Job-sharing among teachers: Positive, negative (and unintended) consequences

Sue Williamson
UNSW Canberra, Australia

Rae Cooper and Marian Baird
University of Sydney, Australia

Abstract

The pros and cons of part-time work have attracted considerable attention in recent years, not least because of its presumed potential to enable employees to reconcile paid work and family needs. This article focuses on job-sharing, which is a unique yet underexplored form of part-time work and one which has rarely been analysed in terms of the consequences for all stakeholders. This case study of job-sharing details its positive outcomes for some employees, in assisting them to balance career and family. The study also highlights some previously unexplored and, we argue, unintended negative consequences of job-sharing. In this case, job-sharing contributed to the increased use of temporary employees who were locked out of many of the benefits of quality flexible work. Furthermore, the case study reveals competing interests between permanent and temporary employees, creating a range of challenges for human resource practitioners in managing and developing both groups.

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Keywords

Employment conditions, flexibility, gender, non-standard employment, working hours

Introduction

Australian employers provide a range of working arrangements to enable employees to reconcile paid work and family needs, including paid parental leave (Williamson, this issue), part-time work (Charlesworth and Chalmers, 2005; McDonald et al., 2009) and

Corresponding author:
Sue Williamson, School of Business, UNSW Canberra, PO Box 7916, Canberra BC, ACT 2610, Australia.
Email: s.williamson@adfa.edu.au

flexible working hours, (Cooper and Baird, in press). As a consequence, reduced hours and flexible working have received increased attention from researchers. There are two specific reasons for the growing interest in part-time work, and by extension, quality part-time work. The first is the distinctiveness and high incidence of part-time work within Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries, which is now a prominent feature of women's labour market participation. Among these countries, Australia has a relatively high rate of part-time work, ranking fifth after the Netherlands, Switzerland, the UK and Ireland (OECD, 2014). Australia is characterised by a working time regime (Rubery et al., 1998) of long full-time hours (dominated by men) and short, insecure hours (dominated by women), and as a neo-liberal leave regime with relatively poor childcare and parental leave support (Baird and O'Brien, 2015; Tomlinson, 2007). The second reason for increasing attention to part-time work is that many OECD countries have introduced legislation which provides employees with a 'right to request' flexible working arrangements in order to meet caring responsibilities. This provision has resulted in more employees requesting to work part-time or to job-share (Hegewisch, 2009).

Academic researchers have examined the elements which constitute quality part-time work (Burgess, 2005; McDonald et al., 2009). Professional part-time employment has been found to benefit employees not only by enabling work and care needs to be reconciled, but by also providing high quality work, complete with opportunities for career progression (Hyde, 2008: 1095; McDonald et al., 2009: 144). Academic debates have also identified negativities associated with much part-time work, namely, a lack of opportunities for career advancement, work intensification and frequent unpaid overtime (Charlesworth, 2007: 40; Dick, 2009: S184; Tomlinson, 2010: 256, 266). These negative links may potentially reinforce gender differences in the labour market (Rubery et al., 1998).

While there is an emerging practitioner literature on professional part-time employment (e.g. Richardson, 2009), there is a paucity of academic research on job-sharing, whether within a professional setting or otherwise. This is a serious oversight, given the extensive research on other forms of part-time work, and the importance accorded to job-sharing within Australian and international discourses on flexible working arrangements (see, for example, Australian Government Fair Work Ombudsman, 2015). Our article addresses this gap.

Job-sharing has been defined as a 'part-time contract in which two [employees] are jointly responsible for the workload of one position' (Freeman and Coll, 2009: 65). Although a form of part-time work, job-sharing is distinctive in being based on one full-time position, rather than two discrete part-time positions. It therefore has a strong relationship to standard full-time work. It is not a downgraded form of employment, as is much part-time work: employees share the workload of a single position. While the incidence of part-time work is high and growing in many countries, that of job-sharing is much lower. This is despite efforts by governments in Australia and internationally to promote it as a way to help parents integrate work and family responsibilities (Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service, 2007; Australian Government Fair Work Ombudsman, 2013; Citizens Information Board, 2013).

Of the various forms of reduced working hours, job-sharing is rarely analysed in terms of its consequences for all stakeholders. We know very little about the impetus for

implementing job-sharing arrangements, about the positive impact of job-sharing upon organisations, employees and families, or about the potential downsides of such arrangements. We seek to address this gap by presenting the results of a detailed case study of an organisation implementing job-sharing arrangements.

