Job sharing: feasibility and effect on turnover in the telephone customer service department Wisconsin Gas Company

Patricia P. Rees

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JOB SHARING: FEASIBILITY AND EFFECT ON TURNOVER
IN THE TELEPHONE CUSTOMER SERVICE DEPARTMENT
WISCONSIN GAS COMPANY

BY:
PATRICIA P. REES

A THESIS
SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF SCIENCE IN MANAGEMENT
CARDINAL STRITCH COLLEGE
DECEMBER, 1983
This thesis has been approved by the following committee:

Project Advisor

Date

Second Reader

Date

F.R.A. Director/Representative

Date
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHAPTER</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. PROJECT PROPOSAL</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose of the Project</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statement of Problem</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project Title, Location and Duration</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participants</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Objectives</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limitations of Project Findings</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definition of Terms</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time Line</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Budget</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. LITERATURE REVIEW</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Historical Foundations</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sociological Foundations</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychological Foundations</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philosophical Foundations</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. FINDINGS OF THE PROJECT AND CONCLUSIONS</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Historical Review</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presentation of Findings</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusions and Implications</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommendations</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary of Project</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendixes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. Turnover Data</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Telephone Survey Results</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ABSTRACT

Job Sharing: Feasibility and Effect on Turnover in the Telephone Customer Service Department, Wisconsin Gas Company

Patricia P. Rees

Job sharing is a staffing and work scheduling alternative where two individuals share one job. This project examines the feasibility of applying job sharing to the telephone customer service department of Wisconsin Gas Company, Milwaukee, Wisconsin. This department was selected for study because of the nature of the work performed and the problems presented by its unusually high rate of employee turnover. The project results indicate measurable improvement in turnover and quality of work life as a consequence of offering the job sharing option. Although the focus of this project is on the one department, the evidence presented in the feasibility study implies job sharing's appropriateness in a variety of work settings.

To complete this study, literature on job sharing experiments in public and private sectors was reviewed. Surveys were conducted on other Milwaukee, Wisconsin employers and other natural gas utility companies across the United States. Extensive interviews with current and former employees of Wisconsin Gas Company's telephone customer service department were conducted. A portion of the project is dedicated to an implementation and evaluation plan designed for the department studied.
1. PURPOSE OF THE PROJECT

The purpose of the project is to determine the feasibility of job sharing and its effectiveness in reducing turnover and related costs in Wisconsin Gas Company's telephone customer service department.

To complete this study, information was gathered from other companies in the Milwaukee, Wisconsin area as well as other natural gas utility companies across the United States. Input was also received from interviews with Wisconsin Gas Company management personnel, surveys of current and former employees and unofficial discussions with union leaders. A review of existing literature was conducted and a detailed cost benefit analysis was prepared. As a result, a start-up plan with schedule, procedures and follow-up techniques was developed to guide implementation.

The evidence presented will support that turnover in the telephone customer service department will be reduced by 15% in the twelve month period following implementation of job sharing. As a result, the Company will realize cost savings in replacement and training. The project results will also confirm that job sharing has a positive effect on improving employee morale and quality of customer service practiced in the telephone customer service department.
2. **STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

The telephone customer service department at Wisconsin Gas Company has an unusually high rate of employee turnover. This means replacement costs of recruitment and training are high. If the turnover rate could be improved, not only would these costs be reduced, but productivity would improve as would employee morale and quality of customer service.

Several factors contribute to the turnover in this department. The nature of the work involves constant telephone contact with customers dealing with service orders, billing questions, credit arrangements, conservation information, emergencies, complaints, literally every type of inquiry or request generated by customers. The work is non-stop, highly regimented and stressful because of call volume and customers constantly challenging the information explained to them by the service representative. Employees use video display terminals for the on-line system and telephone head-sets which require they remain physically plugged in to the system at all times with the exception of breaks and lunch periods.

The negative impact of high turnover in the department is illustrated in many ways. The number of staff is always less than the ideal complement. This means the call volume cannot be handled as efficiently with customers on hold longer and calls taking longer while less experienced employees seek supervisors' assistance. Productivity and quality of customer service decline as a result. Experienced employees are used to sponsor
new employees in training. This means the experienced employees lose productive time as they are teaching.

The training program for new employees in the department is one of the costliest side effects of high turnover. A comprehensive training program is necessary to prepare employees for the extensive variety of customer calls. They must become qualified to handle any inquiry or complaint, memorize policy, code and legislative information, learn the use of forty different paper forms, be able to accurately explain technical information about gas installation and service and become experts in effective communication and listening skills. The training program lasts three months with a combination of classroom and hands-on practice. It involves one full time trainer plus five supervisors and employee sponsors who monitor and evaluate trainees. It is costly, time consuming and the failure rate is high because of exacting standards.

The employees in the telephone customer service department are part of a bargaining unit represented by the United Association of Office, Sales and Technical Employees. The contract between this union and the company calls for vacant jobs to be filled through a posting system with the most senior qualified employees. This job posting system tends to encourage employees to leave the telephone customer service department via posting to positions in other areas of the company which are less demanding and for which they are almost always more qualified than other employees because of the scope of their expertise.
Staffing in the department is budgeted for thirty-six full time and twelve part time employees, for a total of forty-eight employees. Because of the reasons described, the employee population in the current year has averaged thirty-seven or eleven employees under complement. This short staff problem puts employees under additional pressures as they are told to be thorough and understanding with each caller, they are also expected to handle more calls per hour. Supervisors are also put under more pressure because they must work with so many inexperienced employees. There are few times during each year that a training class is not in progress. The employee group is not cohesive, as the longer service employees continue to post out and are replaced by newcomers.

