

Job Sharing

How to navigate job sharing arrangements

Why job share works – in a nutshell

Job sharing arrangements can provide many benefits to employers and employees, including:

- allowing employees to meet family or personal responsibilities while providing continuity of service to clients and their matters
- providing two minds for the price of one – two employees can offer a wider base of skills, expertise and effort than one
- employees can learn from their job-sharing partners and gain mutual support and encouragement on the job.

When job share works best

A job sharing arrangement requires a good fit between two like-minded, committed employees who are willing to co-operate and share the workload equally. There are at least two combinations that work well.

Employees with same levels of experience

Both employees are at the same level of seniority and remuneration, and clients do not differentiate between them. They may share a desire and the ability to build a legal practice together, following an agreed practice development strategy. They may also share similar goals in relation to career progression and work/life balance.

Employees with different levels of experience

A senior employee is the lead lawyer and a more junior employee acts under their guidance. The senior lawyer is accountable for all matters, however matters are allocated between the senior and junior lawyer according to client preference and their respective expertise and capacity. Each may run their own matters as well as some joint matters, or all matters may be handled jointly.

How to make it work

Managers and employees need to work together to create a mutually beneficial arrangement. Some models and options to consider include:

Shared responsibilities

Two employees share the responsibilities of one full-time equivalent (FTE) role or 1.2 FTE (i.e. both employees work 0.6 FTE). There is no division of duties. The employees are interchangeable and each employee picks up where the other left off.

Divided responsibilities

Two employees share one full-time position or 1.2 FTE (both employees work 0.6) and divide responsibilities between them according to expertise and specialised knowledge.

Unrelated responsibilities

Two part-timers work autonomously on their own matters but share resources, office space and support staff as if they were one employee.

Other keys to success include:

- ensuring firm-wide support of job share arrangements by having a written policy and guidelines for those wishing to implement it
- being transparent by notifying clients of the arrangement in introductory letters and retainer agreements
- providing ample administrative time for job sharers to communicate in relation to handover aspects, and budgetary relief where required
- ensuring each employee has their own performance appraisal
- putting in place a management plan that sets out consequences of a job-sharing employee departing the organisation, resuming full time employment or otherwise exiting the arrangement.

Tips for job sharing employees

Good communication in relation to matter management is essential. This can be assisted by:

- having some specified time in the office together
- maintaining a status report of tasks completed and outstanding on each file
- access to each other's work email, and emails copied to each employee and their support staff
- a shared calendar, or critical dates to be entered in both employees' calendars
- shared electronic folders, with each employee using the same email filing system and protocols
- up-to-date filing, including file notes typed for legibility and immediately put on file

- an agreement as to the sharing and allocation of resources such as office or telephone, including when both employees are in the office
- employees being available to discuss matters when they are not in the office
- review of client invoices to address any duplication of time or costs.

Benefits of job sharing

In addition to those noted above, other benefits include:

- the full utilisation of firm resources, e.g. office space, equipment, secretary
- greater potential for practitioners to build a legal practice or specialisation than via a traditional part-time arrangement
- while standard personal leave and annual leave entitlements will apply, the nature of job sharing means there will usually be someone available to meet the client's and the firm's needs
- retention of staff, particularly senior trained staff, translating to reduced turnover costs
- increased staff loyalty from participants in well-supported job share arrangements
- employees achieve a balance between work and family or other responsibilities, boosting morale and productivity
- offering a point of differentiation for marketing purposes and can help meet requirements for government tenders
- enables the lateral recruitment of senior employees
- provides additional marketing opportunities as both employees can profile themselves to clients.

And some of the challenges ...

- Job share participants require good communication and organisation skills, and a willingness to delegate tasks.
- Care needs to be taken to avoid possible duplication of work (resulting in increased costs to the client).
- Servicing job sharing arrangements can require extra administration, however this is usually offset by other time and resource-saving benefits.
- Clients, colleagues and/or managers may favour one employee over the other, leading to uneven workloads and career progression opportunities. This needs to be carefully guarded against with measures put in place to pre-empt it, where possible.