The article first presents an overview of current literature on job-sharing, to derive the research questions that guided our case study. First, how does job-sharing work? Second, what are the positive and negative implications for both employees and employers? We then take a more analytical view by investigating the degree to which job-sharing provides a form of quality part-time work and a career track. The methodology is then explained, and the implementation and outcomes of job-sharing in the case study organisation are explored. The discussion and conclusion identify the potentially conflicting impacts of this flexible work arrangement.

Previous research on job-sharing

Most writing about job-sharing tends to be descriptive, rather than analytical or conceptual. Existing research tends to be based on small case studies written by practitioners in feminised, professional occupations who have documented the organisation's and employees' experience of job-sharing. These articles provide advice on how job-sharing can successfully be undertaken, such as the need for job-sharers to be compatible and the need for formal policies, communication methods and review mechanisms (Boyd, 2008; Brocklebank and Whitehouse, 2003; Lafferty et al., 2002: 141; Richardson, 2009: 7; Tiney, 2004: 431; Wales, 2000). Much of the research on the benefits to organisations of job-sharing is based on 'business case' outcomes such as improved productivity, reduced absenteeism and increased staff retention (Gholipour et al., 2010: 137; Harris, 1997: 30; Roche et al., 1996: 143). Other, less tangible, benefits noted in this literature include improved performance and creativity within job roles, resulting from the multiple perspectives of the two workers (Freeman and Coll, 2009; Lafferty et al., 2002: 133; Tiney, 2004: 432).

Practitioner-oriented studies also highlight the challenges faced by employers implementing job-sharing arrangements, including increased costs through providing twice as much training and increased administration (Brocklebank and Whitehouse, 2003: 249; Gholipour et al., 2010: 136). Perceived challenges include perceptions of job-sharers as less committed than 'standard' employees (Branine, 2003: 61; Freeman and Coll, 2009: 69; Harris, 1997: 30; Roche et al., 1996: 144, 151). Managers have also reportedly complained of the need to resolve difficulties arising from personal incompatibility between job-sharing partners (Branine, 2003: 61; Lafferty et al., 2002: 137) or communication failures (Harris, 1997: 32; Tiney, 2004: 432).

Studies of the benefits of job-sharing are more common. It may offer employees an increased ability to manage work and family responsibilities and the opportunity to engage in fulfilling and professional work, with continued access to career progression (Boyd, 2008: 40; Branine, 2003: 62; Freeman and Coll, 2009: 65, 69; Roche et al., 1996: 144; Tiney, 2004: 431). Job-sharing may enable employees to develop their career, rather than accepting a part-time position with lower status and responsibility (Dubourg et al., 2006: 17; Richardson, 2009: 5).

While job-sharing has benefits and challenges in common with other forms of part-time work, its distinctiveness as a form of quality part-time work has not been widely canvassed. By locating job-sharing within this wider analytical framework, we extend the literature on quality part-time work.

Methodology

Our analysis is based on a case study of job-sharing in 'EduCo', a regional education provider and employer of teachers across a network of primary and secondary schools. This case study offers an opportunity to research the operation of job-sharing among professionally qualified employees. Despite the limitations of basing research findings on one case study (Kitay and Callus, 1998: 105; Ruddin, 2006: 799), the findings can be applied to the education sector more broadly, as the terms and conditions of employment are comparable across this industry.

Interviews were conducted with three groups of informants – employees working in a job-sharing arrangement, temporary employees and the school principals managing job-sharing employees. An EduCo human resource (HR) manager and a union official distributed a flyer to employees and union members which outlined the research and requested participants. Teachers and support staff voluntarily responded. Once interviews commenced, flyers were also provided to the interviewees to distribute, resulting in further employees contacting the researchers and being interviewed.

Thirty-two participants were interviewed between August 2012 and November 2013 (Table 1). The interviews were semi-structured and lasted from 30 to 45 minutes. Fourteen job-sharing employees were asked about the processes for, and outcomes of, negotiating their working arrangements and their manager's response to their request to reduce their hours. Employees were also asked about how their job-sharing arrangement operated, such as the communication methods used. Seven temporary employees were interviewed once it became clear to researchers that issues at the nexus between job-sharing/part-time work and temporary employment were significant in EduCo.

The researchers also interviewed two HR line managers, three senior managers and four principals about the operation of job-sharing. Additionally, the researchers interviewed four union officials from the main union which covered staff in non-government schools. A further three union officials who covered other school sectors were interviewed about the job-sharing arrangements in their locations.

Each interview was recorded, transcribed, and coded using NVivo10 qualitative data analysis software (QSR International Pty Ltd, 2012). Approximately 90 coding categories were used, including demographic information, the types of employment used, the process of negotiating and implementing job-sharing, the effects of job-sharing on an employee's career, and the benefits and challenges associated with job-sharing. A thematic analysis of the coded data was undertaken, based on these categories.