Part time work is currently available in the department in the twelve positions mentioned above. The schedule is set up for six-hour days five days per week with one day off every other week. Due to the thirty hour work week, and scheduling problems such that the alternate days off aren't consistently awarded, part time employees tend to request to be moved to full time jobs as soon as vacancies exist. This creates a vicious cycle where new employees hired from outside the company can only be placed in the part time slots when full time work is actually more appropriate. As a result, although the company saves on fringe benefit costs with part time employees, the constant state of flux means the company forfeits the scheduling coverage and consistency part time employees should afford.
Improved productivity and quality of customer are two goals stated in the company's strategic plan for the current year. Problems are experienced in the telephone customer service department in both of these categories as a result of turnover. This project and its results are responsive to these corporate goals.

3. **PROJECT TITLE, LOCATION AND DURATION**

   a. **Title:**
      
      Job Sharing: Feasibility and Effects on Turnover in the Telephone Customer Service Department at Wisconsin Gas Company

   b. **Location:**
      
      Milwaukee, Wisconsin

   c. **Duration:**
      
      September to December, 1983

4. **PARTICIPANTS**

   The researcher was the sole participant in carrying out the project. Other individuals consulted or surveyed are indicated below. They are employees of Wisconsin Gas Company unless otherwise noted.
1. Manager, Customer Information Center
2. Senior Supervisor, Customer Information Center
3. Four Supervisors, Customer Information Center
4. Manager, Commercial Office
5. Manager and two Trainers, Commercial Office Training
6. Manager, Personnel and Labor Relations
7. Placement Coordinator
8. Thirty-seven current employees of the Customer Information Center
9. Ten former employees of the Customer Information Center
10. President and Customer Information Center Steward, United Association of Office, Sales and Technical Employees
11. Manager, Compensation and Benefits
12. Industrial Psychologist

5. OBJECTIVES

DEVELOPMENTAL OBJECTIVE 1

By the end of October, 1983 the researcher will have conducted a telephone survey at other companies in Milwaukee, Wisconsin to determine to what extent job sharing is utilized as a work scheduling or staffing method.

IMPLEMENTATION ACTIVITIES

To complete the survey, the researcher will conduct the following activities:
a. Identify Milwaukee, Wisconsin employers of comparable size and wage scales to Wisconsin Gas Company and prepare a list of such employers.

b. Prepare a list of questions to be used as a format for the survey with appropriate forms designed to record survey results.

c. Conduct telephone interviews with personnel department representatives in these companies following the prepared list of questions.

Evidence of Completion: The step will be completed when all companies have been contacted and a summary of the results has been compiled.

DEVELOPMENTAL OBJECTIVE 2

By the end of October, 1983, the researcher will have surveyed other natural gas utilities across Wisconsin and the United States to determine the extent of utilization of job sharing.

IMPLEMENTATION ACTIVITIES

To complete the survey, the researcher will conduct the following activities.

a. Compile a list of natural gas utility companies serving metropolitan areas comparable to Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

b. Devise a questionnaire format with cover letter including deadline date to be distributed to the target companies by mail.
Evidence of Completion: The objective will be met when responses are received and summarized.

DEVELOPMENTAL OBJECTIVE 3
By October 25, 1983, the researcher will have interviewed Wisconsin Gas Company personnel within telephone customer service and employee relations departments. Individuals are selected for interviews because their input is responsive to the underlying problems of the project as well as future application of the project results.

IMPLEMENTATION ACTIVITIES
To complete this objective, the researcher will complete the following:

a. Prepare three separate lists of questions appropriate for interviews with managerial, first level supervisory and union employees.

b. Conduct and document the interviews.

Evidence of Completion: The objective will be met when interviews are completed and results summarized into categories of information.

DEVELOPMENTAL OBJECTIVE 4
By November 1, 1983 a cost/benefit analysis will be executed by the researcher. This analysis will include a 3-1/2 year history of employee turnover within the telephone customer service department. Cost savings
to the company will be projected based on instituting a pilot program of job sharing with four employees in the department.

IMPLEMENTATION ACTIVITIES
To complete this objective, the researcher will conduct the following activities.

a. Collect employee turnover data for the period January, 1979 to June, 1983 through a search of union job posting and individual personnel records.

b. Calculate staffing costs for the telephone customer service department through consultation with the compensation and benefits department.

c. Calculate replacement costs through consultation with the employment and training departments.

d. Project cost effectiveness of the pilot group of four part time employees sharing two full time positions.

e. Analyze and respond to concerns raised in departmental interviews in the cost/benefit context.
Evidence of Completion: This step will be completed when the information listed above is compiled in a one page summary with supporting documents and graphs in detail and language appropriate for presentation to top management.

DEVELOPMENTAL OBJECTIVE 5
By November 15, 1983, the researcher will have designed an implementation plan and schedule which outlines in step-by-step fashion how the pilot group and subsequent groups in other departments would begin job sharing.

IMPLEMENTATION ACTIVITIES
To complete this objective, the researcher will carry out the following steps.

a. Conduct informal survey of telephone customer service employees to determine if current full-time employees are interested in the job-sharing part time schedule.

b. Coordinate with the training department the time frame for filling the next two vacancies with four employees on job sharing basis.

c. Discuss informally with union representatives the concept of job sharing and possible implementation. Include in implementation plan responses to union concerns and ideas for promoting maximum cooperation between company and union on this project.
Evidence of Completion: A written summary of the implementation plan and schedule will be in final form and ready for presentation to top management.

DEVELOPMENTAL OBJECTIVE 6

By November 25, 1983, the researcher will identify appropriate means of follow-up and evaluation to be utilized once approval for implementation is received.

IMPLEMENTATION ACTIVITIES

a. Create forms and a schedule for supervisors to use in reporting to personnel department, status and problems with job sharers.

b. Using input from staff psychologist, develop opinion survey for use before and at regular intervals after employees begin the job sharing schedule.

c. Create vehicle for personnel department use in reporting turnover statistics targeting departments using job sharing.

