

Job share model: Hybrid

Case Study



“ We heard from our team ‘hey it’s great that you are opposites and we get the benefit of both of you working together’ ”

Felicity No and Peter Goth worked as Co-Directors of Business Strategy and Evaluation in the Department of Primary Industries for one year. Felicity and Peter’s job share is a ‘hybrid’ model. This means they share joint responsibility for the role, with some pieces of work completed individually by each. Felicity also characterises some elements of the job share as ‘vertical’ because she receives on the job coaching from Peter, and benefits from Peter’s experience and role modelling.

A supportive agency helped to get started

Peter: We both came to Industry on the basis that we both thought it’s a good place to job share and accepted the role on that basis. We started the job share in a new team, which meant we didn’t have

to take something existing and turn it into job share, but built something around the job share. We made sure we went through the process of introducing our team to the concept of job share, establishing ground rules and finding out from them what they thought would work or not.

Felicity: This cluster is one of the leaders in job share - I don’t know many others that have as many job-share executives. Coming from the Department of Premier and Cabinet, I knew that job share was somewhat established.

Peter: There wasn’t any issue with us working as 1.2 FTE because Primary Industries has that history of job share. There is an understanding that it costs more, but it’s an investment that’s worth making because it produces a whole lot of benefits. The agency probably understood that more than we did.

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Mon	Tue	Wed	Thur	Fri
Felicity	Felicity	Felicity and Peter	Peter	Peter

Agency HR systems need work-arounds

Peter: While conceptually HR is supportive, we have had to find a lot of the solutions to system problems. For example, we had to create our own joint email account, and all the systems are configured for individuals rather than job share. For example, Felicity's performance plan came to me, and Felicity's leave sometimes comes to me for approval. The systems haven't worked out how to accommodate job share. We manage that between us.

Felicity: All of the burden of timesheet and approvals leave is on Peter because the employee system can't allow two people to be in the same role number, making it hard for me to share the administrative burden. Pro-active support would be great. It took us a couple of months to get the Director email account, and we regularly remind people outside our team to use it.

Deciding who does what

Felicity: We take time to check-in on Wednesdays about significant decisions when we think each other should have input. That said, work doesn't stop if Peter isn't here or I'm not here - we do still make those 'in the moment' decisions based on a shared view of how things should run in the team. It can also depend on who is on leave and the person in the office picking up that piece of work.

Peter: If it's not an integrated piece of work, i.e. it will make more work to have the other person across it, then one person leads it and we decide together who has the specific skills to do that piece of work. But this is an exception that doesn't come up that much.

Taking advantage of handovers to reflect and improve

Felicity: We use Google Keep to share our handover notes. I update the notes every Tuesday afternoon, so if Peter has time he will log in on a Tuesday night. If not, we always sit down on a Wednesday morning and go through the notes together. We also keep a shared to-do list in that application, which we tick off jointly. We have shared meeting notes, with anything that we've recorded during a meeting that we think the other person needs to know about, or conversely there might be a meeting coming up in the diary that I might not be going to so I will record some notes or actions that I want Peter to raise on our behalf. Up until 12pm on a Wednesday I handle our inbox. Then post 12pm Peter takes over and I tie up any loose ends. On a Friday afternoon Peter does his handover notes and gives me a call, and we have a handover on a Friday night so that I can get started really early on Monday.

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Peter: Google Keep means we both have access to all the notes, all the to-dos and all the things we've individually scribbled down that we need to do. It's important to use the same application, and it's central to us being able to do the same job and have faith that the other person is going to progress tasks and share learnings from meetings we've each had. We take turns to catch up with our people each week and the only way we can ensure continuity is by sharing the same notebook. In the same way we share the same calendar and email. We also tag emails that we think the other person should read, and we each start our part of the week by reading those emails before we do the handover discussion.

Felicity: We try not to duplicate through different mediums and applications by filtering what the other person has to read in their handover for them, and making sure our notes don't duplicate

what's already in any emails. It takes some effort and time that shouldn't be underestimated.

Peter: Duplication is an inherent part of job share, you can't get completely away from it, but we do try in fact to make the most of it. On Wednesday it can seem like we spend a lot of time explaining things to each other, but I think we each actually benefit from that review time, with both of us using that time to get a better perspective on the job we do. It's actually something that slows you down but there's real benefit in that; you strategise what you're doing a lot more, as opposed to just running with things as they come up. Being able to take the time to meet your team but then ponder it, think about the importance of an given issue, and consider what to do next is a fantastic opportunity you usually don't get.



"I don't think we really thought of the benefits of job share, we thought it suits us and we felt like the agency was doing us a favour, but now we feel like we're providing better value for them."

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How job share builds your own skills

Peter: It makes you more disciplined. I have things that I would otherwise put off because they seem boring and mundane but then I would feel guilty if I passed them onto Felicity, so I finish those things because it looks bad if I haven't done it. If it was just me, I might continue on until someone got cranky with me for not doing something. I think Felicity is diligent of her own volition.

