

Flexibility at Novartis: Christine Sturchler and Aileen Wrynn

Sturchler and Wrynn explain why their job-sharing experience was one of the most successful and energizing periods of their careers.

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The “Flexibility at Novartis” series spotlights associates who have one thing in common: They work flexibly. As a result, they are able to manage the demands of their work and private lives. Flexible working can boost employee engagement while increasing efficiency and productivity. This series provides a glimpse into flexible working at Novartis.

Aileen Wrynn and Christine Sturchler had a job share as Head Portfolio Strategy and Innovation for the Ophthalmology franchise in Development in Basel, Switzerland. They tell their story below.

Two heads are better than one

In 2008, we moved from our positions as lab heads in NIBR research to job share a project management role in Development, ultimately sharing the role of Head Portfolio Strategy and Innovation for the Ophthalmology franchise. We consider our job-sharing experience one of the most successful and energizing periods of our careers so far – especially given that it lasted 10 years!



Job sharing is a win-win for both the company and associates. By having two individuals fulfill one role, the company benefits from a greater range of skill sets and thinking styles. This leads to more effective and informed decision-making as well as sustainable high performance. And it's a great way to meet the expectations of many associates today that a fulfilling and demanding job can coexist with a full and balanced life.

Sharing a job is also good for your mindset. When you're off duty, you're off duty. When we shared a job, each of us could really let go and re-energize during non-working and vacation time.

A job share means sharing everything: the satisfactions and challenges, the compliments and the criticism. When you have a difference of opinion, you have to work it out between yourselves and present a united front. You also have to clearly define and communicate who is responsible for any given task. Over time, we learned the true meaning of collaboration.

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Of course there are challenges, too. The external perception that you are two associates doing "just" one job takes some time to dispel. It takes perseverance, resilience and a daily dose of humor to stay the course.

Flexible work requires flexible leadership. Our first manager was initially looking to hire someone full time or at least 80%. We both had small children at the time and wanted to work fewer hours, so we approached him with the idea of a share. He not only welcomed our suggestion, he helped us design the job so we could each work 60%. Then, once a job share is set up, it takes a committed and open-minded leader to support it because – despite the net benefits – it takes more effort to manage and develop two people rather than one.

Judging from our own experiences and other job sharers' experiences in Basel, we see many opportunities to expand the concept. For example, intergenerational job shares would be a great way to combine the strengths of someone early in his or her career with those of a seasoned professional in one single role. We'd also like to encourage more men to take advantage of flexible arrangements like job sharing.

What does flexibility at work mean to you?

Flexibility means integrating your work into a balanced and full life.

Two Novartis associates detail their #flexibleworking experience.

Learn more about careers at Novartis

While our diverse workforce brings different people and perspectives together, inclusion is making the mix work. It is about creating an atmosphere and an environment where each of us feels valued, respected and heard.

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