Evidence of Completion: This step will be completed when forms, reporting schedules, responsibility assignments and guidelines are in final form and compiled in a procedures summary format.
EVALUATION OBJECTIVE 1
Turnover will decrease in the telephone customer service department at least 15%. Resulting replacement costs of recruitment and training will also decrease.

IMPLEMENTATION ACTIVITIES
a. A report will be used to track turnover, training and recruitment costs within the target department.

b. Six month summaries of the data will be reviewed by personnel and compared to information from previous six month periods.

Evidence of Completion: The comparison of the pre-job sharing to post-job sharing statistics will show clear evidence of the 15% turnover reduction and corresponding decreases in recruitment and training expense.

EVALUATION OBJECTIVE 2
The level of employee morale and quality of customer service within the telephone customer service department will improve.

IMPLEMENTATION ACTIVITIES
a. Develop an employee opinion survey.

b. Administer the survey before and after implementation of job sharing.
Evidence of Completion: Enhanced employee morale and quality of customer service will be evidenced by comparison of the pre- and post- job sharing results.

6. LIMITATIONS OF PROJECT FINDINGS

a. Collective Bargaining Constraints/Union Presence
   Evidence of cost effectiveness presented in the project results may be impacted in the near future by changes in the collective bargaining agreement. This impact is impossible to predict. For example, if changes in fringe benefits or job posting provisions are negotiated, this would change significantly the data utilized in the cost/benefit analysis and turnover reduction predictions of the project.

   The presence of the union, the input from and personal leadership exercised by the steward within the telephone customer service department as well as other union officials may have a chilling effect on the acceptance of job sharing. This may or may not become a factor once the implementation plan commences.

b. Other Outside Factors
   The project findings regarding turnover may be affected by factors unrelated to the desirability of the job sharing concept. For example, turnover due to spouse's transfer out of state or other personal circumstances may become significant.
The employee morale improvement measures may be affected by a change in management anticipated in the period immediately following conclusion of the project. The department manager will retire and be replaced. It is probable that other changes in the supervisory level personnel will follow. This transition may be timed and may involve new supervisors from other departments less familiar with the project such that the employee morale will be affected.

7. DEFINITION OF TERMS

For clarification, the following terms used in the project are defined.

a. **Job sharing** - a method of staffing and work scheduling where one full-time position is intentionally split into two part-time positions. Job sharing partners then divide the duties of the job on the basis of time, skill, or complementary tasks.

b. **Turnover** - the measurement of employees moving out of the organization; calculated by comparing the number of separations for any reason, e.g. termination, promotion, transfer, leave of absence to the average employee population.

c. **Burn-out** - a condition of mental and physical exhaustion related to stress. In the project's context, burn-out relates to job stress resulting from customer contact work.
8. **TIMELINE**

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10. **SUMMARY**

Chapter One of the project introduced the need for the study in describing the turnover and related problems of the telephone customer service department. Against this backdrop, job sharing is presented as an option worthy of serious consideration. The objectives outlined in Chapter One provide the necessary direction the study will take in providing measurable evidence top management will review to decide if implementation is approved.

Chapter Two will provide a review of current literature dealing with job sharing in practice in both public and private sectors. The theme of quality of work life enhancement through job sharing will be explored as documented in the literature. The history of job sharing will be described and evidence from other studies of turnover reduction and productivity improvement will be discussed.
Chapter Three will present the findings of the researcher's surveys and interviews. A detailed cost/benefit analysis based on a proposed test group of four employees will be reported in Chapter Three, along with an actual "how-to-" implementation plan and follow-up evaluation plan.
CHAPTER TWO
LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The purpose of this project was to demonstrate the feasibility of job sharing as a staffing method at Wisconsin Gas Company. The researcher has assumed that there are measurable benefits both to organizations and individuals who participate in such an arrangement. This Chapter seeks to confirm this premise through examination of existing literature and reports of actual experiments with job sharing.

The following foundation questions will be addressed in historical, psychological, sociological and philosophical contexts:

**Historical**

How has job sharing evolved? In what industries has it been tried? What advantages and disadvantages have been identified?

**Sociological**

How is job sharing responsive to America's changing work force, i.e. demographics and worker value systems? How does job sharing impact certain workforce groups such as women, older workers, students?

**Psychological**

What are the attitudes of individual workers toward job sharing?
Philosophical

Why is job sharing beneficial for organizations to offer? What ethical concerns about working does it address?

It must be pointed out that available literature on the subject of job sharing is limited for the most part to journal reports on single teams offering only tentative findings on cost and benefits. The most detailed information was gleaned from results of a 1978 survey conducted by the California Employment Resource Agency, New Ways to Work. The director of that survey, Gretl Meier, in her 1979 book, Job Sharing, A New Pattern for Quality of Work And Life offered the only work devoted solely to job sharing. Other resources addressed job sharing only as a corollary to flex time and other variable work scheduling methods.

Historical Foundations

Although part-time work schedules have been used by employers for many years, the concept of two people sharing one full-time position has gained recognition only recently. The first documented project to establish such shared jobs dates to 1968 when the Massachusetts Department of Public Welfare used job sharing for affirmative action reasons, as a way to attract college educated women to social worker jobs. In 1973, the employment agency which organized the Massachusetts project came forward with the first known position paper which defined job sharing and other forms of career part-time work.
This paper spelled out a number of variations of dividing the work in a job sharing schedule. Technically, job sharing refers to two equally qualified part-time employees who divide the hours, responsibilities and benefits of a full-time job by performing complementary tasks. Job pairing, in comparison, uses two employees who share between them one entire set of job duties and responsibilities. A third term, job splitting, refers to two employees with different qualifications who divide a job according to their skills. Other terms such as twinning and tandeming are also used.

Whether the work is divided horizontally or vertically, job sharing is the appropriate term to identify part-time work which meets the following four criteria:

1) it is voluntary;
2) it involves a deliberate conversion of a full-time position;
3) it depends on the existence of a partner;
4) it includes provisions for fringe benefits.

