

## Work shadowing

Work shadowing is where an individual from one area of the organisation has the opportunity to work alongside and gain experience of the role of another individual, and gain an insight into that particular work area. It can also be used to provide an individual within a department the opportunity to work alongside more experienced colleagues so they can learn and develop within their current role. Work shadowing might be 'horizontal' shadowing, where both parties are working at more or less at same level or 'vertical', where one person is more senior than the other.

### **The benefits of work shadowing include:**

- The broadening of experience, developing a deeper knowledge and understanding of how other roles, teams and departments work.
- It enables them to reflect and learn from others.
- Help to view processes they are involved in, from a different angle.
- The opportunity to "test out" possible career options.
- Improved communication across departments
- Hosts can share best practice and often a chance to reflect on own work and see their role through "fresh eyes".

### **Different types of work shadowing**

#### *Observation*

The shadow spends the agreed period of time observing a typical representation of what the host does for example, attending meetings, watching interactions with students/customers. This type of shadowing works best when a shadow is looking to gain a greater understanding of what the host's job role actually consists of, if someone is considering a career change but is not quite sure if they fully understand what is involved in that role. The host will provide opportunities for questions and a de-brief to ensure that both parties benefit from the shadowing.

#### *Focussed activities*

Here a shadow will follow the host for specific activities over a period of time which are all preceded by a mini briefing and follow up debriefing. This works best when individuals work near to the host and the host can then advise them of dates and times of specific activities which are of value in understanding their role. This type of shadowing provides short periods of specific interactions, rather than passive ongoing observation but needs careful timing and planning if it is not to become disruptive.

#### *Hands on*

This is an extension of the observation model, where the shadow starts to undertake some of the tasks they have observed and gains 'hands on' experience of the role whilst having the safety net of

being closely supervised by the host. This is not always possible and would need to be discussed on a case by case basis by the host and the shadow.

## **Key roles and responsibilities**

### **The host**

A host is the person who agrees to be shadowed. This role does involve some preparation. A host needs to consider if the time requested is the best time for the shadowing to take place and how long each period of shadowing should be for. They will also need to take into consideration their work obligations and ensure that the shadowing experience does not get in the way of their day to day responsibilities. The host is responsible for:

- ✓ In consultation with the shadow, deciding the type, timing and length of the shadowing session(s)
- ✓ Providing information in advance as to what the shadow can expect to observe during the session(s)
- ✓ Ensuring as far as possible that the shadowing experience meets the agreed objectives
- ✓ Carrying out a de-brief following the session(s) to enable to shadow to ask questions or clarify anything they have not understood

### **The shadow**

A shadow should consider why they are doing the shadowing, what they hope to achieve and do some preparation with their line manager or the host prior to the shadowing to set objectives for the sessions. Following the shadowing it is important to review and discuss outcomes and what happens next with their line manager. The shadow is responsible for:

- ✓ Making the initial approach to the host, with the agreement of their line manager
- ✓ Agreeing the objectives of the session with their line manager and the host before the shadowing takes place
- ✓ Respecting the rules and cultures of the host's work environment and exercising discretion and professionalism throughout any shadowing session
- ✓ Writing a short summary of what they have learned and the benefits of the experience
- ✓ Reviewing and discussing the outcomes of the shadowing with their line manager

