



# ***“The (bad) end of Job Sharing”: another paradox of the Italian labour (market) reform that aims at the future but recedes into the past...***

by Amedeo Tea

## **Introduction**

According to Norbert Thom, Professor at the Institute of Organisation and Human Resource Management (IOP) of Bern, “*Job sharing makes good economic sense when the demographics of the working population are considered. It is also a response to the growing number of highly qualified people who, for whatever reason, are looking for part-time employment. We must make use of this potential!*”. Job sharing represents a concept that has been at the core of the flexibility debate for about 30 years (see, Crampton, SM, Mishra, Jitendra M (2005), “*Job Sharing: A Viable Work Alternative for the New Millenium*”, in *Journal of Applied Management and Entrepreneurship*). Furthermore, the international context offers great evidence of the benefits of implementing job sharing (see, Hall, E. (1993) “*Job Sharing: evidence from New Zealand*”, in *Australian Journal of Management*).

## **Job sharing: definition, categories and prerequisites**

As it is widely known, Job sharing can be defined as an alternative work schedule in which two or more employees share the duty and responsibility of a full-time job or position, which is to say that one job is performed by two or more people. In particular, its contract implementation can be categorised into different forms:

- a) “*Top sharing*”, means that job sharing occurs for positions with a high level of responsibility, i.e. the management of co-workers;
- b) “*Job splitting*”, when the job can be easily divided into independent roles including distinct functions for the workers;
- c) “*Job pairing*”, conversely, when the job cannot be easily divided. For this reason, workers are interchangeable. This model includes two further types:
  - c1) “*Pure*”, job sharing occurs when a single employment contract is signed between an employer and two workers. In short, partners are completely interchangeable. For example, both workers using a single e-mail account;
  - c2) “*Hybrid*” job sharing is the most frequently practised form and it refers to the clear division of tasks and responsibilities under a single project. Indeed, each employee signs their own employment contract, while other tasks remain interchangeable.

In order to successfully implement the “job sharing model”, workers are supposed to meet the following criteria:

- Common vision and values;
- Flexibility;
- Open-mindedness;
- Generosity;
- Manage conflicts constructively;
- Lack of competitiveness.

It’s possible to apply job sharing in various ways. For example, the following “A hypothesis” refers to a simple weekly split, 50% - 50%.

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Co-worker A	Co-worker A	Co-worker A	Co-worker B	Co-Worker B
Co-worker B	Co-worker B	Co-worker B	Co-worker A	Co-Worker A

It’s also possible to split (“B hypothesis”) weekly working hours in another way, i.e. 60% - 40% providing that both workers are physically present at the workplace the same days, while absent the other, with the possibility to call the worker in case of need.

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	
Co-worker A	Co-worker A	Co-worker B	Co-worker A	Co-worker B	Co-Worker B
Co-worker A	Co-worker A	Co-worker B		Co-Worker A	

The following case presented refers to senior managers that (“C hypothesis”, *top sharing*), for a period of three months, alternate their function. Practically, Co-manager A works 70% as senior manager quarterly, while co-manager B works 30% as senior manager and for the remaining time in a subordinate role.

The following schedule reflects a full-time employee position in a lead management role.

Jan Mar	Feb	Apr Jun	May	Jul Sep	Aug	Oct Dec	Nov
Manager A		Manager B		Manager A		Manager B	
Manager B and subordinate role		Manager A and subordinate role		Manager B and subordinate role		Manager A and subordinate role	

### **Job sharing: advantages for employees and employers**

The benefits offered by job sharing are many, in fact we can list positive aspects both for workers, as well as for employers.

Benefits for workers:

- Job sharing has the ability to make jobs, usually performed only as full time, attractive and stimulating;
- Increased innovation;
- The possibility to reconcile professional lives with education, family and caring activities (work-life balance);
- Improving the professional skills of workers through collaboration;
- Collaboration which leads to an efficient decision-making process;
- Insurance coverage: in case of impossibility of working or illness, the co-worker can take their peer's place in carrying out task and activities;
- Better (information) integration within the company: this is more efficient than a part-time contract;
- Facilitate "professional complicity" in the sense that job sharing supports inactive or unemployed workers to return to the labour market.

There are also undoubted benefits for employers:

- Increasing productivity and decreasing absenteeism;
- Greater awareness of operational decisions;
- Employers benefit from a wider range of professional experience and quality skills thanks to the combination of two workers;
- Continuous presence;
- Increased innovation;
- Increased motivation;
- Increased transfer of experience;
- Improving the image of the company in the labour market;
- (Benefits stemming from the network of two professional workers.)

An interesting study conducted by a South African scholar (see, Ngambi, H.C. (2004) "*Job sharing and employee productivity: two for the price of one?*" South African Business Review, Volume 8, n. 2) considers job sharing as a possible solution to the problems arising from low levels of employee productivity within South African industry.

### **Repealing the job sharing: is this the "Italian way" to labour flexibility?**

In Italy job sharing was firstly regulated by articles 41 to 45 of Legislative Decree n. 276/2003. The Italian Legislator repealed it in the text of article 55 of Legislative Decree n. 81/2015 (Jobs Act). Indeed, employers cannot longer resort to a "job sharing model" (it will probably be possible through an atypical contract, art. 1322 of the Italian Civil Code).

Taking into account what has been examined in this article so far, we don't agree with this choice. The need for greater flexibility, indeed, is not recovered through the few major elements of flexibility granted in the Jobs Act to part-time jobs, which remain the "façade".

The Italian legislator should have strengthened job share arrangements by increasing incentives to employers, in order to improve the ability of reconciling the professional lives of employees with family duties, lifelong learning or other activities affecting work-life balance.

Furthermore, job sharing should be strengthened because:

- It offers high-level of responsibility to workers;

- It reduces discrimination between men and women at the work place;
- It supports women to access to positions of responsibility with consequent benefit of the whole society, as professional skills don't go wasted.

### **Closing remarks**

In conclusion, the repealing of job sharing is not acceptable since it's a flexible tool and an expression of labour modernization and contractual flexibility arrangement, as shown by the experience of other European countries. On the contrary, the Italian legislator should have clarified current legislation regulating job sharing, instead of simply relegating it to the few provisions of labour collective agreements.

Has the Italian Legislator missed another opportunity?

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