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When two heads are better than one

By Jane Garcia 2006

Job sharing – where two or more people share a full-time work role – is in its infancy in Australia but there are significant opportunities for organisations to use it as a proactive people-management tool to help address issues such as the retention of working parents and mature aged workers, according to an expert from employment and human resources consultants Hudson.

A recent company report surveying more than 8000 Australian employers about job sharing found only 40 per cent of employers provide a job share program to staff, while 52 per cent of employers and 73 per cent of job seekers surveyed would consider job sharing as a work option, now or in the future.

Jobsharing: A fresh look at flexible working found the practice could have a positive influence on an organisation's ability to attract and retain staff and it was currently most prevalently used by the education and government sectors.

"Taking into account what the [jobs] market it like right now, the ability to retain people is one of the top three HR priorities again this year," says Hudson JobShare national practice leader, Vilma Faoro.

"When you're doing exit interviews... a common theme in Australia and overseas is the ability to have pragmatic and practical work/life balance solutions and working options.

"From the individual's point of view, the benefit is the ability to continue to participate in a challenging and fulfilling roles without re-skilling is a strong value proposition. There's not many work options that allow people to today because quite often part-time work actually means you're taking a side-step or you're doing a role with responsibilities you may have had five years ago."

She says one of the biggest misconceptions about job sharing is that it is "just a solution for working Mums who are administration assistants".

"I have done so many presentations where I'll be sitting in a room with HR managers and in the first 10 minutes I talk about job sharing as a solution for transitioning the aged to retirement or retention of working parents or as an accelerated graduate induction program or a way to keep senior women in the workforce so they can continue their career path to be in leadership and managerial positions," Ms Faoro says.

"You can see the lights going on. They've never been presented with the information and they've never thought about it in that way."

She says it is important for both an organisation and potential job sharers to talk openly about any concerns and really think about the role, how it can be best structured for job sharing, how it is going to work and operate, how to apportion responsibilities and what to do in an emergency.

"It is important for the organisation to support and encourage these sorts of arrangements as an organisational solution rather than leave it all up the job sharers to make work," Ms Faoro says.

"The research we've done and the situation in Europe is that it's a much more shared responsibility – the organisation puts the parameters of the solution in place and says this is how we want to use it, this is how it is going to operate and the individuals work within that framework. There are a lot less grey areas for the individuals to sort out."