

The Positive Effects of Top-Sharing: A Case Study

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Abstract : Due to political, social, and societal changes in labor organization, top-sharing, defined as job-sharing in leading positions, becomes more important in HRM. German companies are looking for practical and economically meaningful solutions that allow to enduringly increase women's ratio in management, not only because of a recently implemented quota. Furthermore, supporting employees in achieving work-life balance is perceived as an important goal for a sustainable HRM to gain competitive advantage. Top-sharing is seen as being suitable to reach both goals. To evaluate determinants leading to effective top-sharing, a case study of a newly implemented top-sharing tandem in a large German enterprise was conducted over a period of 15 months. In this company, a full leadership position was split into two 60%-part-time positions held by an experienced female leader in her late career and a female colleague who took over her first leadership position (mid-career). We assumed a person-person fit in terms of a match of the top sharing partners' personality profiles (Big Five) and their leadership motivations to be important prerequisites for an effective collaboration between them. We evaluated the person-person fit variables once before the tandem started to work. Both leaders were expected to learn from each other (mentoring, competency development). On an operational level, they were supposed to lead together the same employees in an effective manner (leader-member exchange), presupposing an effective cooperation between both (handing over information). To see developments over time, these processes were evaluated three times over the span of the project. Top-Sharing and the underlined processes are expected to positively influence the tandem's performance which has been evaluated twice, at the beginning and the end of the project, to assess its development over time as well. The evaluation of the personality and the basic motives suggests that both executives can be a successful top-sharing tandem. The competency evaluations (supervisor as well as self-assessment) increased over the time span. Although the top sharing tandem worked on equal terms, they implemented rather classical than peer-mentoring due to different career ambitions of the tandem partners. Thus, opportunities were not used completely. Team-member exchange scores proved the good cooperation between the top-sharers. Although the employees did not evaluate the leader-member-exchange between them and the two leaders of the tandem homogeneously, the top-sharing tandem itself did not have the impression that the employees' task performance depended on whom of the tandem was responsible for the task. Furthermore, top-sharing did not negatively influence the performance of both leaders. During qualitative interviews with the top-sharers and their team, we found that the top-sharers could focus more easily on their tasks. The results suggest positive outcomes of top-sharing (e.g. competency improvement, learning from each other through mentoring). Top-Sharing does not hamper performance. Thus, further research and practical implementations are suggested. As part-time jobs are still more often a female solution to increase their work-life- and work-family-balance, top-sharing may be a suitable solution to increase the woman's ratio in leadership positions as well as to sustainable increase work-life-balance of executives.

Keywords : mentoring, part-time leadership, top-sharing, work-life-balance

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