

THE POWER OF TWO

Job-Share Resource Guide



Empowering Women, Transforming Law

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Job-sharing is a type of flexible working arrangement that can offer women more potential for career advancement than part-time roles.

Kate Mills is to be commended on her initiative and leadership in seeking to raise awareness and understanding of the important benefits of job-sharing.

In this publication, Kate has drawn on the experience of 10 job-sharers working in the legal profession. She has outlined the benefits - to both employers and employees-of job-sharing in a clear and persuasive manner. In addition, she has helpfully identified practical tips and resources for both employees and employers interested in implementing job-sharing.

The Women Lawyers' Association of NSW is proud to support this initiative and hopes that it will ignite a dialogue in the legal profession (and beyond). It is hoped that this dialogue will result in the introduction of formal workplace policies to facilitate and support job-sharing. Job-sharing has enormous potential to revolutionise the concept of part-time work in a sustainable way that is mutually beneficial to both employers and employees.



Lee-May Saw

President of the Women Lawyers' Association of NSW

Introduction

What job-sharing is, why it is rising in popularity and why we support it.

In 2014, ProfessionalMums.net undertook a project with Women's Agenda (www.womensagenda.com.au) to find the most senior professionals working in flexible arrangements in Australia. We called it the Part-Time Power List - although we were looking for professionals who had any type of flexible arrangement, not just part-timers.

The response was fantastic. Women's Agenda profiled 31 high-performing professionals across the country with adjustable working arrangements - including two men. We thought it was a great way to demonstrate that flexible work and career progression are not mutually exclusive.

What was surprising, however, was how heavily job-sharing featured in the end result. Ten of the 31 people profiled were job-sharing. It was a light bulb moment - up until then we had not given much thought to job-sharing as a viable way for women to progress their careers. However, here were 10 women showing us a new way of working that gave them time with their families and a career path.

Some of the problems with part-time work help explain why they chose a new approach. Anecdotes suggest it's hard to progress careers working part-time - it's not impossible, but it is hard. Few employers are willing to redesign jobs to create fulfilling part-time roles. Instead, part-time jobs are typically more junior roles where women can find themselves on the classic mummy track. Or they're full-time roles crushed into a shorter week - and there is nothing more frustrating for this kind of worker than to see colleagues do the same job for more money and more respect.

"When I came back to work, I was working part-time but not enjoying it," one woman who is now a job-sharer says. "Because of the days I wasn't there, I was always trying to catch up on things. People were having to repeat things and I felt like I couldn't take on big pieces of work, when I had been used to leading programs."

She says it is a trap for women who want to progress their careers: *“If you are driven and ambitious and work a part-time role, then you end up working a full-time week and you take work home. The boundary between home and work is eroded. You start to resent your job and get stressed.”*

Another job-sharer says when she came back to work at her law firm after maternity leave, *“there were part-time workers who lasted only six months and did rubbish work, such as policy reviews. Anything that required litigation was not given to them because [their managers] didn’t think they would be able to follow it up. Part-time work does not work.”*

Personally, I have always been a fan of what I term “full-time flexibility,” when it comes to career progression.

Full-time flexibility is where employees have a full-time role with defined outputs and defined performance indicators. Employees are able to deliver results in a flexible manner of their choosing - they may work from home one day a week, come in early or late, or leave early or stay late, according to their own schedule. As long as deadlines are met and performance levels are high, flexible full-time work can allow for better work-life balance while pursuing a career. Such a model is particularly well-suited to legal work where performance is often measured by billable-hour targets.

Now that some roles require 60-plus hours a week, however, even flexible full-time work is hard when raising a family, which is why job-sharing is becoming a popular option.

Job-sharing is where two people work in a symbiotic relationship to deliver the outputs and responsibilities of what was traditionally one role. Each job-sharer will work less than full-time hours. The most common scenario that we encountered involved both employees working three days a week with a common day of overlap. Job-sharing is growing in popularity as a solution for women juggling children and a career.

One job-sharing woman told me: *“I believe job-sharing is the only way that you have a senior role in an organisation [without a traditional full-time schedule]; you can’t do it part-time”.* (There are no official figures on job-sharing, as the ABS has not collected data on it since 2003.)

