

Job-sharing and job-splitting

Job-sharing typically involves filling an established (often senior) job in a different way. In reality, while some such jobs are shared others are split with tasks divided between two part-time job holders. It is not always easy to distinguish a job-share from a job-split. Indeed, they tend to form two ends of a continuum.

Where a job is shared, the parts of the job continue to be linked together and cannot be run completely separately. Both sharers are equally responsible for the whole job and part of their role is to work together to ensure that nothing is missed or lost. A key element in sharing is the continuing joint responsibility for tasks.

The advantage of a job-share to the organisation is that the job continues to exist in its full-time format and a full-time employee can be moved into it at some later stage if desirable. A further advantage is that there are always two people to provide cover - particularly in emergencies. Depending on the needs of the organisation holidays can be taken at the same time or staggered with each job-share partner providing holiday cover for the other.

The biggest potential difficulty with job-sharing is finding a suitable partner. This is likely to be easier in large organisations than in small.

"Working on a job share basis my job security is dependant on there being another job share for the other half of the week. I wish there was another way around this, as there are problems recruiting to job share vacancies. If no one is recruited you face the decision to be forced to work full-time or leave"

female 31-35

In job-splitting, two people simply divide one job between them so that both parts are covered. The work routines are fairly well established and the need for co-ordination between them will be minimal. The main rationale for job-splitting tends to be achieving flexibility of cover, labour cost reduction or job creation. Job-splitting can be an effective way of achieving continuity of cover for longer than a standard working week without the addition of a second half-time job. For example, a full-time job can be split into two 60 per cent jobs.

An advantage of job-splitting is that the job can be split unevenly separating the skilled elements from the less or unskilled elements. A more junior employee can then be recruited into the less skilled part of the job-split.

Jobs requiring continuity - in the sense that a responsible job holder needs to be around throughout the working week to account for their actions to others or to provide a continuous service to colleagues - are often seen as unsuitable for sharing or splitting. Those which are defined by output - such as specialist professional jobs, project based jobs and many clerical and administrative jobs - are seen as more suitable. IMS research revealed that job-sharing tended to be concentrated in the service sector whereas job-splitting was found in both manufacturing and services industries.

Both options can potentially increase costs. There may be a need for additional furniture and equipment where sharers work together during a handover period. Training costs may also be higher.

A practical consideration with job-sharing is the time needed to formalise arrangements. The organisation will need to assess the suitability of a job for sharing, to decide how it should be divided and to recruit a job-share partner. Many employers therefore require a period of notice (say three months) when an employee makes a request to job-share. Setting up a job-share can be a complex process and the decision to do so should not be undertaken lightly. Issues which should be considered are covered in the next two sections.

Job-share or job-split?

Although people talk about job-sharing and job-splitting, in reality it can sometimes be hard to determine into which category a particular post falls. In addition, an employer may decide to create a job-share in order to retain the job in its full-time form where a job-split would be more appropriate but is likely to result in the development of two separate part-time jobs.

As a general guide, **job-share** is more likely when:

- A more senior post is involved.
- Higher levels of skill and responsibility are required.
- The postholder has a high degree of discretion over the content and organisation of the work.
- There is a handover of tasks from one sharer to the other.
- The job is being divided to retain highly skilled staff unable to work full-time.

In contrast, where there is a **job-split**:

- The post is likely to be more junior.
- Lower levels of skill and responsibility are required.
- The postholder has less autonomy and discretion over their work.
- The work is likely to be more systematised.
- Tasks can be completed in the hours worked and little or no handover is required.
- The purpose of the split is to create new jobs, or to achieve cost reductions.

Based on research the IMS has suggested that at the two extremes most professional and managerial jobs are job-shares, while divided jobs at the routine clerical or semi/unskilled shopfloor level are almost entirely job-splits. However, between the two extremes fall a number of divided jobs which are harder to define - such as secretarial, junior administrative and technical work. Whether it is a job-share or job-split will depend on the precise content of the job and how it is organised.

How to make a job-share work

To be successful a job-share needs to be planned thoroughly. In particular, the following issues need to be addressed:

- ***What are the peaks and troughs of the current workload? How should the hours be arranged so that both sharers have an equal workload?***

The most common job-share arrangement is for two people to work 2½ or 3 days each with an overlap period. A few job sharers work alternate weeks. An uneven split where one sharer works two days while the other works three is also possible if acceptable to both parties. In some jobs tasks are carried out by whoever is there, whereas in others clients, projects or cases are allocated to each sharer.

- ***What handover arrangements will be needed? How will the job-sharers communicate with each other?***

Some arrangements allow for a period when both sharers are at work. Others communicate by telephone or write things in a book.

- ***Can the sharer who is not working be contacted by telephone if necessary?***

Some sharers do not wish to be contacted at home unless there is an emergency while others are happy to resolve queries as they arise. The situation should be clarified at the outset to avoid later misunderstandings.

- ***What will be the impact on pay and other benefits?***

The implications for pay and benefits need to be spelt out. For example, in most share arrangements where overtime is paid this only occurs when the full-time hours for the week have been worked. A sharer covering for her partner will therefore only be paid at the standard rate. Where the share is being undertaken in preparation for retirement the reduction in salary may have an impact on pension payments under a final salary scheme.

- ***How well are the sharers likely to work together?***

Co-operation among job-sharers is essential and many commentators agree that successful job-shares are based on mutual trust and respect. Where the two sharers already know and understand each other they are likely to find it easier to work together than if a new sharer has been recruited from outside the organisation.

- ***How will the work be assessed? How will the sharers be appraised?***

Where sharers each have specific responsibilities, this will be reasonably straightforward. Where both cover the entire spectrum of tasks 360 degree feedback can produce valuable insights. Part of the appraisal should also be to consider how well the two sharers are working together and the impact of this on colleagues, subordinates and customers.

Some organisations choose to appraise sharers individually followed by a joint discussion to set objectives for the coming year.

- ***How will the sharers be promoted?***

Promoting individual job-sharers is not always straightforward, particularly where one postholder is perceived to be performing better than the other. If one is promoted this will mean finding new job share partners for both. In addition, the postholder not promoted might feel undervalued and overlooked. The issue of promoting job-sharers is probably easier to accommodate in larger than smaller organisations.

- ***What is the likely impact of the proposed arrangement on work colleagues and third parties?***

In particular, does the proposed arrangement create undue pressure on work colleagues and will there be adequate cover and continuity for customers or clients? If there are negative impacts, how can these be reduced?