

## Virtual Job Shadowing

**Author: Munodiwa Zvemhara . August 2020**

Learning in a classroom is great, but it is not the only way to gain know-how. Hands-on learning helps students retain knowledge and score better on tests. It is for these reasons that many institutes of education have begun to implement more and more real-life learning programs.

### **What is Job Shadowing?**

(Hughes et al; 2016) Job shadowing is a type of on-the-job employee job training in which a new employee, or an employee desiring to become familiar with a different job, follows and observes a trained and experienced employee. Job shadowing is an effective form of job training for certain jobs.

Job shadowing allows a student, employee, or intern to gain comprehensive knowledge about what an employee who holds a particular job does every day. Job shadowing provides a far richer experience than reading a job description or doing an informational interview during which an employee describes their work.

Job shadowing allows the observer to see and understand the nuances of a particular job. The job shadowing employee can observe how the employee does the job, the key deliverables expected from the job, and the employees with whom the job interacts. They can attend employee meetings, visit customers, attend conferences or training events, and become completely familiar with the job.

(Ahier et al; 2000) Job shadowing can be particularly helpful in highly-skilled and technical areas of work, such as those found in manufacturing or STEM-related industries, which may struggle to provide work experience placements or to get students involved in their primary work processes. This can be due to health and safety or quality-control considerations.

### **Different Types of Job Shadowing**

#### 1. Observation – “fly on the wall”

As a visitor, you will spend the agreed period observing the day to day work of your host. This may involve a range of activities such as attending meetings and watching interactions with customers. It should be a typical representation of what the “host” individual does daily.

This type of shadowing works best when a visitor is looking to gain a greater understanding of what the host’s job role consists of. So, for example, if someone is considering a career change but they do not fully understand what is involved in that role doing, job shadowing will allow them to explore this further. The host will provide opportunities for questions and de-brief to ensure that both parties benefit from the shadowing.

## 1. Regular Briefings – “Burst Interactions”

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

### 1. Hands-On – “job sharing”

A progression of the observation method, hands-on job shadowing is where you start to carry out some of the tasks you've been observing under the supervision of the host. This type of shadowing can be time-consuming for the host and so isn't always possible.

## **How to get Job Shadowing Opportunities**

If you are a student first, check with your college to see if they offer a formal job shadowing program through their Career Services Office. If not, career counselors can be an enormous help in either helping you find a potential job shadowing opportunity or pointing you in the right direction. The alumni of your college may also know of businesses (either large or small) that offer job shadowing and government agencies often offer job shadowing programs for students.

When looking for opportunities it's important to only choose roles that are of interest to you, as the time spent shadowing is so short. You also need to be aware of how time-consuming the process can be for the person being shadowed, so preparation and a genuine interest in the area are vital.

Some jobs are not suitable for shadowing due to the sensitive nature of the work and issues around health, confidentiality, and safety. For example, it may not be possible to shadow all professionals in healthcare, law, property and construction, social care and science, and pharmaceuticals. In these cases, it's still worthwhile contacting the company involved to see if you can speak to someone in the job away from their workplace.

When trying to discover who you can shadow career fairs are also a useful resource. Attend job fairs and speak to representatives to enquire about work shadowing opportunities. If the particular role you had in mind is unsuitable for shadowing the company may be able to offer a different form of experience.

## **Benefits of Job shadowing:**

### **The ability to ask questions**

What made you choose this career? What education do you need to become employed in this field? If you could go back, would you change anything? What is your favorite and least favorite thing about this job? Do you have advice that may help to make my experience go more smoothly?

## **Hands-on experience**

In some job shadowing experiences, not only are you able to observe how tasks are completed but you may also get some hands-on experience yourself. This is certainly beneficial to inspire or deter you from pursuing this career path further. Narrowing down a specific path: In some careers, you may receive a degree and then choose to specialize further.

Job shadowing is effective for any job in which the seeing is more graphic than the telling, or when the seeing is an important component of the learning. When job shadowing, the individual sees the actual performance of the job in action. But, in job shadowing, the participant also sees and experiences the nuances of how the service is provided or the job performed.

The participant experiences the employee's approach, the interpersonal interaction required, the steps and actions necessary, and the components needed to effectively perform the job that the employee might never think to mention.

## **Scholarship possibilities**

There are numerous programs such as KHOP (Kearney Health Opportunities Program), RHOP (Rural Health Opportunities Program), KLOP (Kearney Law Opportunities Program) that offer scholarships for students seeking health or law professions. They offer scholarships to help cover the cost of tuition at particular colleges and an automatic position in professional school.

Persons vying for these scholarships/positions must go through the application process and if selected as a finalist, and will need to go through an interview process as well. Job Shadowing in that particular field can help show scholarship providers that you are serious about a career in that field.

## **Networking**

Job shadowing is a great way to meet people in the profession that you are seeking. In the future, you may be able to use those people to answer questions for you, have them write letters of recommendation on your behalf, or may recall your experiences at their business and may want to offer you a position after you are done with your schooling.

Job shadowing provides opportunities for young people to experience and gain insight into real workplaces. It has shown to be 'potentially effective' in two areas that are: in supporting progression to further education and in developing a better awareness of particular careers, respectively

## **References:**

- Hughes, D, Mann, A, Barnes, S-A, Baldauf, B & McKeown, R. (2016). Careers Education: International Literature Review. London: Education Endowment Foundation.
- Ahier, J., Chaplain, R., Linfield, R., Moore, R. and Williams, J. (2000) School work experience: young people and the labor market, *Journal of Education and Work*, 13 (3), 273–288.

---

*Munodiwa Zvemhara is a consultant at Industrial Psychology Consultants (Pvt) Ltd a management and human resources consulting firm.*

*Phone +263 4 481946-48/481950/2900276/2900966*

*Cell number +263 783168453*

*Email: [munodiwa@ipcconsultants.com](mailto:munodiwa@ipcconsultants.com) or visit our website at [www.ipcconsultants.com](http://www.ipcconsultants.com)*

*<https://thehumancapitalhub.com/articles/Virtual-Job-Shadowing>*