocal role model for job sharing. If it is working for you, make sure people know about it.