

 <p><b>DIVERSITY FACTORY</b></p> <p><i>Know your business</i> <i>Know your people</i> <i>Prioritise &amp; prosper</i></p>	<h1>Lawyers Weekly</h1> <h2>It takes two</h2> <p>By Vilma Faoro 2006</p>
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***Job sharing keeps women in the workforce, and employers ahead of the market, says Vilma Faoro***

Professional women face many challenges in the workplace, but perhaps the most complex is how to stay in fulfilling, mainstream employment after they have children. How do we continue in a chosen field, in which we have invested years of hard work, while avoiding the career holding pattern that often comes with part-time work?

This is the question I faced when I had my second child over two years ago. My employer, a global oil company, was unable to provide any solution that allowed me to continue to participate in the challenging and fulfilling roles I was used to. Instead, I was given a succession of part-time transition roles, with no influence or decision-making powers, and with responsibilities similar to those I had six years earlier. Like many women in the same situation, I left the company.

Becoming a mother doesn't rob you of your professional faculties. You still need to grow professionally, but you also need to balance work with family. Unhappy with the status quo, I started a company that attempted to address these issues – JobShare Australia.

Job sharing involves two people sharing one full-time role. The role can be designed and established in many different ways. You can partner with an individual of the same skills or complementary skills. You can share, divide or split the responsibilities, depending on the nature of the role, the skills of the partners, and each individual worker's needs. There are few full-time roles which can't be shared, and the system is a win-win for employers and employees. Employers are able to retain and attract staff, while employees have a work option that doesn't impact career progression or development opportunities.

Already a proven management tool in Europe, job sharing is gaining momentum in Australia, helping employers address some of the real human resource issues that continue to confound modern firms and companies. How, otherwise, do organisations retain working parents, especially those returning from maternity/paternity leave? How else can they promote and grow the talent pool of women available for partner and management positions and attract quality employees in a competitive marketplace? Retaining the valuable experience of retirement-age also becomes possible through job sharing.

For employees, job sharing allows greater flexibility while enabling career advancement, a better balance between work and family, or work and education. It also fosters the sense of real contribution that comes with working in a challenging, full-time role and puts workers alongside colleagues with different skills, knowledge or experience and provides mutual support and encouragement.