On my time not yours: Job sharing in the context of work/life balance

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Abstract: This paper investigates the use of job sharing work arrangements among office-based employees and the implications for employee work/life balance. A mixed method quantitative and qualitative approach was employed to explore the research objectives. Survey data was collected from 162 job sharing employees in a large Australian organisation followed by a series of semi-structured focus group interviews. Direct relationships were found between job sharing schedule flexibility and three dimensions of work/life balance (work interference with personal life, personal life interference with work, and work/personal life enhancement). However, while job sharing may have a positive impact on overall employee work/life balance, the qualitative results reveal greater job sharing flexibility appears to be a key element in achieving work/life balance for many employees. The implications for employees, organisations and future research are discussed.

Keywords: Flexible work arrangements, flexibility, job sharing and work/life balance.

INTRODUCTION
A wealth of literature examines the impact of flexible work arrangements on employee and organisational outcomes. Moreover, many flexible work arrangement studies focus on telecommuting, flexitime, or compressed workweek schedules (e.g., Baker, Avery, & Crawford, 2007; Barber, Dunham & Formisano, 1992; Baltes, Briggs, Huff, Wright & Neuman, 1999; Galea, Houkes & De Rijk, 2014; Kossek, Lautsch & Eaton, 2006; Pierce & Dunham, 1992; Ronen & Pimps, 1981; Saltzstein, Ting & Saltzstein, 2001; Stains & Pleck, 1986). However, job sharing has not received the same research attention. While there are some attempts to explore the implications of job sharing (Griffin, Vest, & Winkler, 2014; Hayman, 2009; Todd & Binns, 2013), empirical investigations linking job sharing and work/life balance are relatively rare. To better understand the results of previous job sharing investigations attention has increasingly focused on employee experiences of job sharing and how these experiences may contribute to positive employee outcomes. Consequently, the purpose of this study is to gain a better understanding of how job sharing flexibility influences the work/life balance of office based employees.

Job Sharing Flexibility and Work/Life Balance
Job sharing allows two or more employees to share one full time equivalent position. Indeed, job sharing work schedules offer employees the opportunity to work with greater flexibility than employees operating on fixed hour work schedules (i.e., 9am-5pm). This flexibility offers employees a way of taking advantage of family, leisure, and personal activities. The benefits of greater flexibility provided through job sharing arrangements have been linked to increased retention of valued employees, increased work and non-work attitudes, cost savings and improved recruitment (Griffin, et al., 2014; Tausig & Fenwick, 2001; Todd & Binns, 2013). From an organisational stand point job sharing can be a complicated process to manage and have negative consequences, particularly for service providers (Zedeck, 1992). However, as Griffin, et al., (2014) point out, the benefits for employees from job share arrangements generally far out way any negative consequences. Furthermore, various social experiments with samples of office
based, clerical and administrative employees operating on flexible work schedules have indicated that job sharing can make the integration of family and personal life a more realistic proposition (Kossek, Barber & Walters, 1999).

However, organisational job sharing initiatives alone may not be enough to create job flexibility, and thus, positively influence employee work/life balance. Indeed, job sharing policies that influence employee flexibility may not be applied consistently and employees may not have any choice in determining their own work schedule (Galea, et al., 2014). In situations where job share work programmes are inconsistently administered employees may not receive the benefits traditionally associated with job sharing initiatives, such as work/life balance. Moreover, a lack of consistency from supervisory management to implement flexible work programmes may result in perceived stress when trying to balance personal and working life (Kossek, et al., 1999). Consequently, there is evidence in the work/life literature (Bailyn, 1989; Eaton, 2003; Hill, Hawkins, Ferris & Weitzman, 2001; Hyland, 1999) that employees need to have some degree of flexibility in determining their own job sharing schedule to have a positive impact on employee attitudes. This argument supports the prediction that greater job sharing flexibility will enhance employee work/life balance perceptions.

Evidence presented in the literature suggests that greater flexibility provided to employees with the use of flexible work schedules can provide employees with positive outcomes (Baltes, et al., 1999; Barber, et al., 1992; Dunham & Barber, 1989; Pierce, Newstorm, Rodgers, 1992; Ronen & Pimps, 1981; Saltzstein, et al., 2001). In addition, it has also been suggested that greater work schedule flexibility will lead to enhanced work/life balance perceptions for professional employees (Baker, et al., 2007; Tausig & Fenwick, 2001). Therefore, it is logical to assume that greater job sharing flexibility should provide employees with a better ability to balance work and non-work responsibilities.

