

New forms of employment Job sharing, Czech Republic

Case study 36: Office of Town District Prague 9

The Office of Town District Prague 9, a public sector employer, has introduced job sharing in recent years for a number of its employees. The numerous benefits include supporting parents of young children to work part time and helping to develop methods of intergenerational learning at the workplace.

Introduction

Job sharing is a flexible employment form where two or more workers are employed part time to cover the working hours required for one, usually full-time, position. The employees concerned agree on the extent of their participation and, with employer approval, can substitute each other when one person is unable to work based on availability. The possibility to occasionally replace each other was cited by Czech private employers as the key advantage of this form of employment (LMC, 2011).

Job sharing as a specific form of flexible employment is not too widely used in the Czech Republic at present. According to the findings of research conducted by LMC Ltd in 2011 on alternative employment forms, this type of work is used by approximately 13% of employers in the Czech Republic (in the public, civil and private sectors). It most commonly applies to jobs that do not require specialist skills, such as assistant and receptionist positions. No statistical data are available for a further description of the socioeconomic characteristics of employees who share jobs. The lack of widespread use of job sharing is attributed to the low level of interest and the lack of information on this option among both employers and employees (Nekolová, 2010).

Czech legislation lacks specific provisions on job sharing. However, according to government and employer representatives, specific legal regulation is unnecessary. This form of employment is used as a combination of two (or more) standard part-time employment contracts. Only temporary agency work and problems associated with the use of the so-called 'Schwarz system' (the 'employment' of self-employed people in order to reduce labour costs) were, until 2012, at the centre of public attention in connection with flexible forms of work.

However, in 2012 to coincide with the European Year of Active Ageing, the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs launched a pilot project called 'Working Together'. The main objective of the project was to highlight the benefits of shared jobs as a tool for the integration of unemployed people aged 50 and older into the labour market. The project has been implemented since February 2013, and job sharing is being used as a means of creating intergenerational solidarity and transferring knowledge, experience and competences. On the one hand, job sharing enables workers approaching retirement age to stay in the labour market while, on the other hand, it supports the transfer of work experience to young graduates entering the labour market or people returning to work after long periods out of the job market, such as those who have taken maternity leave or have been caring for dependent relatives.

The project was implemented by the Ministry of Labour with the intention of exploring the possibility of wider public support for the development of shared jobs in the Czech Republic. In this context, the Further Education Fund – a state-funded organisation under the Ministry of Labour – prepared an analytical project aimed at mapping in detail shared jobs in the Czech Republic and abroad. The organisation also designed tools that support the use of shared jobs and the transfer of knowledge and experience between different generations of workers in the private and public sectors. The project was approved in April 2014 and was launched at the beginning of May 2014.

In addition to public administration, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and other non-profit organisations – such as the People Management Forum (PMF) – have been supporting the development of shared jobs in the Czech Republic for many years. PMF is a non-profit professional organisation with 250 corporate members and is one of the main advisors in the field of transformation of human resources and people management. The organisation aims to increase awareness of current trends in the area of human resources and to promote equal, diversified and flexible forms of employment. Its ‘Alternativa’ project, which ran between 2007 and 2011, focused on non-standard forms of employment for alternative groups of workers, meaning those who have a higher need for flexibility. To this end, PMF supported the creation of such forms of employment, provided counselling in this area and introduced an online platform to ‘market’ alternative jobs based particularly on non-standard working hours. It also acted as an intermediary between private employers who wished to introduce new forms of employment (especially part-time jobs, job sharing, home working, teleworking and so on) and workers whose circumstances put them at a disadvantage in the labour market – for example, those responsible for the care of a family member. However, no information is available on the effectiveness of this effort.

This case study focuses on the Office of Town District Prague 9 – a public sector employer that enables its employees to use various flexible forms of work (for example, part-time jobs, work from home or flexible working hours). These flexible forms of work include shared jobs.