The most extensive use of job sharing to date is in the public sector in both federal and state government agencies. This is due in part to legislation passed during the Carter Administration which established a part-time career system in the government. The bill called for federal agencies to review the applicability of permanent part-time work and set annual goals for establishing or converting positions. A one year program of job sharing was begun in 1979.

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in the Environmental Protection Agency, Federal Trade Commission, General Services Administration, Veterans Administration and the Export-Import Bank. These efforts highlighted the affirmative action advantages in hiring older workers, the handicapped, and women, and also addressed productivity in that tedious clerical work could be accomplished more effectively by a permanent part-time work force.

At the state level, efforts begun in the mid-seventies have led to job sharing arrangements in at least twenty state governments. Although most of these variable work schedule experiments centered on flexible hours, certain states such as Massachusetts, Oregon, Maryland, Hawaii, California and Wisconsin have experimented with job sharing per se.

In the private sector, job sharing is documented in such a variety of professions as librarians, teaching, banking, social work, attorneys, lab assistants, museum curators, clerical workers, pharmacists, retail and medical. The numbers of job sharers in these fields are difficult to measure since most employers do not have formal programs but began job sharing to accommodate individual employee’s scheduling needs. The field of education has by far the most job sharers.²

² Michael Frease and Robert A. Zawacki, "Job Sharing: An Answer to Productivity Problems?" The Personnel Administrator, October, 1979, pp. 35-38, 56.
Part-time teachers sharing full-time positions are especially prevalent in elementary schools. Surveys show these arrangements are usually on an individual basis with few districts actually promoting job sharing or having written policies on it. At the college level, job sharing is utilized in administrative positions as well as a few faculty jobs. Participating schools include Smith, Wellesley, Hampshire, Mt. Holyoke, M.I.T., Scripps, Claremont, Stanford, Grinnell, Wells, and Oberlin. Certain of these schools are even experimenting with job sharing by married couples in faculty positions. The unique problems encountered by married couples seeking joint faculty appointments at the same institution can be addressed through job sharing, although special concerns arise as well, for example, "nepotism, departmental voting, promotion and separate tenure tracks for each member of the couple."\(^3\)

In the medical field, job sharing has been promoted through federal legislation. Section 709 of the 1976 Health Professions Educational Assistance Act stipulates that institutions with medical residency training programs in primary care specialties receiving federal assistance "must establish or restructure and maintain . . . a reasonable number of physician training positions . . . as shared schedule positions."

Harvard University is a pioneer in promoting these alternatives to traditional scheduling with its "Reduced Schedule Residency Project." In this program, two physicians share one house officer position, each working and receiving half

\(^3\) Meier, p. 27
pay, full fringe benefits and appropriate credit for time worked. 1978 statistics showed only 1,051 residency programs offered shared schedule training but compliance guidelines on Section 709 have since been issued assuring that the numbers will grow. 4

To date only a few major employers have implemented job sharing. The Walgreen Company in Deerfield, Illinois started secretaries job sharing in order not to lose experienced help to retirement. United California Bank in Los Angeles has 1,500 permanent part-timers splitting jobs. Hewlett-Packard Company in Palo Alto, California has 500 permanent part-time employees, some of whom are job sharers. General Telephone of Illinois also employs permanent part-time people. Scott, Foresman and Company of Glenview, Illinois and a Control Data Corporation of Minneapolis facility employ "mother's shift" and "student shift" job sharers whose hours are flexible enough to allow summers off for mothers while students work full time. Other companies offering job sharing include Lufthansa, New York Life Insurance, Connecticut General, Eastman Kodak and Xerox. 5

Employment statistics bear out this increasing interest in permanent part-time employment opportunities like job sharing. In 1960, 1 out of 10 workers was part-time where in 1970 the count was 1 out of 8 and in 1980, it is estimated that 1 out of every 5-1/2 workers was part-time. It is also estimated that the

---

5 Employee Benefit Plan Review, April, 1979, p. 30.
number of people seeking part-time work has increased by three and one-half million or more in the last ten years. That figure does not, however, account for the number of discouraged workers who have given up looking for such work. Other sources confirm that "between 1964 and 1977, for example, the percentage of the workforce that was employed part-time increased from 11 percent to 18 percent, and the rate of increase has been nearly 4 percent per year, more than double the rate of increase for full-time workers."

There are a number of reasons which explain this surge of interest in career part-time work. Some of these reasons reflect trends and attitudes which will be explained further from sociological and psychological perspectives. As Jerome M. Rosow and Robert Zager point out in their "Special Report" for the Harvard Business Review, these trends include "the influx of women (especially mothers with school age children) into paid employment; the increase in multiple worker and dual career families; the desire of older workers to reduce their hours while continuing to work; new employee expectations for greater participation, dignity, and self-fulfillment at work; the heightened preference for leisure and further education . . . and increasingly insistent demands for higher productivity and fuller capital utilization."

Job sharing, one variation of permanent part-time employment, is being used by employers in response to the need for change these trends have introduced.

---

Organizations which have tried job sharing have recorded several advantages. One advantage is economic: job sharing costs little to install, requires no change in technology or plant, requires no organizational restructuring yet turnover, absenteeism, and productivity appear to improve. Companies facing layoffs can use job sharing to reduce the number of employees affected, as did United Airlines in 1980.

United's experience, called "partnership time off" was successful in reducing the number of layoffs from 200 to 75 positions. There was a more even geographical distribution of layoffs; trained employees were retained; some reduction in absenteeism was experienced and the employees felt the Company had demonstrated that it cared. In Britain, job splitting has been mandated as a partial solution to the unemployment problem, "although the government formula has several built-in limitations which combined with the political issues, have contributed to the low level of follow-up." Other economic factors for organizations to consider are cost savings in training, temporary workers and overtime. Because workers are trained simultaneously, the cost is no more than one full-time employee yet it is unlikely both will leave at the same time. As a result, one employee may train their partner's replacement, thereby reducing formal training expenses.