For the purpose of this study, work/life balance is conceptualised based on previous research (Fisher-McAuley, Stanton, Jolton & Gavin, 2003; Hayman, 2005). The construct of work/life balance includes the negative influence of work on personal life as well as positive enhancement between work and non-work. Consequently, work/life balance is comprised of three dimensions: work interference with personal life (WIPL), personal life interference with work (PLIW), work/personal life enhancement (WPLE). Therefore, it is suggested in the following hypotheses that job sharing flexibility will be related to the three dimensions of work/life balance.

**Hypothesis 1:** Job sharing flexibility will be inversely related to work interference with personal life (WIPL)

**Hypothesis 2:** Job sharing flexibility will be inversely related to personal life interference with work (PLIW)

**Hypothesis 3:** Job sharing flexibility will be positively related to work and personal life enhancement (WPLE)

**METHOD**

**Sample and Procedures**

Data was collected from office-based employees in a large university in Western Australia. Questionnaires were administered to job sharing employees in six divisions of the university. In total, 162 completed questionnaires were collected from job sharing employees, with a response rate of almost 60 per cent. The response rate is better than response rates from similar surveys using samples of Australian data (e.g., Pearson & Duffy, 1998), arguably because of the support received from senior management at the university and because university executives are
conscious of exposing staff to extensive in-house surveys, resulting in a more than acceptable response rate. Furthermore, a series of five focus group interviews were employed to elucidate the quantitative results and to clarify the questionnaire findings.

A multi-method quantitative and qualitative approach based on a pluralist framework was employed in this study. A number of prominent social scientists claim mixing quantitative and qualitative methods can lead to greater validity and understanding of the study results (Wilk, 2001). Indeed, using a pluralist or mixed method approach encourages the researcher to consider difficult issues to do with both the depth and breadth of the study, at all the stages of the research process (Todd & Binns, 2013). Furthermore, the overall approach of using two distinct data collection methods is generally considered to provide greater validity of the findings, despite some criticism (Bryman 1988). Mixed method field research is also strong in realism, which is useful in studying real life work situations. Finally, prominent work/life researchers (Hill, et al., 1998) have suggested the use of both quantitative and qualitative methods to appropriately address the complex interrelationship between work and home.

A prominent demographic characteristic of the sample was the majority of respondents were female (65 per cent of respondents), reflecting the nature of the administrative staff employed within the university (Healthy Life Style Office, 2002). Another feature of the sample was that all age groups were represented and university degrees were held by 46 per cent of respondents. The university administrative employees have been utilising the organisation’s flexible work schedules (including job sharing) for over twenty years. Overall, the characteristics of the sample generally represented the demographics of the university’s office based employees.

**Measures**

*Job sharing flexibility* consisted of six items adapted from a 22 item instrument developed by Dwyer and Ganster (1991). The scale yielded an internal consistency reliability of 0.88. Because the study reported in this paper concerns mainly flexibility of work scheduling decision making, some of the items of the control scale were deleted and more items that addressed the specific constructs of interest in this study were added. Respondents were required to indicate the amount of flexibility or control they have in their job sharing schedule on a seven-point interval scale (1=no flexibility to 7=complete flexibility). The arithmetic mean of the six items was determined for the measurement of job sharing flexibility.