For this project, ProfessionalMums.net interviewed 10 women lawyers who were job-sharers and reviewed the current literature on job-sharing. The research revealed that despite the growing popularity of job-sharing, there are few organisations that have a clear-cut or documented approach to the arrangement.

For all of the women interviewed, job-sharing had evolved organically, most often because the two sharers had worked with each other in the same or a neighbouring team while they were pregnant and the relationship evolved from there.

“It all happened very suddenly,” one interviewee says. “I had come back from maternity leave after my second child and then our manager fell ill and within two months, a colleague and I started job-sharing the manager role. We were fortunate, as we had worked together for quite a long time and we knew how the other worked and had filled in for each other from time to time.”

Most of the job-sharers interviewed started on a trial basis. Changes evolved organically, with little degree of formality. This guide is to help people looking to set up a job-sharing arrangement, but it’s also for organisations that want to formalise their approach to this burgeoning form of flexibility.

I think that job sharing is set to grow over the next couple of years and that organisations that embrace it will be able to attract and retain the kind of senior female talent that is essential to a diverse, thriving and sustainable workplace.

Kate Mills

CEO, ProfessionalMums.net

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1. Building a Case

Evidence of the positive effects of job-sharing on productivity and gender diversity, along with templates and other resources to give your employer.

Professional women who become mothers are often surprised by how difficult it can be to combine work and family responsibilities. Many companies are deeply committed to flexibility, but a successful arrangement still often comes down to the relationship between the manager and the employee. If women want a flexible arrangement, they must be prepared to do the groundwork and present the case for arrangements such as job-sharing.

“We worked out what we wanted to do before we approached the partnership”, one woman says. “We had a reasonably detailed plan about which days we would work and how we envisaged working.”

Job-sharing can be more complex than simply negotiating flexibility around time and location. It requires an in-depth partnership and relationship with another job-sharer. Another concern is that it's not the norm; while managers have become used to people asking to work from home or to work part-time or compress hours, when managers receive a request to job-share, it may be the first time they have come across this type of arrangement.

A job-sharing applicant will need to familiarise their manager, employer and possibly their colleagues with what job-sharing is.

When a role is split in two and given to two separate employees, it is not generally considered job-sharing. The roles may be complementary, but they are fundamentally separate. This type of arrangement is reasonably common but may well encounter the same issues that arise with part-time roles, as described earlier. And while splitting a role in two may seem like the easier option, true job-sharing better ensures the seamless delivery of service.

"We were going to split the functions, with her covering tax and me covering accounting, but the team expressed concerns about how the whole week would be covered," one job-sharer says.

Regardless of how the arrangement is structured, you will need to convince your manager of the benefits.

Two heads are better than one

Job-sharing offers many advantages for employers.

Retention: There is no doubt that arrangements that work for employees create a strong sense of loyalty and decrease turnover (*source: Insync Surveys 2012 Retention Review*).

Productivity: Job-sharers report that they are more productive than full-time workers, as they are fully utilised when at work and not worrying about what is happening at home (*source: "EY Untapped Opportunity 2013"*).

Diversity: Many job-sharers sell the benefits of the employer getting two heads for the price of one. This means there are two sets of skills, ideas, approaches, etc. *"We are both consultants but she has a fantastic analytical mind while I am better at stakeholder engagement - a complementary skill set that works really well,"* one job-sharer says.

Another had this to say: *"One of the best things is the ability to learn from each other. We will have a chat and share our thoughts - you get the benefits of two brains for one role."*

Cover all year: Most job-sharers say they cover for each other during holidays or when one is ill, meaning the role is covered all year round.

Fully utilised: One concern for companies is that they are often, in effect, paying for 1.2 full-time equivalents for a role that could be done by 1 FTE, because often each job-sharer works three days so there can be an overlap day. However, job-sharers point out that they waste less time at, say, the water cooler.