Temporary replacements are needed less often as lunch periods, vacations and illnesses can be more readily covered. Overtime is also reduced as scheduling is more efficient and more productive time is actually worked each day.

An increase in productivity appears to accompany the use of job sharing although the evidence is as yet incomplete. A study at a mass-assembly department of a southeastern firm found that job sharing brought about a seven percent higher output and a twelve percent lower scrap ratio.10 By working four hour shifts, fatigue related errors are reduced, employees work faster and assembly lines do not have to shut down if shared shifts are scheduled back to back. The Massachusetts group of welfare caseworkers mentioned earlier reported job sharers handled 89 percent of a full-time case load.11 Similar impressive productivity figures are reported in other companies where, almost as if in return for the special consideration, employees work harder and longer than their part-time schedule prescribes. Because of the energy and enthusiasm displayed by job sharers, creativity is sparked and menial tasks are less tedious because they are shared. Turnover, now estimated to be "the most significant hidden business expense",12 as well as absenteeism may also be reduced through job sharing yielding savings on the Company.

Job sharing schedules have also been found to be very appealing to retirees. Employers benefit in retaining their experienced employees without blocking career paths of younger workers. The older workers can then be paired with younger workers in the job share arrangement to take advantage of their expertise yet allowing the older worker to ease into retirement.

Pros and cons of job sharing not so easily quantified have to do with payroll cost factors. Although fringe benefit costs may be saved if companies, (like Wisconsin Gas) choose not to pay health insurance or life insurance for part-timers and prorate time worked towards vacation, sick pay and pension benefits. Fixed payroll costs such as FICA and unemployment insurance withholdings do, however, increase with job sharers. The relative cost to the company is dependent on the salary levels and numbers of the employees involved.

There are other disadvantages of job sharing. Personality problems between job sharers, scheduling meetings when both must attend, assigning responsibility/accountability when jobs are paired are examples of these. Job sharers also experience limited promotion opportunities, their supervisors have an increased span of control, and accurate communication and follow-up become critical. Some additional paperwork and possible additional training may also be experienced.

Union opposition to job sharing and other forms of part-time employment has been documented as a serious obstacle to job sharing. Basic to union's fears of part-time employment is a perceived threat to overtime opportunities and concern that part-timers may compete with or erode wages and benefits of
full-timers. Unions are not the only group with pre-conceptions about part-time workers. Another obstacle to job sharing often cited is the attitude of supervisors who somehow believe that part-time workers are less valuable to the organization, work less hard, have less loyalty and commitment to the organization, or "value the intrinsic rewards from their jobs less than full-timers do because they spend less time on the job and have different reasons for working."  

All of these concerns must be addressed by the organization considering job sharing. As this section of the literature review has pointed out, however, there are many instances where job sharing has been and is being used successfully. These applications range from the job splitting effort in Britain to alleviate unemployment to United Airlines' averting layoffs to medical residency candidates and married college professors sharing schedules to the women, students and retirees in the public and private sectors who find job sharing allows a better balance between work and other life activities.

It has been said that job sharing "could touch off the biggest boon to industry productivity since the invention of the computer or could become the wave of the future, perhaps even a tidal wave."  

and improved morale as employees work harder, have reduced absentee and turn-over problems because their schedules have been tailored to their personal needs. This effort to fit the work to the worker, and make available more meaningful career part-time employment, will be discussed further in light of sociological, psychological and philosophical considerations.

Sociological Foundations

The appropriateness of job sharing is reinforced by what Gretl Meier calls "the changing cultural expectations of work, i.e., not just any work under any conditions." These changing expectations are reflected by a diverse workforce made up of increasing numbers of women, older workers, and more educated young people, each group having different needs which can be met through job sharing.

Besides the complexion of the work force, the nature of work itself is changing. The shift away from manufacturing to white collar employment indicates the standardized work schedules and staffing patterns of our manufacturing past may no longer apply. The importance of work itself has changed, and the importance of leisure time for family, recreation and education purposes has increased dramatically. As Daniel Yankelovich points out in his book, New Rules: Searching For Self-Fulfillment in a World Turned Upside Down, only one in six employees he surveyed viewed work as the center of their life and at least half believed that both sexes have the responsibility to care for small children. This trend is also confirmed in a 1978 Louis Harris poll which

15 Meier, p. 5.
showed between 30 and 40 million workers would accept up to a 10 percent reduction in pay for a proportional reduction in working hours. Job sharing is responsive to these trends in that it provides meaningful part-time career opportunities where, depending on the shared arrangements, participants may have half days off, partial weeks off, or even half years off alternating with their partner.

The benefits of the job sharing's time arrangements are probably most significant to working women, either re-entering the workforce or attempting to balance working careers with care of the family. As Eli Ginzburg, Chairman of the National Commission for Manpower Policy once stated, the demand by women for equal participation in the labor force is "the single most outstanding phenomenon of this century." Burgeoning numbers of women are expected to continue to enter the workforce. In 1974, women comprised forty percent of the workforce. Projected figures for working women in 1990 are 48.7 million. Because women are considered as the primary care providers for children, a significant number of this 48.7 million women will not be able to work full-time. Employers considering the impact of this trend on their organizations will consider job sharing as one means of attracting and retaining qualified women.

