

Case Study – Job share success across the South Pacific

Flexibility - it's an important part of Insurance Australia Group Limited (IAG) workplace culture and it's a loyal staff that is benefiting from the company's leading range of work arrangements and leave options. Already recognised as an employer of choice for women (close to 60% of the staff are female), the international general insurance group provides opportunities for flexible work hours, part time and job share, work from home, community leave, career break and primary and secondary carer's leave amongst other impressive initiatives.

For longstanding and now senior IAG employees Tricia, Alex and Michele, a job share arrangement across two roles provided the personal flexibility each required. In the following case study, we talk to each of them about how to succeed in a job share role and discuss the benefits, challenges and complexities that can arise.

Job share role 1 –Tricia & Alex

Moving to New Zealand for a year off with his family, Alex was offered the opportunity to work two days a week as head of his department. Together with his Manager, Alex approached Tricia to share the role working three days a week. Despite the fact that Tricia had had no experience in this department previously and was based in Sydney, both she and Alex would find compatibility in their work practices and core competencies making the role a success.

Job share role 2 –Tricia and Michele

Following Alex's return to Sydney and full time employment, longstanding peers Tricia and Michele applied and interviewed together for a newly created full time position within the company. For Michele, reducing her four work days to three was ideal; Tricia's three day work week would ensure her personal responsibilities continued without interruption.

Q: Where does one start when creating a job share role, especially when one partner has no previous experience in a specific department or with job share?

T: It took us a few meetings to discuss how best to divide the position, but for me, even before you start working out the day to day requirements and responsibilities of a role, you need to discuss your personalities and work styles. Between the two of you, a frank and open presentation of your strengths and weaknesses, your optimal working environment or situations you want to avoid need to be addressed. From here, the division of the role becomes easier as tasks are allocated in line with your strengths, and your job share partner has some understanding of who you are with regards to work ethics.

A: With me working remotely from overseas, and Tricia based in Sydney, it made complete sense to divide the role into operational and strategic functions. Tricia's management experience made it easy for her to take over leadership of the key operational areas of the function. As Tricia says, making job share work comes down to compatibility of the individuals with regards to work styles, values and ethics.

M: Yes, and set ground rules, identify decision making styles and understand why your colleague wants a job share arrangement so needs are met around annual leave and extra hours.

Q: For Alex and Tricia, the job share status had already been approved. How does one persuade management to restructure a full time position for a single employee into a job share arrangement?

M: It comes down to preparation really. Tricia and I had worked out how we would divide the full time role before we applied for it, we then created a joint application that addressed the requirements of the business and the teams, and we interviewed together to demonstrate that we were bringing double the strengths of one candidate to the role.

T: We were also able to demonstrate that we had already divided the day to day management of the role, that we recognized the need for continuing flexibility and review to ensure the arrangement was working. Whilst the flexibility suited both of us personally, it was clear we had the company's best interest in mind when dividing the role – every job responsibility had been accommodated and it was clear we would work well as a united and productive team.

Q: Where do you see the greatest complexity or difficulty lies in job sharing?

T: Potentially, it can have the greatest impact on your colleagues as they often find it difficult to understand where one person's responsibilities start and the other's finishes. If your communication strategy includes your team and management, you'll find as we did, that the team actually benefits from having both of you in the role.

M: Persuading others that a role can be performed just as well if not better by two people; that if the job share team is right, the company gets double efficiency without the usual fatigue and stress experienced by a single employee. Interviewers are not used to the dual applicant interview so it's essential you demonstrate your compatibility as a team, as well as how you'll address the needs of the job and company.

Q: Communication does come up a lot – would you say it's the most important element in job share success?

A: It certainly plays a monumental role yes, and that's on every level. Between the two employees, their teams, clients, management – I think it's a question of managing the expectation, pre-empting a situation and briefing accordingly.

For Tricia and I, we agreed upfront that we could be contacted outside of our working days, and we established strong communication channels to ensure the transfer of information remained fluid. Via mobile phones and email, we caught up daily, a more formal call each week for a full catch up, and the same again between me and my manager. For pressing business requirements, both of us would be available so we could address the priorities together.

M: Beyond communication, total honesty and trust between the two of you are just as important given you can't be across everything all the time. Having a work partner who shares the 'wins' despite your absence on a given day makes for a motivating work environment.

Q: Having worked together so successfully with Alex in the first role, was it hard starting again with Michele?

T: Not at all, Michele and I have very compatible personalities and skills and I was able to bring my previous experience of workable communication systems and review techniques to the new role. We applied for the new role together because we knew we would work well together. Michele will agree - we had already built trust, we were non-territorial and non-competing when it came to work styles.

Q: Any advice for those thinking of job share?

A: Make sure you're clear on how much work you're prepared to do outside your normal working hours. I certainly put a lot more in than was expected of me but that's just my personal work ethic and I was happy to do it. I would imagine others could become resentful if it had not been agreed upon upfront.

T: At a management level, make sure you establish an assessment process to determine sharer compatibility – it's essential to job success.

M: Understand that there is no single job share model to follow for success. Recognise the value of the people, the time and place of the position and review continually in line with business demands.

PartTimeOnline

Part Time Works Here.

Last words...

Alex has returned to Sydney and is once again working full time. As a strong supporter of job share, 25% of his direct reports work part time; in his view, a deliberate recruitment strategy he's keen to continue.

Michele and Tricia continue successfully with their three day job share arrangement in Sydney.

IAG underwrites approximately \$7.5 billion of premium per year and employs more than 16,000 people in Australia, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and Asia.

For more information on IAG, visit www.iag.com.au

For further information on the case study or Part Time Online please contact
Liana Gorman – Director
0423451145

www.parttimeonline.com.au

info@parttimeonline.com.au
(02) 9369 1133