Supplementary document analysis explored background information about the organisation, EduCo policies on part-time work and job-sharing, and EduCo reports on equal employment opportunity submitted to the Australian government. Union policies on these forms of part-time work were also considered. The researchers also examined Government reports and policy documents on Australia's school education system generally and specifically the Catholic education sector – in which EduCo is located.

Table 1. Table of interviewees: EduCo case study.

	Number of interviews
Managers and employer representatives	
Senior managers and HR staff	5
Principals	
Primary schools	3
Secondary schools	1
Total principals	4
Employees and employee representatives	
Teachers	
Secondary school, permanent employee job-sharing	3
Secondary school, temporary (included three job-sharers)	4
Primary school, permanent employee job-sharing	6
Primary school, temporary (included two job-sharers)	3
Total number of employees	16
Union officials	7
Total	32

Overview: Job-sharing policy in EduCo

In 2012, when the research was being undertaken, Australia had over 9400 schools, divided into three sectors – government or public schools, Catholic systemic schools and independent schools. The Catholic systemic sector was the largest employer after the government sector, with 21% of all students (ABS, 2013).

EduCo was a geographically bounded, or Diocese-based, education provider with 29 primary schools and 8 secondary schools (Table 1). Teachers were employed by the Catholic Education Office in the diocese. This regional office oversaw the implementation of central policy and also developed policies at the local level, including those regulating job-sharing and part-time work (Anthony, senior HR manager). In 2012, EduCo had over 2700 employees, of whom almost 1000 worked full-time, over 900 had part-time jobs, just over 860 were casual employees (EduCo, 2012) and almost 700 were temporary employees (who could either be full-time or part-time). The numbers of temporary employees had increased in the previous decade and proportionately, ranged from approximately a quarter to a third of all employees in the workplace (communication from employer, 12 November 2013). Women also constituted the majority of employees in job-sharing arrangements: 103 of the 106 employees who job-shared in 2011–2012 were female. This equated to almost 12% of part-time employees in EduCo being in a formal job-sharing role.

The mechanisms enabling job-sharing

EduCo had a clear commitment to ensuring that parents could reconcile work and caring responsibilities, articulated in policy documents and on the organisation's website. Job-sharing was one element of a suite of work and family policies employees could use. EduCo introduced policies for flexible working arrangements in 2005, formalising

practices which had been occurring at the school level, such as job-sharing. The 2005 policy referenced the industrial award in relation to parental leave and personal/carer's leave and also outlined the job-sharing procedures. The policy made it clear that 'job-sharing is one position, not two part-time positions', reiterating that positions in EduCo were based on the concept of a full-time worker, even though the proportion of part-time employees was high. The 2005 policy also outlined the attributes required of potential job-sharers: 'flexibility, reliability, communication skills, and initiative'.

The policy was revised in 2010, and referenced the enterprise agreement, with the job-sharing provisions remaining the same. The latest version of the policy, released in 2012, included the legislated 'right to request'[1] provisions and replicated those in the union-negotiated collective agreement. EduCo's human resources policy and collective agreement outlined the eligibility requirements for job-share. Access to it was restricted to staff who had completed 12 months' service. Requests were made to the principal of the relevant school and while largely dependent on managerial prerogative could only be refused on 'reasonable business grounds', reflecting the legislation. The policy also outlined the mechanisms of job-sharing, including the need for principals to consider how many job-sharing positions the school could accommodate, costs to the workplace and career development opportunities for the job-sharers (EduCo HR policy, 2012).

Thus, EduCo provided four types of employment, set out in the organisation's collective agreement. These were as follows: permanent full-time, permanent part-time, casual (where the contract of employment did not extend beyond 20 days in any single period) and temporary employment, which was for a fixed term extending beyond 20 days. Access to job-sharing in EduCo was not a collective agreement entitlement but was based on organisational policy. It could take one of three forms.

First (and perhaps the most commonly understood version of job-sharing), it involved two teachers employed as permanent part-time employees who filled one full-time position. This was an arrangement negotiated between the employee(s) and their principal. In this case, neither teacher had a right to revert to full-time status (EduCo policy).

The second form was temporary job-sharing, where two permanent employees engaged in job-sharing on a temporary basis, for example, on returning to work after taking a period of maternity/parental leave. This arrangement was also negotiated at the school level with the principal. These employees had a right to return to their permanent, full-time positions. If either wanted to work for longer than a year in a job-sharing arrangement, they were required to submit a request to continue the temporary job-sharing arrangement. If an employee desirous of job-sharing could not find a partner, the principal found a temporary employee to become the other partner (EduCo policy).