“I would be the last person in the office on a Friday night and by the time we left the firm we were 120 per cent utilised and billable,” one sharer says. *“In fact, we were working ridiculous hours but were able to maintain that and do good work because we had days at home to recover.”*

High performers: There is no research to prove it yet, but anecdotal evidence suggests women who job-share are high-performers. *“We presented a business case but it was more from an intangible perspective,”* one job-sharer says. *“We are both on the high-performance list and that’s your entry ticket to the game.”*

Resources for your manager

Consider that for a manager who is encountering a request to job-share for the first time, it adds to their workload if they have to do the research themselves. There are many resources out there that can help them.

In particular, these could be useful:

- “Making Job Share Work: Australian women share their success secrets”, Horizons Unlimited (2009)
- “The Job Share Project”, Capability Jane (2011)
- “The Pros and Cons of Job-sharing”, Entrepreneur.com (2006)

Common manager queries about job-sharing include:

- Can you both demonstrate how you will deliver what is needed for this role?
- How will I (and others) know who to contact when we have questions?
- Will one of you be in charge?
- How will I know who is responsible for what?
- What am I going to tell the other team members?
- Will you perform similar or different tasks?
- How will the responsibilities be split? Will both sharers undertake the full range of tasks within the position? Or will the responsibilities be divided into specific tasks?
- Can you make the division of responsibility practical and understood by all?
- Can/should some or all responsibilities be divided by project or client?
- Will the job-sharers report to the same manager?

- What impact will there be for staff being supervised?
- Has the existing staff member fully thought through what it means to share a position?

One job-sharer suggests having the conversation about the possibility for promotions up front.

“Ask if there is career progression as a job share,” she says, recalling a negative experience when seeking a promotion. “I think we had made assumptions about how far we could progress in this model. In the end, the organisation had not thought it through and when we put in a joint application for a promotion we were told we would need to apply as individuals.”

You should be ready to make your case for value when you meet to discuss creating the shared role. Job-sharing may cost the organisation more. In addition to the cost of the scheduling overlap, where information is shared, there could be more training expenses, as well as changes to systems, phones, desks, etc. Demonstrate what the organisation will get in return for this.

You can provide a template for your manager, showing the issues that need to be addressed. There are several templates available online; however, here is a basic outline for an application to job-share:

- Your proposed work schedules and how you will communicate to each other.
- An overview of the role’s responsibilities and how these will be shared.
- Insight into any potential issues with regards to colleagues, customers, suppliers and management.
- Any additional expenses that could be incurred through the arrangement and also any potential financial benefits.
- How you intend to communicate with internal and external stakeholders.
- A trial period with a review process.
- A plan for covering for absences and also what will happen if one of the job-sharers leaves.

There is also a job-sharing toolkit available at the **Job Share Project website**.

Talk to clients informally to make sure they are onside. One successful job-sharing team noted they had first ensured their internal clients would be supportive before taking it to their manager.

Even if you don’t manage to persuade your manager to accept a job share in the first instance, it can be a good starting point for a discussion at senior levels about having a policy about job-sharing. Most of the interviewees for this research say that while the organisation supported job-sharing in their case, it did not have a formal policy about it.



2. Finding a Job Partner

Where to look and what qualities to seek.

In all of the research interviews, every woman in a job-share arrangement said it had arisen organically. In most cases, the two partners either worked together and then both had reasons for wanting to job-share at the same time, or were at least in the same organisation and aware of each other. None of the women interviewed had gone looking for a job-sharing partner outside of their organisation.

Larger surveys do suggest that about a quarter of job-sharing partners are sourced from outside the organisation. (Source: *The Job Share Project. Job-sharing at senior level: Making it work*. Available at the [Job Share Project website](#).)

This organic nature of job-sharing arrangements poses a problem for women who cannot easily identify a job-share partner, particularly in industries where women are under-represented. There is, however, a growing recognition of job-sharing and several businesses are developing programs to meet this need.

In addition to these resources, if you are employed in a large organisation, consider working with the central human resources team to identify potential job-sharers in other parts of the business.

Two particular websites can also help:

www.jobsharepartner.com.au

This is a platform where people can register to be contacted by potential job-sharers. Applicants can communicate with one another through the platform and the site has some resources on applying for roles as job-sharers.

www.professionalmums.net

The site focuses on professional women - including lawyers, accountants, engineers, IT consultants and management consultants - who are looking to work flexibly. Applicants can't apply for roles through the site but it does publish job-share roles in its weekly newsletter.