*Work/life balance* was measured with a 15 item scale adapted from an instrument reported by Fisher-McAuley, et al., (2003). The original scale consisted of 19 items designed to assess three dimensions of work/life balance: work interference with personal life (WIPL), personal life interference with work (PLIW), work/personal life enhancement (WPLE). Respondents were asked to indicate the frequency with which they have felt in a particular way during the past three months using a seven point time related scale (e.g., 1=Not at all, 4=Sometimes, and 7=All the time). A factor analysis of the items confirmed the three dimensions of the work/life balance scale. The WIPL sub scale consisted of seven items that reported factor loadings ranging from .90 to .67 (eigenvalues = 5.16, accounting for 34.4 % of the variance). PLIW included four items reporting factor loadings ranging from .88 to 8.0 (eigenvalues = 3.24, accounting for 21.6 % of the variance). The WPLE sub scale contained four items and reported factor loadings of between .84 and .61 (eigenvalues = 2.26, accounting for 15.0 % of the variance). The final Cronbach alpha values for the three factors were .90 for WIPL, .86 for PLIW, and .79 for WPLE. The WPLE sub scale is worded positively and higher means indicate higher levels of perceived work/life balance. The WIPL and PLIW sub scales, which are worded negatively, have been re-coded so higher arithmetic means are purported to indicate higher levels of work/life balance.
Control Variables: There are a number of demographic and work related variables that have been found to influence the relationship between work and non-work. Specifically, previous work/life literature (Baltes, et al., 1999; Eaton, 1999; Haar & Spell, 2003; Tausig & Fenwick, 1993; Voydanoff, 1998) proposes numerous variables that may impact employee work/life balance and the use of flexible work schedules. These variables include parental status, gender, hours worked and salary. This study controlled for parental status (coded 1 = one or more dependents, 0 = no dependents), gender (coded 1 = female, 0 = male), hours worked (per week), and salary (coded 1 = under $20,000 per annum, 2 = between $20,000 and $40,000 per annum, 3 = $40,000 and $60,000 per annum, 4 = $60,000 per annum and $80,000 per annum, 5 = more than $80,000 per annum).

Data analysis
The hypothesised relationships between job sharing flexibility and work/life balance (Hypotheses 1, 2 and 3) were tested using hierarchical regression. Specifically, linear regression was conducted to test the linkages between job sharing flexibility and the three work/life balance dimensions of WIPL, PLIW, and WPLE. Step one contained the control variables (parental status, gender, hours worked and salary). Step two consisted of the predictor variable of job sharing flexibility. In all, three regression models resulted, one for each of the criterion variable (WIPL, PLIW and WPLE). The results of the regression analysis to test the hypotheses are subsequently presented, starting with the descriptive statistics and bivariate correlations between the study variables.

RESULTS
Descriptive statistics and bivariate correlations for all the study variables are shown in Table 1. The results presented in Table 1 have two noticeable features. The study variables were all assessed using seven point scales, with means score ranging from 3.80 to 4.89. Higher means indicate higher levels of the particular variable. All of the examined variables presented in Table 1 are significantly inter-correlated. Job sharing flexibility is significantly correlated to WIPL (r = .50, p < .001), PLIW (r = .32, p < .001), and WPLE (r = .48, p < .001).

Table 1: Descriptive statistics and correlations (n =162)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>s.d.</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Job sharing flexibility</td>
<td>4.85</td>
<td>1.26</td>
<td>.88</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. WIPL</td>
<td>3.80</td>
<td>1.49</td>
<td>.50</td>
<td>.90</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. PLIW</td>
<td>4.89</td>
<td>1.18</td>
<td>.32</td>
<td>.47</td>
<td>.86</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. WPLE</td>
<td>4.10</td>
<td>1.26</td>
<td>.48</td>
<td>.53</td>
<td>.38</td>
<td>.79</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: a. Correlations r ≤ .16, p ≤ .05; r ≤ .20, p ≤ .01; and r ≤ .23, p ≤ .001.
b. Bold values on the diagonal are the reliability assessments.
c. s.d. = Standard deviations of the means
d. WIPL = Work interference with personal life, PLIW = Personal life interference with work, and WPLE = Work and personal life enhancement.

The results of the regression analysis for Hypotheses 1, 2 and 3 are presented in Table 2. These results indicate that job sharing flexibility significantly relates to the dimensions of the work/life balance; WIPL, PLIW and WPLE (at the p < .001 level). Among the control variables both parental status and hours worked were significantly associated to WIPL and PLIW. However,
parental status did not significantly relate to WPLE. The results presented in Table 2 provide a reasonable level of confidence in interpreting the results for Hypotheses 1, 2 and 3. Consequently, these results provide support for the research hypotheses, that job sharing flexibility is linked to the three dimensions of work/life balance.