The study is based on the following sources of information:

- desk research – web pages and articles analysing the general strengths, challenges and problems of job sharing;
- interviews – six structured interviews were conducted as follows: four interviews were held with employees of Town District Prague 9 (one interview with the head of human resources (HR), one interview with the head of the public services department and two interviews with employees sharing one job); one interview was conducted with a representative of the largest Czech union of employers; and one interview was held with a representative of the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, which regulates the labour market and so controls employment forms.

General characteristics of Town District Prague 9

The Office of Town District Prague 9 (hereafter also referred to as the ‘Authority’) is an autonomous organisation under the remit of Prague City Hall. It manages the following parts of Prague: Vysočany, Prosek, Střížkov, Hloubětín, Hrdlořezy and a part of Libeň. Formerly working-class and factory settlements, these districts are today largely residential areas and are an important location for the railway sector. The Authority is governed by the Act on the Capital City of Prague and the Statute of the Capital City of Prague.

The management of the Authority consists of the town district council, the mayor and special authorities. The Authority has its own budget, which it manages under the conditions stipulated by the Act on the Capital City of Prague, the Statute and other laws. It is managed by the mayor, the direct manager of the Authority’s secretary. The secretary manages the offices of the mayor and secretary, and all nine departments (economics, construction and territorial development, internal administration, social affairs, civil administration, environment and transport, asset management, trade, education and European funds). The

departments are further divided into units. Five councillors of Town District Prague 9 and three deputy mayors are responsible for the said departments.

The Authority employs 180 staff, made up of 130 women and 50 men. The employees work as officers, officers-drivers or technicians for the Authority. The average age of the employees is approximately 45. A trade union operates within the Authority under a signed collective agreement. In the spring of 2014, the Authority's HR policy was being developed as part of a project co-financed by EU structural funds to create competency models for key positions, employee evaluation systems and training.

Two women share a job at the Authority, working at the counter of the Czech Point (official abbreviation of *Český Podací Ověřovací Informační Národní Terminál*). The role involves advising and providing clients with certified documents and copies, such as criminal records, land registers and certificates of incorporation, among others. One woman is aged 35, has completed secondary education and has been working as an officer for the organisation since 2010. Prior to working for the district, she worked as a company operations manager. The second woman is aged 34, has specialised secondary education and has been working as an officer for the organisation since 2012. Before this, she worked as a bank clerk. Their job share began at the end of 2011.

Design and implementation process

The head of the HR department was familiar with the concept of job sharing long before its actual introduction within the Authority. The other personnel, specifically the head of the department of public services and the two employees sharing the job, were introduced to this concept for the first time in 2010, shortly before it was implemented. In reality, the head of HR began to consider the implementation of job sharing when an employee returned after her maternity leave at the end of 2011. The worker wished to work part-time so that she could balance her family responsibilities, particularly the care of small children. The head of HR consulted the department head and the direct manager of the employee about the possibility of creating a shared job. The formal process of creating the shared job took a relatively short time, approximately 14 days. The HR head and the department head together explored the pros and cons of this measure and suggested ways to reassign tasks for the two job sharers. The secretary made the final decision on the official creation of job sharing at the Authority. The implementation of the shared job was therefore based on trial-and-error rather than careful planning prior to its creation. There was no internal regulation on job sharing. Even after the creation of the shared job, the Authority decided not to prepare any internal regulation and to adjust conditions for each job sharing arrangement in the future on a case-by-case basis.

When the two employees started sharing one job, the head of the department familiarised them with the new operating mode. The department head gained all the necessary information about job sharing during consultations with the head of HR, and therefore was delegated to introduce job sharing to the job sharers. Other training dealt with general Authority policy and was not specific to job sharing. While the first job sharer was returning to the Authority after her maternity leave, the other job sharer was recruited from the labour market by the Authority's HR department specifically for this job sharing post.

There were several reasons why the Authority created the shared job:

- to retain the qualified and experienced employee;
- to support flexibility of work, not yet very marked in the public sector;
- to support reconciliation of work and family life among employees;
- to increase employees' satisfaction, with the aim that this would be reflected in their quality of work and their approach to the Authority's clients.

