

What makes a good internship programme?

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In our previous article (What kind of internship?) we stated that an intern is not a source of cheap labour.

The internship year is a wonderful opportunity for young people to learn about the world of work and to acquire job related skills which will help them in their future careers.

In order to ensure that the internship is meaningful, a lot of thought has to go into structuring the intervention.

The intervention must have a champion who needs to have significant seniority in the organisation so that he/she can report at EXCO level. Often the responsibility for structuring and overseeing the internship is the responsibility of the Human Resource (HR) Department.

Some organisations take on a large number of interns every year and in this situation, it is important that an influential member of HR is given responsibility for ensuring that the intervention is a success. This is important as the person responsible will have to liaise with Operational Managers and with the Skills Development Facilitator and Training Manager.

The officer responsible for the internship intervention will also require excellent people skills and will be able to develop a network of useful contacts which will help the programme and the young people concerned.

When structuring the internship programme, the following must be taken into account:

- There must be clear objectives as to what is to be achieved during the year.
- Each department identified to host an intern must have a plan of action for the internship period.
- A schedule of work activities for each intern must be formulated.
- This schedule will indicate task rotation, deliverables etc.
- A decision must be taken as to whether each intern will stay in one department for the whole period or whether the intern will be exposed to various departments so that he/she is able to gain a wide knowledge of the organisation.
- Induction and orientation must be take place during the first week of the initiative.
- Suitable accommodation must be made for work space and equipment.
- A training schedule must be compiled and integrated into the work plan.
- Time must be allocated for formal coaching and mentoring sessions.
- Where possible, sessions must be scheduled for the interns to listen to talks by the CEO and the Directors of the organisation. These sessions are invaluable as it enables interns to meet and listen to executives who will be able to share some of their career growth experiences.

- Regular feedback must be given to the intern.
- Coaches / Mentors must be trained to enable them to facilitate the process.
- The interns must receive advice and counselling when necessary.
- The initiative must end in a positive manner.
- Assistance must be given to interns who will be leaving the organisation at the end of the intern period. This may involve liaising with a placement agency, preparing the interns for interviews and the writing of references.

If you need any assistance in structuring your internship programme do not hesitate to contact me.