**Table 2: Regression analysis for the effect of job sharing flexibility on WIPL, PLIW and WPLE (n=162)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>WIPL</th>
<th>PLIW</th>
<th>WPLE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Step 1 – Controls</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parental status</td>
<td>.160*</td>
<td>.125*</td>
<td>.074</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>.047</td>
<td>.070</td>
<td>.032</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hours worked</td>
<td>.220**</td>
<td>.140*</td>
<td>.208**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salary</td>
<td>.037</td>
<td>.053</td>
<td>.019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R² change</td>
<td>.207***</td>
<td>.119***</td>
<td>.159***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F change</td>
<td>14.150***</td>
<td>9.021***</td>
<td>11.210***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Step 2 - Predictor</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job sharing flexibility</td>
<td>.480***</td>
<td>.301***</td>
<td>.465***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R² change</td>
<td>.294***</td>
<td>.107***</td>
<td>.220***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F statistic</td>
<td>196.400</td>
<td>61.588</td>
<td>168.603</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total R²</td>
<td>.496</td>
<td>.256</td>
<td>.377</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjusted R²</td>
<td>.468</td>
<td>.204</td>
<td>.360</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes:  
 a. * p < .05, and ** p < .01, *** p < .001.  
b. WIPL = Work interference with personal life, PLIW = Personal life interference with work, and WPLE = Work and personal life enhancement.

**DISCUSSION**

The main focus of this paper was to explore the relationship between job sharing flexibility and work/life balance with a sample of office based employees. The hypotheses presented in this paper predicted that job sharing flexibility would be related to three dimensions of work/life balance: WIPL, PLIW and WPLE. Indeed, the expectation that job sharing flexibility would be linked to WIPL, PLIW, and WPLE was substantiated by the statistical results. The results demonstrate the importance of employee flexibility in organisational job sharing policies in reducing the negative impact of work conflicting on personal life and personal life interfering with work. Furthermore, the statistical results provide empirical confirmation that job sharing was associated to positive enhancement of personal life on work and vice versa. With the exception of a small number of researchers (Daves, 2004; Eaton & Bailyn, 2000; Eaton, 2003; Tausig & Fenwick, 2001), limited attempts have been made to empirically assess the importance of flexibility in job sharing policies to positive outcomes for employees.

There was an expectation that job share work schedules would be linked to work/life balance, which was confirmed by the statistical results. These empirical results are in accordance expectations and popular findings (Griffin, et al., 2014; Todd & Binns, 2013) that suggest that job share routines can improve the ability of employees to integrate work and family responsibilities. The empirical findings are also consistent with some research (Bailyn, 1993) that job sharing can lead to reduced stress in the home and family. The following salient statement from an administrative assistant supported these findings: “I have been working on a job share arrangement for the past two years. It’s great, it enables me to spend more the kids and gives me more time for attending to some of the family chores.”

Focus group members provide also relevant remarks about the importance of separating work and family duties to help avoid the negative consequences of job share routines, such as taking work
into the home environment. One office manager eloquently depicted the following statement: “Job share suits the hours I prefer to work. However, I must be careful I do not take too much work home with me, because this can negatively impact my family time.” And, a female job share worker, with two children, who were no longer living with her at home, indicated the

**Control Variables:** There are a number of demographic and work related variables that have been importance of the separation of work and family roles when working on her job sharing schedule.

> Sometimes my job share days conflict with my family life and I have to bring more work home...When I bring work home with me, I have to be very careful to separate my work and family time to really give me a favourable impression in terms of balance.

Many focus group members emphasised that greater control over their work scheduling is a key element in reducing the extent that work interferes with personal and family life. These findings have been documented in the previous work/life studies (Eaton & Bailyn, 2000; Tausig & Fenwick, 2001). Indeed, some degree of control to determine their own job sharing schedule appears to be a significant indicator of improved work/life balance perceptions. A degree of elucidation for these findings was provided by a focus group member (a married male financial assistant with two children) who commented in terms of the importance of schedule control and timing of work duties for reducing interference from work

> Greater control over many aspects of my job helps me to manage my work and personal life responsibilities. However, the ability to control aspects of my job share schedule and timing of my work duties are the most important things for me in reducing work from conflicting with my personal and family life.