The same flexibility job sharing would afford young mothers could just as easily apply to fathers. As Meier states, "All too often discussed as a

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17 Meier, p. 5.
women's problem, reduced work schedules need, instead, to be considered as a concern of men, women and children, and of society as a whole.\textsuperscript{18} Although the U.S. has been slower than European countries such as Sweden and France in offering parental leaves to both parents, questions are being raised in the U.S. about the strains on the family unit when two thirds of all mothers are working full-time. Recent studies on family life have pointed to concern about the inflexibility of work as one of the greatest concerns expressed by parents of young children. These same studies indicated that "in intact families, the highest stress for mothers arises when working full-time, less when not working at all, but \textit{least} when working part-time.\textsuperscript{19} These same studies reported heightened feelings of adequacy as parents as well as job satisfaction related to working part-time. The implication is clearly that meaningful part-time work opportunities such as job sharing may have a positive effect on preserving the family unit.

Another group whose needs are well served by job sharing are older workers. As the birth rate declines and life expectancy lengthens, organizations can foresee their workforces in the not so distant future made up of more older workers. The job sharing option has benefits both for the worker and the company. By offering part-time work through job sharing, companies can make full use of the older workers' expertise, pair them with inexperienced employees in an efficient training duo while affording the older worker a chance to ease into retirement. Employee interest in such arrangements is confirmed by a

\textsuperscript{18} Meier, p. 6.
\textsuperscript{19} Meier, p. 7.
Harris poll in which 79 percent of employees aged 55 to 64 said they would prefer working part-time to retiring completely. Younger employees can then be promoted without the friction of bypassing the senior employee and the technical experience and support of the older worker for the newly promoted employee can be critical to their success.

Younger workers, especially students, can benefit in other ways from job sharing. Students locked out of entry positions because of economic conditions affecting employers' hiring practices can begin to get practical experience through job sharing part-time. Increasing awareness of the difficulties in transition from school to work may further dramatize the need for more meaningful part-time work opportunities. With the rising costs of tuition, part-time work for students will continue to be needed. As mentioned earlier, the pairing of mothers and students has seen significant success. Executives in European countries responding to a 1981 survey reported they utilized job sharing in part out of concern for bringing more secondary and university graduates into the workforce. Job sharing was reported in 34.7 percent of the organizations in Sweden and 25.3 percent in Denmark. These numbers are much higher than U.S. estimates.

As this section of the literature review has illustrated, job sharing has special appeal for certain segments of the workforce, especially women, students and older workers. Job sharing and other forms of permanent part-time employment anticipate changes in the nature of work and the importance of work

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in the future; white collar service work performed by workers interested in leisure time as well as work. The attitudes of workers in relation to job sharing will be explored further in the section on psychological foundations.

Psychological Foundations
As described in the introduction to the literature review, reports on job sharing experiments tend to emphasize the positive effects on individuals and organizations. It is a new concept, experience is limited, and the only criticism noted is that of organized labor. In reviewing the recorded responses of individuals actually participating in job sharing, the overwhelming impression is that it is a positive experience, one that gives them more control over the work they do and the time they spend doing it. Self-esteem, identification and feelings of satisfaction in workers are heightened; skills which might have atrophied are retained. Stress is reduced as time and energy are made available for family and pursuits other than work. In the older worker, anxiety over the transition from work to retirement is lessened.

Feelings of accomplishment and heightened job satisfaction are noted in countless examples of feedback from job sharers, but behavior toward the partner is critical in its success or failure. Selection of compatible partners, communication and clear understanding of accountabilities also affect the relationship. There are predictable problems. As one sharer stated, "You can't run your own show, you've got to sit back and compromise." But stress related to work is decreased as partners know that both are concerned about problems.

21 Meier, p. 59.
and results; there is the safeguard of a replacement if absent due to illness or personal crisis. A feeling of being in this together pervades, and "partner synergy" accounts for a source of much job satisfaction.  

Energy and creativity are enhanced through job sharing. The result of less fatigue is critical in production settings, and in other settings there is the feeling that, "two heads are better than one, and combining talents and perspectives makes work exciting."  

A tendency of most job sharers is to work harder and display more loyalty to the organization. This is due in part to a feeling of obligation that they give the company for the privilege of having flexibility in their work.

These attitudes and behaviors of job sharers dispel the stereotype of the part-time worker as a "temporary, secondary wage earner not serious about careers or committed to working." With job sharing, not only is the quality of part-time work opportunity improved, but the ethic of full time work is carried over. The job sharer has confidence in the sense of contribution and accomplishment for the organization, as well as personal satisfaction in exercising choice and control over work and other personal life pursuits.

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23 Meier, p. 79.

24 Olmsted, p. 293.
This element of personal choice is explored further in the philosophical context.

**Philosophical Foundations**

In deciding whether or not to offer job sharing, an organization considers certain philosophical questions. In regard to its social responsibility, job sharing offers a way to provide fuller employment in communities and helps further national goals of productivity improvement. Job sharing affords companies a way to improve the quality of work life and treat older workers with more dignity. Job sharing provides meaningful options which allow the exercising of individual choice in regard to work and other life pursuits.

Job sharing is also one means of changing the "linear life plan" into which individuals in our society have been locked. This linear progression from school to work to retirement can have stifling effects. There may be distinct advantages to distributing income earning work opportunity more evenly over the total life cycle. With continued high unemployment, if enough quality jobs can't be created, it makes sense to at least rotate the available jobs among qualified persons. Job sharing on a wide scale might accomplish this to the extreme advantage of organizations and individuals.

As Fred Best says in "Recycling People: Work Sharing Through Flexible Life Scheduling,"

"The world of the future will likely require more flexibility in the way we schedule education, work and leisure over a person's life
time. If this can be done successfully, the way will be open for each individual to realize many personal dreams.25

Summary

This review of the literature on job sharing has confirmed that as a staffing method it offers advantages to employers and as a work scheduling method it offers individual workers greater freedom of choice in work. Job sharing has been utilized successfully in both public and private sectors since the mid-1970's. It is seen as one way to provide fuller employment and offers organizations several advantages. These include greater flexibility in work scheduling, retention of valued employees, reduction in absenteeism and turnover, improved productivity and employee morale, reduced costs in training and temporary help, recruitment from a broader pool of candidates.