Despite these new platforms, it remains true that the best way to find a partner is usually through your own networks.

Talking of how she found her job-sharing partner, one woman says: *"We weren't good friends, although we had started in the same summer clerk group. We were both pregnant when she approached me to job-share."*

Building a relationship of trust is essential. *"You need to be able to trust the other person and trust what they are doing is in the best interests of both of you,"* the woman continues. *"You can be different though - we have quite different personalities and fill in each other's gaps. But you need to be able to get along."*

Be proactive and consider advertising for a partner in industry publications or online job boards.

It is essential that the chemistry is right. You will, as the women we interviewed for this research confirmed, work more closely with this person than anyone else in your life - including your life-partner!

On first meeting a potential job-sharing partner, these are a few topics to discuss:

- Share résumés and your career story. What are your strengths and weaknesses? Remember it can be a strong point to have complementary skills, as you are presenting a wider range of expertise to an employer.
- What are your career ambitions, where do you see yourself in five to 10 years?
- Why do you want to job-share and what's important to you outside of work?
- What is your communication style and how would you see the communication between the two of you working?
- What kind of flexible arrangement are you looking for and how flexible are you? How many days a week do you want to work and will you have an overlap period?



- How do you want days away from the office to be treated - will you be contactable, able to take telephone calls or respond to emails, or would you rather not be contactable?
- How do you envisage splitting up responsibilities? Will you work across the same projects and clients seamlessly or will you divide the role so one of you takes the lead with particular clients or projects?
- How good are you at sharing? A job-sharing arrangement is unique in that it requires participants to partake in both the good and the bad that goes with every role.



3. Doing it right

Everyday practices for successful job-sharing.

Be warned that job-sharing is not for everyone. Many job-sharers say making it succeed means working harder and for longer hours than those for which they are paid. It can also be difficult to escape the perception that you are working part-time and that you are less committed to your career.

The single biggest component of successfully job-sharing comes down to the relationship between the job-sharers and how they communicate.

“You have to treat that individual like your work wife,” one job-sharer says. “We both understand that our families and our health and wellbeing come before the job and we don’t call or email each other on our days off. We look after each other; it’s very comforting when you come back from maternity leave to someone who has your back. In fact, it’s wonderful.”

The five elements of successful job-sharing

Successful job-sharing requires:

- The right relationship
- Delivery of a seamless service
- Strong communication
- An organised week
- Agreement on how to treat days off

The relationship

Every job-sharer interviewed emphasised that the single most important element of success was a relationship based on trust and communication.

These quotes elucidate this:

“It is important that you pick the right person - I knew her beforehand and knew that we would be well suited because we had worked with each other before.”

“The most crucial part is the trust and respect for the other person and the ability to hand over control to that person. You have to trust that she will provide the advice that you would provide and do everything in a manner that you would respect. That’s crucial. There hasn’t been a situation where I have looked at what she has done and thought that I wouldn’t do it that way, or that I would have done it better.”

A seamless service

Job-sharing success requires delivering a service where nothing falls between the cracks - something that can be hard to do even when working in a more traditional manner.

“We are very careful that people don’t have to ask twice about a matter;” one job-sharer says.

The handover and how information is passed between the job-sharers is an area that requires a particular focus. Nursing, where job-sharing has long been in practice, is an example of this.

Nurses work shifts, yet are responsible for patient care around the clock.

Companies looking to put job-sharing into practice could learn much from how hospitals - which have a critical service to deliver - ensure that patients receive it seamlessly.

Hospitals typically have an institutionalised method for exchanging information as nurses clock on and off. At the end of each shift, staff take the time to fully inform the person who is starting work of all the critical information they will need.

Job-sharing in other roles requires the same transfer of information. There are many examples of job-sharers ensuring they have one day that overlaps, where they can bring each other up to date on what has happened.