The third type of job-sharing arrangement in EduCo occurred when a permanent, full-time teacher wanted to work part-time (as again, e.g., on returning to work after maternity leave) and a temporary employee became the second job-sharing partner. In this situation, the position belonged to the permanent teacher and the second teacher was employed on a temporary contract. Such job-sharing employees were required to apply for a continuation of the job-share on an annual basis. According to union sources, the job security of the temporary employee was dependent on the continuation of the job-sharing arrangement by the permanent job-share partner.

Establishing and implementing job-sharing

It is instructive to examine how job-sharing arrangements were initially organised and operationalised, highlighting the strategies developed by teachers and principals. This understanding helps in identifying the benefits and disadvantages of job-sharing to both parties.

Principals used various methods to organise job-sharing arrangements. Around October each year, teachers completed a form detailing their preferred working arrangements for the following year and could specify job-sharing (Victoria, primary school teacher; Marcia and Tasha, secondary school teachers; Sandra, secondary school principal). One employee detailed this process:

> We get a request form at the beginning of Term 4 and we're asked '(h)ow many days? Are we returning to the school? How many days would we like to be working?' … That's a fantastic thing that our principal does requesting what days and any reasons or special requests that we have. Like I requested again, Thursday and Friday, because they're the days my children are at childcare. (Victoria, primary school teacher)

The principal then considered these requests and drafted a timetable to accommodate as many requests as possible (Peta, secondary school teacher; Paul, secondary school principal).

In some schools, the process was more informal and the principal contacted teachers and requested their working hour preferences (Alessia, secondary school teacher; Hayley, primary school teacher). At other schools, requests were made when principals met with each staff member as part of their annual performance appraisal (Megan, primary school principal; Jenna, secondary school teacher; Joyce, primary school teacher). Yet, other principals simply informed teachers which days they were required to work (Billy, union official; Paul, secondary school principal; Yvette and Ann, primary school teachers).

Staff who were on maternity leave contacted their principal and requested their preferred working arrangements towards the end of their leave (Jenna and Kate, secondary school teachers; Billy and Ilsa, union officials; Dianne, primary school teacher). In some cases, this request was followed up by a formal interview with the principal (Billy and Ilsa, union officials; Dianne, primary school teacher; Mitchell, high school teacher). The principal then considered the response and subsequently informed the teacher of their decision. If the request was refused, in exceptional circumstances the regional head office intervened and overrode the principal (Kirrily, senior union official). More often, the union intervened on behalf of the union member and the situation was resolved amicably (Billy, union official).

Either teachers or principals sourced job-sharing partners as a part of the process of establishing job-sharing arrangements. A variety of mechanisms were used to match employees:

> Often in a school there is someone who works casually, someone who's already part-time and you can put that together as a job-share. Sometimes schools will advertise for someone for a year to job-share with another person. But again it depends on – we always say that the person who's coming back who owns the job – who has ultimately the right to return to the full-time job – they should have a very significant say in who they work with as their job-share partner. (Kirrily, senior union official)

In some schools, teachers were required to find their own partner. They informally approached colleagues to gauge interest (Bianca, primary school teacher) or used their peer networks to find a partner (Jenna, secondary school teacher).

Generally, interviewees in job-sharing arrangements reported that they felt personally compatible and had experienced very few problems, whether because the principal judged which employees were likely to work well together, or through employees sourcing their own partner. In cases where job-sharing was not successful, such as where the partners had different teaching methods and philosophies or different skill levels and their relationship was relatively unequal, permanent teachers reported that they worked with their partner for a year and then found a new job-share partner (Jasper, senior manager). Overall, however, interviewees reported experiencing very few problems with their job-sharing partners.

In discussing the implementation of job-sharing, teachers detailed the various arrangements used. Successful primary school job-sharers were flexible with their hours, working the days which the school needed, but which also suited their caring responsibilities (Ann, primary school teacher). Interviewees might work alternate days on different weeks, 3 days one week and two the second, to ensure effective coverage of classes and workload (Victoria and Ann, primary school teachers). Generally, teachers in primary schools had less flexibility than did their counterparts in secondary schools, as they had a higher face-to-face teaching workload. Primary school teachers did, however, access approximately 2 hours a week relief from teaching to undertake class preparation or training, which meant that in 1 week, three teachers could be responsible for the same class (the two job-sharing teachers plus a relief teacher). This was considered sub-optimal for classroom continuity, but an inevitable outcome of employees' need to job-share and access relief teaching (Charlotte, senior HR manager; Megan, primary school principal).