According to the Authority's head of HR, the key decision criteria when implementing the shared job were:

- considering the costs and benefits of this form of work;

- ensuring the smooth running of the Authority in relation to the public;
- promoting the Authority as a good employer.

Both job sharers at the Authority stated unanimously that they decided to accept this form of work due to a desire to balance family and work responsibilities and interests. The employee returning from maternity leave was delighted to accept the job sharing post. Without this option, she would have terminated her employment at the Authority. The new employee was recruited specifically for job sharing; therefore, her acceptance of the part-time job sharing was intrinsic to her recruitment and also welcomed due to family reasons. The new employee received a fixed-term contract for 36 months. Other employees have not yet been offered job sharing options by the Authority and have not been officially informed about its creation. However, they do know about job sharing at the Authority and mostly approve of it. Since the implementation of job sharing, there has been no need to make changes; the shared job has been working according to the original plan and fulfils its main objective.

Working method, processes and procedures

The employees using the shared job both have employment contracts with the Authority for a half-time job. The employee returning from maternity leave is continuing her permanent contract, while the new employee has a fixed-term contract of 36 months to cover the maternity leave of another employee. When this employee returns to the position, she will be allowed to job share with the existing employee who has a permanent contract, and the contract of the newly recruited employee will be terminated.

The division of tasks between the two employees is determined by their immediate superior – the head of the Department of Public Services, Register’s Office and information offices. The division of work and tasks does not differ from that of a typical employee; however, it can be modified by prior agreement with the department head if and when required by any of the workers. Nevertheless, changes only occur sporadically. It is not often that the job sharers have to replace each other at work, but this has happened due to family-related issues like a child’s illness. The job sharers’ contracts do not explicitly state that they have to be ready to replace each other; however, as it is one position with the same responsibilities, it is much easier for them to replace each other than to find a replacement among other employees. Therefore, it is automatically expected as a sort of implicit agreement. If one of the workers decides to terminate the employment with the Authority and leaves, the HR department would replace them with another employee as soon as possible, either within the organisation or by hiring a new employee. According to the head of HR, the replacement would take a matter of a few days because there has been great interest in this job.

Employee benefits are exactly the same for the job sharers as for other employees with part-time jobs. They have the same working conditions and the same duties; for example, according to the Labour Code, they have a duty to further educate themselves, as do part-time and full-time employees. The Authority administers this job in the same way as it does for other workers with part-time jobs. Payment assessment is prepared separately for each of the shared workers as for a part-time contract. Their income is the same, although it may differ if they replace each other due to illness, vacancy, family-related issues and so on – in other words, pay solely depends on the hours worked. In addition, social protection, notice periods and severance pay are the same for job sharers as for other part-time workers.

The job sharing position is a counter office/clerk job and the responsibilities of the job sharers are completely the same – including advising and providing clients with certified documents. Clients come to the counter at any stage during opening hours and no optional reservation is available. The job sharers do not differ in their skills and provide the same service evenly and routinely. They both work daily: the employee who returned from maternity leave works in the mornings from 8.00 to 12.30; and the newly recruited employee works from 12.00 to 16.30. Their working hours overlap for 30 minutes in order to hand over tasks and to update each other on the computer agenda, information on intranet outages and other emergencies. During that time, the counter is closed as the other employees are on lunch break.

The job sharers report to their superior individually. If necessary, the scope of the work is modified, both by the Authority and the workers, to ensure that all work associated with the job is carried out. The modifications are made on an ad hoc basis through communication between the department manager and the two job sharers. If necessary, conflict situations are resolved by the workers with the head of the department. However, both job sharers stated that there had not been any work or personal conflicts between them as at February 2014. According to the two workers' manager, this is also the reason why no changes have been needed in the organisation of the shared job so far.

External support

The Authority did not consider soliciting external support to establish the shared job, mostly because there is no form of relevant public support available in the Czech Republic. However, in the opinion of the HR head, such support is not required for creating job sharing at this time. The state does not support this form of employment through its labour market policy, and sharing jobs as a personnel management tool is not a familiar concept among recruitment agencies and consultancies.