“We have a one-page handover that we use,” one job-sharer says. *“It is a list of new matters, where each matter is up to and what the priorities are - it’s not overly detailed, more a memory trigger. Then on Wednesdays, we have a catch up to make sure we are both on the same page.”*

Many of those interviewed about job-sharing say it is better to appear as one person to clients and colleagues. For example, there could be one email address for both sharers so work colleagues and clients don’t feel they have to email both parties. Or the email signature could clearly state that the respondent is job-sharing and include the other person in correspondence.

“We don’t have a shared email address, we just make sure that everyone emails both of us,” an interviewee relates. *“We have an overlap day on Wednesday, which is critical, and make sure our important stakeholder meetings are on that day. I would also do a note on Friday so she could read it on Monday morning.”*

While the job-sharers may allocate tasks within the partnership, external parties should not be concerned with who is doing what. In fact, a report in Forbes states that many job-sharers see it as a mark of success when clients do not know which of the two is dealing with the matter because the service is seamless.

When job-sharers are in billing roles with external clients, they need to decide how to deal with any double up in time. *“Billing could be painful,”* one sharer says. *“We had to identify any double up and then half it, so the client was charged for how long it took for one person to review the documentation. The handover day went down as admin, and we used a different code to account for that time.”*

Strong communication

The flow of information between the job-sharers and other stakeholders is key.

“We wanted to present a united front and make sure that, for both our team and others in the organisation, it didn’t matter which one of us they came to because they would get the same decision,” one sharer explained. *“We wouldn’t necessarily make snap [judgements], but if we were clear on the position and knew how the other felt - having worked with each other for such a long time - then we would give an answer.”*

“This also means you need the ability to wing it a bit because you can be in a meeting and there may be something you don’t know. You have to hedge and then get out and call the other person - but that happens whether you job-share or not.”

Deciding what to say to clients is critical, although everyone interviewed said once clients, internal or external, became accustomed to the idea and could see how it worked, there were few issues.

“At the start, we weren’t open with clients; we just did it and forwarded emails and covered for each other,” one job-sharer explains. *“Then there was a blurb that went into letters of engagement, stating that we job-shared and explaining how any double time would be attributed. We got more open about it. We put in our emails which days we were off and talked about it with clients.”*

An organised week

The job-sharers in our survey had several different ways of dividing up their week but the most common was for both parties to work three days each and have a cross-over day - usually Wednesday.

“I do Monday to Wednesday and she does Wednesday to Friday,” one job-sharer explains. *“We don’t actually work in the same office - she is in Melbourne and I am in Sydney but that’s actually been a benefit, as we have clients all over Australia and we are able to see more of them face to face.”*

Another job-sharer says: *“Our cross-over day is Wednesday, so on Tuesday night I go home and prepare a handover file that tells her what work I have done on Monday and Tuesday and also what I plan on doing. On Wednesday, I give her time to catch up on emails and also try to finish off anything that I can. We talk a lot on the day and also have most of our team meetings on Wednesday.”*

Days off

Another point to be cognisant of in job-sharing is how to treat days off. This is a question for the culture of the firm and the type of work being done. Returning to the example of nursing, staff members are not called to answer questions when they are off duty. The nurse on duty is expected to have the answers.

Ideally, job-sharers should have their time away as real days off. However, this may require some negotiation and may not be possible from the beginning, particularly if the organisation is trialling the arrangement.

Conclusion

The final pay-off.

The benefits of job-sharing were clearly evident on many levels from the people we interviewed.

Each job-sharer in the survey thought their career had progressed further through job-sharing than it would have if they had worked part-time. (There is an inbuilt bias into this research, in that only successful job-sharers were interviewed, as they are more visible.)

“I think I have more chance of career advancement with a job share than [with a part-time role],” one sharer says. *“However, while the company is open to flexible working, there are no job-sharers at manager level and that is our next challenge.”*

Everyone interviewed says their arrangement has a hugely beneficial effect on their family life.

“I walk out on Wednesday and that is the end of my week,” one sharer says. *“There may be an occasional call from my partner but that’s all. When you’re part-time, you are supposed to work only three or four days, but really you are on the whole time.”*

Finally, there was also recognition of the benefits of working in a close partnership with someone.

“As lawyers, you are very individual and work with your own clients. You don’t always get the opportunity to work closely with your colleagues, and having a job share is like working in a great team - you have someone there you can always rely on.”



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