Disadvantages to the organization are few, if job share partners are recruited and matched effectively. There is some increase in fixed labor costs of social security, FICA and unemployment insurance but these are dependent on the numbers and salary level of job sharing employees. There may be some concern by supervisors about increased span of control, task responsibility and accountability, and scheduling, communication and additional paperwork. The most often reported drawback of job sharing is resistance in the organization based on perceptions that part-time employees are less committed to their work than

full time employees. Actual results prove that this is easily overcome when qualified job sharers are hired as career employees.

By offering meaningful part-time career opportunities job sharing meets the special needs of a variety of workers and is a positive response to emerging social trends. Its appeal to women, older workers and students reflects the needs of today's diverse work force. By offering greater opportunities for individuals to exercise personal choice in pursuing work, family, education, and leisure, job sharing is responsive to changing values of workers.

Whether or not job sharing will be widely adopted as a concept whose time has come will depend on how well human resource managers resolve the complications inherent in it. It will also depend on how responsive to the human element of individual worker needs organizations choose to be. The concept itself has proven to be a viable one.

The application of this concept in one department at Wisconsin Gas Company is explored further in Chapter Three. The results of the project indicate that it is a feasible staffing option for the company to consider.
CHAPTER THREE
FINDINGS OF THE PROJECT AND CONCLUSIONS

Historical Review of the Project

1. Purpose

The purpose of the project was to determine if job sharing was appropriate for the telephone customer service department of Wisconsin Gas Company. The reason this department was chosen for study was the inordinately high turnover rate experienced there. Job sharing was explored as a means of reducing the turnover as well as improving employee morale and quality of customer service in the department.

The project was carried out within Wisconsin Gas Company's corporate headquarters office in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Employees in the Personnel Division and Controller's Division were involved. The employees in the telephone customer service department of the Controller's Division were the most directly impacted by the project.

The original hypothesis of the project was that the feasibility of implementing job sharing in the telephone customer service department could be measured through improvement in turnover (at least 15% in the twelve months following implementation) and heightened employee morale (measured by a before and after opinion survey).

These evaluation objectives stretch beyond the actual scope of the project because approval from top management must be sought before implementation. However, the project results provide significant indications of the
anticipated outcomes, that is, that job sharing can be used as an effective means of decreasing turnover and improving employee morale in the telephone Customer Service Department.

2. Participants
   The project was carried out solely by the researcher. In the position of Labor Relations Representative, the researcher brought to the project an understanding of the Company's business as well as a personnel orientation. This experience included an understanding of the organization, its goals and priorities and management philosophy gained from direct experience in collective bargaining. Personal experience from a prior job in the Company's personnel department also gave the researcher direct knowledge of the specific operations of the telephone customer service department. In this prior position, the researcher had recruited and hired a significant number of the current employees in the department and had developed excellent working relationships with the department's management. This enabled the researcher to readily access accurate information and to be especially effective in the interview phase of the collection of data.

3. Implementation Activities
   The project was carried out in two major phases: 1) the collection of data both in-house and from outside sources regarding the level of interest in pursuing job sharing and to what extent it is already being uti-
lized in other local companies; and 2) the compilation and analysis of turnover and staffing cost data specific to the telephone Customer Service Department.

Presentation of Results

1. Evaluation Design

As stated earlier, the project was designed with the understanding that top management approval would be required before implementation. The evaluation objectives of 15% reduction in turnover and improved employee morale stretch beyond the actual timetable of the project. However, the information gathered clearly implies that the anticipated outcomes would be realized.

A number of changes had to be made in the developmental objectives set forth in Chapter One. The survey of other natural gas utilities was not sanctioned by the researcher's supervisors. The interview of current employees had to be limited to management personnel only. Contact with union employees and union officials was not allowed due to collective bargaining taking place at the time.

2. Findings for Each Evaluation Question

Turnover in the telephone customer service Department will decrease at least 15% in the twelve month period following implementation of job sharing. Resulting replacement and training costs will also decrease.
The analysis of turnover data shows that turnover in the three and one-half year period studied averaged 80% per year. Of that total, an average of 45% was attributed to employees posting out of the department; 36% of total turnover due to terminations, with leaves of absence, retirements and promotions to management making up the balance.

The costs related to this turnover were significant. Taking into account recruitment, interviewing, selection and training, the replacement costs per new employee equal approximately $15,000. Average replacement costs per year totalled $225,000.

The fact that job sharers are part-time and not currently eligible for medical, dental and life insurance means a cost savings to the Company of $6,408 per job sharing employee per year as compared to full-time employees.

The objective that employee turnover would decrease by 15% and related costs of replacement and training would decrease is a preliminary projection which cannot be reported in the scope of this project. However, as discussed further in Conclusions and Implications, it is a reasonable projection of the impact of job sharing on turnover. It is possible that once the job sharing option is announced to full-time employees, so many full-time employees will want to switch to the job sharing schedule that training costs in the first year would continue to be high but would drop off markedly in the following years.
The reasons for extensive turnover in the telephone customer service department discovered during the project deal with Evaluation Objective Two:

The level of employee morale and therefore quality of customer service within the telephone Customer Department will improve.

Because this evaluation objective measures before and after results, actual findings cannot yet be definitely reported. However, results of interviews with former telephone customer service department employees indicate unanimously that job sharing would be an effective means of dealing with the primary reason for low employee morale, namely, job stress related to constant customer contact work.