In contrast, secondary school teachers taught their specialist subjects to numerous classes in short blocks of time and were not responsible for the full daily activities of a single class. They spent less classroom time than primary school teachers and so principals could more easily distribute their class contact hours across the span of a week (Jasper and Vernon, senior managers). Nevertheless, time-tabling job-sharing employees in secondary schools also brought challenges, as continuity in teaching staff was important:

> In teaching, especially if you come to HSC [Higher School Certificate, the exams for the final year of schooling], it's where you're up to, it's about the student's learning, it's understanding where they're at, where you got to at the last lesson – now we're going here, this one doesn't get it, this one does get it, this one needs special – yeah, it's a lot more complicated … If you're just doing a task, a task is a task, you just do the task, but you're interacting with people and that's the difference. (Jasper, senior manager)

Teachers from both primary and secondary schools described a range of strategies to ensure the successful implementation of job-sharing arrangements. Employees communicated regularly with their job-sharing partners, checking emails, preparing for lessons and communicating developments (Dianne, Victoria and Joyce, primary school teachers; Jenna, secondary school teacher). Teachers might use a communications 'book' where they documented the day's activities and progress in preparation for the job-sharing partner the next

day (Peta and Alessia, secondary school teachers; Gillian and Yvette, primary school teachers). Job-sharing teachers also attended school on the days they were not rostered to work to meet with the job-sharing partner, as Alessia stated, 'so there will be days when even though I'm not technically paid to do the job we'll both be here, so we'll both do it'.

While some job-sharers worked additional unpaid hours, others found that their parental duties prevented them from providing many such hours to the school, and in particular, reduced their involvement in extra-curricular activities:

> I suppose what is generally found in schools is that staff who are working part-time or job-share, they're not the ones who coach the footy team, take the debating team every Friday night, get involved in the productions, coach netball and take the sport teams and do all that kind of thing … They just come in and do their two or three days. (Senior manager)

Peta, a secondary teacher, described how she continued to work in the evenings on teaching preparation and marking, but reduced her extra-curricular activities, which her colleagues were then required to take up (Peta, secondary school teacher).

The positives, negatives and unintended consequences of job-sharing

Teachers and principals identified a range of positive outcomes from job-sharing. They noted the benefits of two people working closely together, and for employees, the ability to reconcile work and family responsibilities. Interviewees also, however, identified several negative outcomes. Employees experienced high levels of unpaid overtime and principals experienced administrative difficulties as well as confusion around policy implementation. Additionally, HR managers needed to develop policies to ensure career paths for that temporary staff, particularly those with long job tenure.

The school community benefited from job-sharing, as it led some employees to contribute '110 per cent' each (Charlotte, senior HR manager). Job-sharing also assisted in staff retention, preventing resignations (Charlotte, senior HR Manager). Schools also gained the combined talents of a job-sharing arrangement:

> Principals will often tell you on the quiet that in a job-share situation you often get greater value out of two people job-sharing than you would if you had one individual teacher. You've got two heads there thinking about programming and the like, you've got two different approaches often in the classroom and they get good results with a number of the kids. (Billy, union official)

Principals preferred job-shared to permanent part-time positions, finding it easier to schedule teachers based on equivalent full-time workloads, time-tabling one teaching position per class across a week and leaving it to the job-share partners to work out the time allocation. It was reportedly harder to schedule two separate part-time employees for one class, whether in primary schools where a teacher had the same class all week or in secondary schools where a teacher taught the same subjects to different classes. Two part-time employees might not, for example, have had the complementary availability to cover the week's timetable.

For employees, job-sharing enabled them to combine work and family responsibilities while continuing to work in a quality part-time job. Many expressed their gratitude and 'luck' at having access to job-share arrangements (Victoria and Dianne, primary school teachers; Jenna, Peta and Tasha, secondary school teachers). These employees valued their position, as evidenced by the length of tenure with their respective schools, lasting from 10 to 19 years. As with professional part-time working, job-sharing employees in EduCo engaged in high-quality work. They were undertaking the same work as permanent, full-time employees, just fewer hours.