Furthermore, a single female human resource consultant, with no children, and operating on a job share schedule contributed to the argument with a relevant statement.

> For me personally, family is not a priority in my life at present. However, this does not mean that some degree of control of my work schedule is not important to me. I consider the university’s attitude towards my job flexibility one of the main factors that have made me not look elsewhere, even though I firmly believe I could earn more if I worked for another organisation. For example, the flexible work schedules here, and the control I have to juggle my job sharing (within reason) and ‘days off’, provides minimal interference from my work, and allows me to concentrate on my sporting and lifestyle activities outside of work.”

These verbatim comments appear to indicate that greater control over their job sharing flexibility provides employees with better opportunities to reduce work interfering with personal and family life. However, an interesting observation from the statistical analyses of the quantitative data is the finding that job sharing flexibility was also significantly related to WIPL (work and personal life enhancement). Moreover, the qualitative findings sustain the implication of the importance of schedule control for all employees, regardless of the nature of their job sharing schedule. For example, one focus group respondent, a female finance assistant, with one child and operating on job sharing schedule for the past three years, provided a specific comment to support the empirical results.

> The ability to influence the scheduling of my job sharing days has a direct impact on my work/life balance. For example, just having the ability to juggle my job sharing days with my colleague, helps me attend to basic
household and family tasks, and gives me a better sense of balance. After all, for job sharing to work effectively it has to be on my time as well.

Overall, both the quantitative results and qualitative statements affirm that there was a relationship between job sharing flexibility and work and personal life balance, which is a connection that has been implied in other empirical studies (Eaton, 2000; Galea, et al., 2014; Hill et al., 2001). Indeed, it appears that greater ability to control or influence job sharing schedules increases the likelihood of a better work/life balance perceptions for employees. Moreover, the empirical results presented in the current study indicate strong support for the limited anecdotal evidence that job sharing flexibility is a key component of flexible work initiatives, which is linked to employee work/life balance. Indeed, the study results indicate that scheduling flexibility was an important aspect for employees in achieving a better balance between work and non-work life. This finding provides added assurance to future researchers, who focus on the antecedents of work/life balance, of the linkages between job sharing flexibility and work/life balance.

Limitations
The study sample was limited to 162 administrative employees within one university, albeit at three different locations. Therefore, future researchers may wish to test the hypotheses in another university environment, or in other industries that use job sharing work schedules with office based employees. Another feature of the study is that a cross sectional research design was employed. Consequently, causality among the variables cannot be determined, but inferences can be made from the associations. Furthermore, the study used self report data collected in the quantitative questionnaire to assess the study variables. The use of self report questionnaires has been a source of debate in the organisational behaviour literature (Bryman, 1998; Spector, 1986), and has been criticised for resulting in artificially inflated correlations among measures of behavioural constructs. Although this method bias due to the use of a self report approach may have possibly inflated the magnitude of the observed correlations, this effect would not alter the statistical significant of the observed linkages between the study variables (Carmines & McIver, 1981; Kent, 2001). Indeed, the variables in this study were assessed by asking employees to report their own attitudes and perceptions, as work/life balance are in the eye of the beholder (Fisher, 2001). Therefore, the use of self report questionnaires is an appropriate and convenient method for collecting the study data. The qualitative focus group findings also helped to elucidate the quantitative survey findings.

CONCLUSION
The results presented in this study support the prediction that job sharing flexibility is linked to work/life balance. This finding makes a significant contribution to the work/life literature, as it is likely that organisational job sharing policies is related to a host of work and non-work attitudes of employees (Eaton, 2000). In addition, this study extends current work/life literature by confirming the negative interference and positive enhancement when capturing employee experiences of work and personal life balance. The primary finding of the study found that job sharing flexibility was linked to work and personal life balance. Moreover, the evidence from the study focus group interviews was supportive of the observation that enhancing the flexibility provided to employees through job sharing can promote the integration of work, family and personal life. Despite the findings presented in this paper, the research has only begun to explain the complex relationships that might transform human resource management practice. Indeed, the findings presented in this study are possibly suggestive, but an important consideration is that the results are not definitive. Consequently, further studies are needed to consolidate these findings and to enhance the generalisability of the results to other organisations with office based employees utilising job sharing work arrangements.
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