Nevertheless, the desire of the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs policy to promote job sharing among older workers indicates a growing interest by the state to promote this form of employment in the Czech labour market. However, the ongoing pilot project of the Ministry is focused on unemployed people and regional employers only. Its main objective is to gauge the interest of employers and workers and to assess the strengths and weaknesses of job sharing.

Outcomes and effects

According to a government representative, job sharing as a flexible form of employment has several advantages for the local labour market and local economy. The main benefit is flexibility, as not every worker is willing and able to work full time, while companies typically require this. Such workers would remain unemployed without the possibility of job sharing. This is the case for vulnerable groups of workers such as mothers returning from parental leave, employees over 55 years of age, people with disabilities, pensioners and/or recent graduates. These social groups are often looking for part-time regular jobs that will allow them to reconcile work with other personal activities and responsibilities, such as family care, studies or hobbies.

The shared job created by the Authority works to the full satisfaction of all parties involved without the need for any organisational changes. From the point of view of the Authority, administration and treatment of one job shared by two people does not differ from that of two part-time jobs and does not require any specific administrative effort or coordination. The quality of the public service provided by the job sharers may be even higher than that of full-time employees as the job sharers work only four-and-a-half-hours a day and experience less fatigue as a result. The analysed case of job sharing followed the initial plan without the need for any change, mainly because of the routine nature of the work. The only new element that needed was the 30-minute handover period, and this was found to be sufficient.

Communication of the job sharers with senior managers or colleagues also does not differ from that of other employees. The job sharers feel well informed about everything that goes on at the Authority. From their point of view, the arrangement meets their needs and expectations and they accepted it with pleasure. From the interpersonal relationship point of view, the job sharers understand each other, their relations are friendly and without conflict, and so their cooperation and handing over of tasks is without problems. In the opinion of the two job sharers, the greatest effect is similar to that of part-time employment – namely, the reduced working hours and thus the ability to coordinate their work and family life, while retaining access to all employee bonuses. The bonuses are the same as those for full-time and part-time contracts and are calculated according to working hours. This particular job share is not as flexible as flexi-time part-time work because of the fixed working hours. The job

sharers cannot choose their own times for starting and finishing work as allowed in flexi-time part-time work.

The job sharers say they appreciate the new professional and communication work experience gained from this form of work. Both women have learned from each other's complementary strengths, especially in ways of dealing with clients. Usually the counter is not closed at exactly noon but it does open promptly at 12.30. This means that the job sharers sometimes work at the counter together, and on these occasions they help each other as well as experience first-hand the other person's working style and communication with customers. Both employees appreciate the job sharing option not only because it meets their needs, but also because it makes the job less stressful.

The reasons they give for this are not necessarily specific to job sharing, but they include friendly relations between them; the shared position involves only providing documents and does not include any potential stress such as deciding whether to grant or refuse clients' applications; and the Authority appreciates the high quality of the public service they provide.

The employer's perspective is that this form of employment gives it access to high-quality and experienced workers who are satisfied with their job. These workers are also more productive than one full-time person. Higher productivity comes from the shorter time spent at work, satisfaction with the job, and direct working comparison between them (it is much easier to compare and evaluate two workers in the identical position through their outcomes). Shorter working time means not only greater efficiency but also fewer options to postpone the work at hand. Both job sharers have to finish their client task before handing over the counter even if that means having to stay on longer at the counter. Another important effect for the employer of providing this option is its good image among its employees and the public.

Job sharing is still not common in the public sector and is therefore considered progressive. The Authority and the Czech Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs regard job sharing first as a tool for reconciliation of work and personal life, and second as a useful HR measure at a time of public as well as private sector restructuring. In this case, it acts as an effective tool for preventing unemployment. Job sharing allows employers to retain all key employees (on a part-time contract) at a time of crisis or change.