Felicity: I think the discipline is a good thing, and a good muscle to exercise - and you only really get the chance to exercise that muscle in a job share. You do need to be very organised. If you let things slide, it will slide into your partner's end of the week. You don't want to hand over a laundry list of things you didn't get around to. Happily I don't think either of us do that - we do have a genuine consideration that we're not overloaded on our days of the week.

Learning from your partner is one of the many benefits

Felicity: Peter has nearly a decade more experience as an executive than me, and he brings so much more experience

to the table, particularly around budget strategy. So even though we're job share partners, there's definitely a certain amount of coaching as well, for which we've helped our own boss see the benefit. It's almost shadowing your job share partner.

Peter: There's been lots of benefits for the organisation, having the two partners with different personalities, skills sets and backgrounds. The feedback from our boss was that he finds it fantastic; he feels like he has two heads for the price of one. Individually we've benefitted from working so closely with each other. Having a peer to give you that advice when you hand over really helps to temper what you do. I can't speak for Felicity, but for me it's been really helpful to help shape the way that I work. It's like having an alter ego that fills the gaps that you would otherwise have.

Felicity: Having someone really close to you, in your role, that you can test ideas with is very valuable and I haven't encountered that before.

"People call us Yin and Yang"



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Checking in with your team is vital

Peter: When we got started, we set up some protocols for how we'd work together, and shared them with the team. After 6 months, we did a survey with our team to check if the protocols were working, whether we were keeping to them and generally how the job share was working for them. We also asked our boss so he had the chance to provide his feedback. It was one of our staff members who asked us to check in after 6 months, so we agreed.

Felicity: We try to keep the feedback conversation active and on-going. We just completed a round of performance plan discussions, which we shared, and we both asked our people if they needed more or different from us, and what that was. Job share was always part of that conversation, and happily we've received positive feedback from our direct reports. But always having that door open to say 'give us some feedback' is really important. Finding out that people call us 'yin and yang' was funny.

Peter: We heard from staff 'hey it's great that you are opposites and we get the benefit of both of you working together', which we hadn't anticipated. I don't think we really thought of that as a benefit of job share.

We felt like the agency was doing us a favour, but now we feel like we're providing value for them as well.

Felicity and Peter's top tips for making it work

Peter: Define what you think will make it a success. When we first started we had upfront conversations about how long we thought we wanted to job share, and when we would review the job share. It's a bit of a forced conversation that you wouldn't have with a colleague normally, but you owe it to your job share partner to be frank and share those thoughts, so that if something happens you aren't caught by surprise if someone is unhappy or if their needs aren't being met.

Felicity: You need to figure out how to make the job share work so that other people don't have to find ways to work around you. Taking ownership of the pros and cons and mitigating the cons is on you. You've got the privilege and the responsibility to make it work for those around you. And a high EQ (emotional intelligence) is needed. Like any partnership there has to be a level of compromise and accommodating each other's various ways of working, so I think you do need to be reasonably emotionally intelligent. What works well in our partnership is our sense of humour, it's a similar sense of humour and we really get on well as peers and friends apart from being job share partners, and I think that helps a lot.

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The fact that people pointed out the benefits that we hadn't thought of, both our boss and our staff, was the biggest measure of success.

Felicity: People respond differently to different management styles and leadership approaches, so that was interesting feedback from our team. We've all been in situations where a management style doesn't align to your own style, and that can be challenging sometimes. With two people in a role, chances are at least one of them will align with an employee's own way of doing things.

Peter: The team also has the ability to learn from two different people as well. That really came out in the feedback from the team - that they appreciate having two bosses and that they use the two perspectives.

Job share can provide development opportunities for your team as well

Felicity: Peter acted up in our boss' role for a few weeks last year, I've acted in another Director role for a few weeks, and both of us have been on leave as well. Some of those times we both worked full time to cover each other and made arrangements; for example, childcare.

Other times, we asked one of our direct reports to act up for half of their time. This gives all of our direct reports the

chance to understand a director role, and a job sharer role. It can be a bit of a challenge for them to be one role one day and a Director the next, but it's a good challenge.

Peter: It's supportive because they have someone who knows the ropes with them, so they're able to step up their responsibility each time.

Having an exit strategy is important

Peter: An exit strategy is really important. We'll both be in the job share for as long as it's working for both of us. We both want to work part time and we both want to make our job share a success. We know we won't job share forever, and we each have career ambitions that will take us in different directions eventually. But while we're working together we want to do a good job and demonstrate that job share can work well. There will come a time that we'll want to do different things, but it won't catch us by surprise.

Felicity: Be as honest as possible; you owe it to your job share partner to share with them if you've been approached by other teams or bosses, and conversations about other roles, even if it doesn't lead anywhere.

Since sharing their story with the PSC, Felicity has been offered a Director role at Service NSW, also an organisation supportive of job share. Peter is considering next steps.