As to the negatives for employees, the first relates to undertaking unpaid overtime. The main way interviewees successfully engaged in job-sharing was by working extended unpaid hours, often outside of the workplace. Joyce stated that this included '… a lot of phone calls after work. A lot of talking, meeting up on week-ends. [The job-sharing partner] and I would spend hours together at her house … writing reports, writing programs … working out assessments …'. In particular, the high level of communication between the job-sharing partners increased their workload:

> Honestly, doing the job-share, even though you're part-time, it's really like – it's like a full-time load. It really is, because I would have to have my work marked and then ready for [job-sharing partner]. So she comes in on the Wednesday and my things are ready to go and everything is set up for her. So I would come home, mark books, drop them at her place late at night so she could take them the next day, because she only lives a couple of minutes away, thank goodness. So we do a lot of that. (Joyce, primary school teacher)

Teachers were not paid for this additional work, but few expressed outright dissatisfaction and it was viewed as something of a trade-off in order to access good, flexible employment. As one teacher stated, '(w)e have to be flexible if they're going to be flexible' (Alessia, secondary school teacher). Another viewed the unpaid work as inevitable: '… if you want to get your work done and up-to-date, you have to do it outside of hours if you've got young children. There's no other way of doing it' (Joyce, primary school teacher). While both full-time and job-sharing teachers may have engaged in unpaid overtime, the communication requirements were greater for job-sharers.

Some employees told us that they engaged in unpaid overtime to complete the same amount of work they had completed as a full-time employee. Ann (primary school teacher) spoke about concentrating 5 days' work as a subject co-ordinator into 3 days. Dianne (primary school teacher) completed 4 days' work in 3. Generally, the teachers interviewed emphasised working additional hours at home in the evening to complete their work, rather than working more intensively at the worksite, which is less feasible in this industry owing to the nature of face-to-face delivery.

While job-sharing provided benefits for EduCo such as increased retention of skilled employees, there were also a range of challenges for the school principals managing job-sharing employees. First, principals in both primary and secondary schools faced administrative problems. In secondary schools, classes needed to be spread across the week and so time-tabling two people across a week could be difficult (Jasper, senior manager). Job-sharing in small schools was particularly difficult, where there were fewer teachers. In one small school, for example, the principal was faced with the difficulty of organising

job-sharing arrangements for four of the seven teaching positions (Sandra, primary school principal). Job-sharing also created extra administration, such as organising and holding more than one staff meeting to ensure that all staff could attend (Sandra, primary school principal), and providing professional development for two employees instead of one, including for temporary employees (Charlotte, senior HR Manager).

Second, principals expressed a desire for clarity around what constituted reasonable business grounds to refuse a request to work part-time or job-share. One principal stated, 'I wanted nitty-gritty. I wanted "(w)hat can I say? What can't I say? What can I do? What can't I do?" But nobody was able to tell me' (Sandra, primary school principal). The central HR office was reluctant to provide a definitive list of what constituted reasonable business grounds for refusal as they did not want to provide a list which could be used by principals to refuse requests as this was 'dispassionate and … not our culture' (Charlotte, senior HR Manager).

Both a senior HR manager and a union official argued that a 'hierarchy' existed which determined which requests would be initially granted and which would be negotiated. An HR manager explained the dilemma,

> … principals [are] saying to me, 'how do I prioritise these requests?' … I just say … 'well, it's their legislative right to request, you've got to prioritise those ones first', and then they keep on juggling this with the ones who want to retire and they want to try to transition to retirement … So, we've got that happening, and they're the ones that are getting declined more often. (Charlotte, senior HR Manager)

One principal considered, however, that this approach risked potential claims of discrimination. Providing flexible working arrangements to parents but not older employees, for example, might constitute unlawful age discrimination (Megan, primary school principal).

While all of the challenges of operationalising job-sharing could be overcome with patience and attention from HR, one challenge emerged which proved more difficult to resolve. This is the high number of temporary teachers employed to replace staff who were job-sharing or on maternity or parental leave. This is a new finding within the job-sharing literature. While working as a temporary teacher may have provided new graduates with entry into the teaching labour market, many wanted to be permanent. Securing a permanent position, however, was elusive for those interviewed for this research. The interviewees therefore accepted temporary positions, often filling a succession of positions for permanent employees who were on parental leave, or who had returned from parental leave and were working part-time. This precarious employment could continue for years, as a senior HR manager explained,

> … we have large numbers who are coming to me and saying, well, 'ostensibly, we are permanent employees of the diocese because we are now entering into our seventh or eighth year of temporary employment contracts, separate employment contracts each time covering these other women and men who are on parental leave or returning part-time for parental reasons, and we can't get bank loans and we can't get permanent jobs'. (Charlotte, senior HR Manager)

Temporary employees therefore tried to secure permanent positions, usually at the end of the year. This was difficult, however,

> … this is my seventh year of applying for jobs at the end of the year, sitting interviews and hoping that I get something … I've just handed in a stack of applications again. To be permanent would just mean the absolute world to me … (Victoria, temporary primary school teacher)

Temporary teachers demonstrated a range of reactions to such ongoing unstable employment. One considered changing careers (Robyn, temporary primary school teacher), another did not expect to attain permanency until she had worked as a casual or temporary employee for 10 years and yet others thought that if they 'proved' themselves at their schools, their principals would try to retain them on a permanent basis (Lucas, temporary secondary school teacher; Penny, temporary primary school teacher). Generally, however, most expressed a weary resignation that they would need to keep applying for jobs until they finally secured a permanent position.

As well as job security, permanency brings a range of other benefits, including financial stability. Victoria stated, '… having a permanent job would allow financial security … we currently rent. We don't have our own house yet because I don't know what the future holds'. Victoria and her partner had applied for a home loan but had been rejected because of Victoria's non-permanent employment status. She also articulated personal reasons why a temporary teacher may desire permanency:

> I've got one child and we want to have another. But we won't have another child until I'm permanent … If I was to find out I was permanent tomorrow, we'd start trying for a baby straight away. It sucks that the fact that I'm not permanent is stopping that. Because I'm nearly thirty and I know that I'm still young, but it might be another seven years before I can get a permanent job. (Victoria, temporary primary school teacher)

Becoming a permanent employee was indeed a trigger for some employees to begin or to extend their family. On securing permanency, some female teachers became pregnant, accessed maternity leave and then requested to return to work in a job-share or part-time capacity (Victoria, temporary primary school teacher; Gillian, primary school teacher; Paul, secondary school principal). This chain of events then led to a subsequent increase in the numbers of temporary employees (Charlotte, senior HR manager).

In order to provide stability and a career path for temporary employees, EduCo considered trialling a 'Conditional Permanent Employment for Casual Employees' programme. This would have involved a panel representing schools in the Diocese assessing applications from temporary employees seeking permanency. These employees, if successful in their application, would be given conditional permanency and fill permanent vacancies. The temporary employees would be 'matched' with schools where employees were intending to retire, which would have given some certainty about job location and tenure. This initiative was not finalised, however, owing to the commencement of a new round of enterprise bargaining negotiations and consideration of a new system of teacher classification, which had implications for the permanency programme (email from EduCo HR officer, 5 June 2013).

An alternative method for permanency conversion had been trialled previously. Several years ago, temporary employees were able to convert to permanency in EduCo. An employee with five consecutive temporary contracts would be deemed permanent. This initiative was 'enthusiastically' taken up by employees (Charlotte, senior HR Manager). The opportunity to become permanent was only offered once, however, and was no longer available to employees when the interviews were being conducted.

Discussion

Our study highlights a number of positive, negative and unintended consequences of job-sharing. For EduCo, job-sharing resulted in the retention of highly skilled employees. The organisation also benefited through having two employees who were able to exchange ideas and support each other. Employees – particularly mothers – benefited through meeting both work and family responsibilities. There were, however, a suite of additional benefits. Job-sharers were employed in the same or a similar position as full-time employees and often continued to carry the same level of job responsibility, albeit shared with another employee. Job-sharing in EduCo, for those fortunate to be in or to secure permanent positions, was not a lesser form of employment as is much part-time employment undertaken by women, because the employment arrangement was within the auspices of a full-time role.

Job-sharing in EduCo, for the permanent employees interviewed, constituted quality part-time work, providing access to training and development, job autonomy and recognition. Job-sharing enabled the employees to determine their own schedules and work-flow (within the confines of their teaching duties). Teachers self-managed the parameters of their role and moderated their relationship with their job-sharing partner. This ensured that, even though not undertaken in a traditional full-time manner, the requirement of employers, schools, students and families was met. It is worth noting, however, that this self-management was largely undertaken on an unpaid basis for job-sharing teachers.

We see job-sharing as having the potential to disrupt the traditional working time regimes where men provide labour on a full-time, continual basis and women provide intermittent and contingent labour (Rubery et al., 1998: 92). It may represent a form of quality part-time work where women progress in careers but have the capacity to do so on a flexible basis. In order to truly challenge the established gender order, however, men would need to use and access this form of work in far greater numbers than identified in this study. In an industry and a workplace which is female-dominated, however, this is unlikely. In effect then, while the job-sharing arrangement has the potential to disrupt traditional gendered working patterns, in actuality this may not be realised. Gender remains as a central organising factor (Rubery et al., 1998) in the education labour market as well as the wider labour market.

Building on previous research, this case study also demonstrates some negative consequences of job-sharing for employees, with a critical challenge being the unpaid work undertaken by female employees who, in many cases, were struggling to combine work and family responsibilities. Engaging in extra-curricular work was expected by some of the principals interviewed, and employees who did not undertake this work were viewed as less

committed to their job than other staff. In EduCo, however, the employees generally demonstrated a high amount of commitment as evidenced by the job-sharers ensuring their work was up-to-date for their job-sharing partner and also by their long tenure with their schools.

We have highlighted some significant negative and largely unintended consequences flowing from the flexible working arrangements in the form of job-sharing. The way that job-sharing was operationalised in EduCo resulted in a very high number of temporary staff who 'backfilled' positions for permanent employees who were on leave or who had returned to work part-time after the birth of children. While this flexibility was beneficial for EduCo and for the permanent part-time teachers concerned, it impacted negatively on temporary employees. A policy tension is therefore evident between the rights of temporary and casual teachers and permanent employees.

For the temporary employees, the consequences of job-sharing were different from those for the permanent employees. The former were circumscribed by a lack of security and were beholden to their job-sharing partner and to the principal who employed them. These employees believed that they had to 'prove' themselves to their employer, to go beyond what was expected to increase the possibility of securing a permanent position. Ironically, therefore, an employment arrangement which seemed to have the potential to promote gender equality was doing so for one group of women – those who were permanent employees. Teachers on temporary contracts, by comparison, were marginalised through not having access to the benefits which accrue to permanent employment.

As Rubery et al. (1998) note, it is 'increasingly important to differentiate between different types of part-time jobs' (p. 80). Our case study shows the importance of considering the constitution and impacts of part-time work even when the jobs are ostensibly the same, in that the same work is being performed in the same organisation. The job-sharing arrangements in EduCo effectively created a hierarchy of groups of female employees, differentiated by their employment status. While researchers have identified that part-time employees may occupy a lesser labour market position, the EduCo case study shows that different grades of career entitlement for different groups of women exist even within an organisation. Furthermore, the lack of career paths for these contingent employees could also lead to a downgrading of professional part-time work. There is the possibility that an underclass of teachers is developing in this organisation, consisting of temporary teachers who do not have access to the same benefits and opportunities as do permanent teachers.

Conclusion

The case study has shown that job-sharing is a viable, but possibly underutilised, form of part-time work which may enable parents in professional jobs to meet their work and family commitments and to maintain careers. This is significant at a time when employers, employees and governments seek to build access to non-standard working arrangements, especially for parents of young children. This study adds to the growing body of research which seeks to analyse how flexible working arrangements are brought to life in workplaces and to understand the implications for stakeholders. We have highlighted the benefits and challenges of job-sharing, as well as the unintended and negative consequences of such arrangements, especially for temporary employees.

In our study, school principals reported facing challenges in managing job-sharers, including increased administrative workloads, and also that they found it difficult to prioritise and rank requests for employees desiring such arrangements. EduCo provides valuable lessons for other organisations in how to implement and operationalise job-sharing, but also reveals the difficulties in implementing job-sharing evenly and on an equitable basis. EduCo job-share employees engaged in high levels of unpaid overtime, which, in some cases, intruded on their family lives. The particular configuration of job-sharing in this case study also resulted in a high number of temporary employees who experienced difficulties associated with non-permanent employment, and waited many years for permanent job openings. Our study shows that, even when the best intentions are evident, when organisations establish family-friendly, flexible working arrangements, that challenging and sometimes contradictory tensions arise. Resolving these tensions is the key to constructing sustainable and equitable workplace policies and practices.

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Note

1. The *Fair Work Act 2009* provides employees and other designated groups of employees with a 'right to request' a change in their working arrangements from their employer. Such changes can include changes to an employee's hours of work, patterns of work or location of work. The employer can refuse the request on 'reasonable business grounds' (s. 65 Fair Work Act).

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Author biographies

Sue Williamson is a lecturer in the School of Business at UNSW, Canberra. Sue specialises in two main areas of research – gender equality in the workplace, and public sector industrial relations. Sue has examined collective bargaining in both the private and the public sectors, examining impacts on working conditions and employees as well as the broader role of collective bargaining as a form of labour regulation.

Rae Cooper is Associate Professor in Work and Organisational Studies at the University of Sydney Business School. Rae has published over 40 articles and chapters on industrial relations and gender and work in leading journals and in major collections. Rae is currently working on three key employment relations research topics: flexible work and flexible careers; collective bargaining in Australia; and care workers and vulnerable labour.

Marian Baird is Professor of Employment Relations and Director of the Women and Work Research Group in the University of Sydney Business School. Marian has received a number of Australian Research Council and federal and state government grants to study maternity and parental leave, flexibility for working parents, women and the global financial crisis, mature age workers and low paid workers, gender equitable organisational change and work and family in regional Australia. She is widely published in Australia and internationally.