The nature of the work in the telephone customer service department was found to be especially appropriate for the reduced work schedule job sharing provides. Employees are completely sedentary, use the video display terminals constantly, must be mentally prepared for confrontation with each customer and deal with constant repetition of the same task. In general the employees feel they work harder than anyone else in the Company, take more abuse, and are less appreciated for the special skills they must develop to deal with the irate, threatening, and emotional customers. This variety of reactions adds to the stress of the job and is a major factor in low morale and in reasons for posting out of or quitting the job.
Conclusions and Implications

Preliminary findings indicate job sharing is a desirable staffing option for Wisconsin Gas Company to use in its telephone customer service department. Job sharing will mean cost reductions in replacement, training and fringe benefit costs. It will significantly reduce turnover because part-time employees are not eligible to post or bid for other job vacancies within the Company per the collective bargaining agreement. It will improve employee morale because the Company will demonstrate a specific response to individual worker needs and will reduce stress, thereby improving morale, by offering the reduced work schedule of four hours per worker per day.

The department will benefit from decreased turnover in being able to maintain a more stable, experienced workforce. Because of extensive turnover, the department currently has 51% of its employees with less than two years of experience. Customer complaints against employees in the department will also decrease as fatigue and the effects of tedium and constant confrontation with irate customers will be limited.

Quality of customer service will improve as employees gain more experience on the job and stay on the job. The level of stress in this high intensity, customer contact problem-solving work will be better managed by employees sharing work on reduced schedules. "Burn-out" as a reason for leaving the department will be less frequent. Because 98% of the current staff in this department is female, and six out of forty-five were pregnant as of the writing of this report, offering the job sharing option may make it possible to retain
those experienced employees instead of their terminating to stay home and care for their family.

The anticipated reaction of the Union to this concept was reported by the Labor Relations Manager to be favorable. However, the question of fringe benefits is of serious concern. During the course of the project, the Company and the Union were engaged in collective bargaining where the Union proposed improvements in part-time benefits. By adding to the ranks of permanent part-time employees, the Company lends credence to the Union's concern that benefits be provided. This is an issue which will not be resolved for some time. However, there are options to be considered such as proration and contributory arrangements.

Recommendations

It is recommended that top management consider seriously the implementation of job sharing in the telephone customer service department beginning with a pilot group of four employees. These first four places might be filled by soliciting volunteers from current full-time employees or through special recruiting efforts from outside the Company.

Based on the success or failure of a twelve month experiment with this first group, additional jobs could then be split. During the initial experiment, other departments of the Company could be canvassed to determine other full-time positions appropriate for job sharing.
The experience of the first test group must be monitored closely. The Personnel Department would work together with the telephone Customer Service Department to track performance, turnover, special problems and costs. This follow-up effort is important to insure an accurate analysis can subsequently be made to indicate if the Company should expand or curtail job sharing.

Special efforts need to be extended to communicate with the Union on the subject of implementing job sharing. As part of the start-up of the initial test group, Union officials and their business agent must be informed. It is important to seek cooperation from the Union in order for the pilot group or subsequent job sharing pairs to succeed. This can be done through the Company's willingness to share information about the project ahead of time, provide updated information as it progresses, and respond as best it can to the concerns raised by the Union.

Depending on the success of the test group, converting all present part-time jobs in telephone customer service to four hour per day sharing schedules should be pursued. This would simplify scheduling as well as remove any discrepancies between job sharing part-timers and other part-timers.

Drawing on input from supervisors of the test group, special training should be developed and made available to supervisors of job sharers. This training should emphasize special concerns of the Company as well as the employees so the supervisors can help the project succeed.
Recruiting of new employees for job sharing positions needs to be carried out with careful attention. Advertising or announcements to colleges and universities should clearly spell out the special requirements and commitment sought in job sharers. Affirmative Action recruiting of the handicapped and the over-forty worker should be planned. A method for announcing the vacancies in-house should also be used. Wherever practical, qualified current employees should be given preference over outside hires. This is a critical point to the unions as well as a factor for success identified in surveys of companies already using job sharing.

The selection of job sharing pairs must take into account the compatibility of the partners. An appropriate method of screening for compatibility should be used as well as joint interviews, current employees recruiting their own partners, or other means to insure partners will cooperate with and be responsible to one another.

A process should be established for handling requests from current employees who want their job to be split. Although the Personnel Department would work with the individual operating departments to determine if the request is feasible, the responsibility for approval or disapproval should be centralized in the Personnel Department. This would insure consistency and a proper means of "saying no" to requests when necessary.

The Personnel Department should also have the responsibility for ongoing analysis of the results of job sharing. If the cost to the Company out-
distances the benefits as proven in the continued monitoring efforts, recommendations should be made to discontinue job sharing.

Restatement of Purpose
The purpose of this project was to determine if job sharing would be feasible in Wisconsin Gas Company's telephone customer service department, and what effect it would have on improving turnover and morale.

The project was carried out with the goal of presenting to top management a detailed proposal on the benefits to organizations and to individuals of job sharing. Surveys of other companies, information gathered from current employees and management personnel, a cost/benefit analysis and extensive review of available literature on the subject support the concept's feasibility. Information gathered during the project also predicts a positive impact on turnover and employee morale. Actual experience with job sharing to measure its effect on turnover and employee morale is anticipated once implementation is approved.
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# APPENDIX A

## TURNOVER DATA

TELEPHONE CUSTOMER SERVICE DEPARTMENT

Average Employee Population: 37

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Separations</strong></td>
<td>32</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>65</td>
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<tr>
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<td>65</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>21</td>
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<td><strong>Postings</strong></td>
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<td>54</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Leaves of Absence</strong></td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Other</strong></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Notes:**
- Total Separations = Terminations + Postings + Leaves of Absence + Other.
## APPENDIX B

### TELEPHONE SURVEY RESULTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Companies Contacted</th>
<th>Job Sharing Practiced</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wisconsin Electric Power Company</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wisconsin Telephone</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Wisconsin National Bank</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blue Cross/Blue Shield</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marine Corporation</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marshall and Ilsley</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northwestern Mutual Life</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MGIC</td>
<td>X</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

All companies indicated permanent part-time employees are utilized but job sharing is not practiced.