Strengths and weaknesses

The job sharers at the Authority regard the reduced working time as the greatest advantage of this form of work. It is especially important for those with care responsibilities, for example those caring for a child or other family member. It enables them to keep even a highly professional position on a part-time basis and to manage both their career and family life. Even when high skills or expertise are not required (as in this case), it is still easier for both parties to participate in job sharing. For the employee, job sharing is easier than having to look for a new job, and for the employer it is easier to create job sharing for an existing employee than to recruit a new employee for a full-time position. The workers in this case study do not feel the need to change or improve anything in the present organisation of their shared job. The job sharers are fully satisfied with their job and have not identified any weakness of job sharing.

For the employer in this case study, the greatest advantage of job sharing is the two employees' full commitment to the work and their good performance at work. The employer does not feel the need to change or improve anything in the present organisation of the shared job. Another advantage of job sharing for employers is that it is effectively a type of part-time job and therefore does not require any new agenda. Moreover, the employer says the ease of substitution if, for example, one employee is sick, is an undisputed advantage.

In the employer's opinion, however, proper selection of employees for the job sharing position is essential. It is necessary that their personalities are compatible to prevent any possible labour disputes. In addition, the administration and management of a shared job can be more challenging because two contracts must be administered and the work of two persons

must be coordinated instead of one contract and one worker. No other disadvantages were pointed out by the employer.

Lastly, job sharing would be easily transferable both within the organisation and to other companies. The high degree of transferability is also confirmed by a representative of the largest employer organisation in the Czech Republic and a representative of the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs. According to the employer representative, job sharing is also an important HR policy tool to support intergenerational solidarity and the transfer of knowledge, experience and competences among workers. The Authority fully shares this opinion.

Future plans

The Office of Town District Prague 9 considers job sharing to be a suitable alternative to standard jobs and says that it will occasionally provide it for its existing employees or employees returning from prolonged leave such as maternity leave.

In fact, from 1 April 2014, the Authority established another job sharing post at the Department of Education and European Funds. The former employee (a woman aged 42) held a technical supervision position for preschool and school building reconstruction and was due to return to work from parental leave; she expressed her wish to work part time, that is, 0.7 full-time equivalent. The remaining part, 0.3 full-time equivalent of this position, is to be filled by a technician worker from another department. This man, aged 58, had a 0.7 equivalent post at the Department of Asset Management and wanted to work full-time. He now has two part-time contracts forming one full-time contract in total.

The Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs plans to promote the use of part-time jobs and job sharing by introducing a tax incentive for employers that create such positions. The new minister presented this policy strategy in March 2014 in a mass media campaign in the Czech Republic. This policy direction is in line with the interests of the Czech employer representatives. However, trade unions are more cautious and remain concerned about possible abuses by employers.

Commentary

Given the limited application of job sharing in the Czech Republic, and the fact that job sharing is not too dissimilar from regular employment contracts, it is rather difficult to gauge its effects and to discuss the nuances regarding its implementation in specific organisations.

Job sharing is not a common practice in Czech businesses and even less so in the public sector. Nevertheless, as the demand for part-time jobs has increased in recent years, especially among women, and the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs is considering tax allowances for such jobs, their gradual development at the Czech company level (including in the public sector) can be expected.

This is because these jobs could provide an effective solution for some women (and men) who need and want to take care of small children, but who also want to remain at least partially in the workplace, with their existing employer or in the field from which they graduated. The Czech Republic has one of the lowest employment rates for women with small children within the EU. The decline in the employment rate before and after motherhood is the highest in the EU.

With the right policy, job sharing could help to support the employment of people after paternal leave, to develop methods of informal intergenerational learning and to contribute to the increased competitiveness of the whole economy.

Websites

Confederation of Industry of the Czech Republic: www.spcr.cz

Czech Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs: www.mpsv.cz

LMC Ltd: www.lmc.eu

People Management Forum (PMF): www.peoplemanagementforum.cz

Town District Prague 9: www.praha9.cz

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Markéta Nekolová, Further Education Fund, Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs