

Leadership Exchange

Overview

The Leadership Exchange is based on a tried and tested model developed by CoCreate Associate Jonathan Gosling and his team at the University of Exeter. The Exchange has been applied successfully to many cross-sector leadership programmes.

Working in pairs, you spend up to one full day observing each other in your normal work. It's essential to remember that this is a leadership exchange, not a job shadowing process. You observe the leadership your partner provides as they navigate every element of their day, from meetings and calls to ad-hoc conversations and moments of reflection.

Please complete your leadership exchange in full before _____.

This is of course (or should be!) a difficult assignment to do well, and therefore much of the learning will also come from your reflections on your experience of attempting to observe in a genuine, useful, and unbiased manner.

The objectives for the Exchange are as follows:

- System learning – to gain a rich insight into someone else's worlds – another part of the system and the organisation they represent
- Leadership development – an opportunity to:
 - Receive feedback from peers on your own leadership style
 - See another leader in action
 - Gain fresh insight / new thinking on specific challenges / current priorities

How it works

- The Exchange takes place in pairs
- There are two roles: 'host' and 'observer' - you take it in turns.
- The observer stays in role the whole time – you don't participate at all.
- There are three stages to the Leadership Exchange, summarised below and set out in detail on the following pages:
 - i. Preparation – set up and prepare for the exchange
 - ii. Observation - you each spend up to 1 full day observing your partner in their daily work and they spend up to 1 full day observing you
 - iii. Reflection – a face to face meeting to review learning from both parts of the exchange

Stage One: Preparing to host

It's not often you have the opportunity to have someone observe you for a full day so think about how you can make this as useful as possible for you both.

- Review your diary: what events, meetings, decisions, projects are planned? Some might be online Teams meetings.
- Think about what might be particularly rewarding for you both to experience?
- Who will you need to brief – colleagues, teams, clients, etc.?
- Let the observer know if there is anything you'd particularly like feedback on – this might be in relation to your leadership style, organisational pressures or culture.

Preparing to observe:

One full day is a significant commitment, so take care to negotiate times that make it most likely you can give you full attention to this process. We appreciate that some of the visit may need to take place virtually but – if at all possible – it would be great to do in person.

"Observation is easy, I do it all the time".

You might be tempted to think that observation is such a natural aspect of life that there is no need to think about its function or consider the ways in which it can be practiced. Is it really that easy though? Just how much do we miss? What do we choose to see and what do we ignore? How do we interpret the data we observe? What impact does this have on our decision-making and actions?

In reality, perception and attention are selective. It is therefore likely that you may find it challenging to simultaneously observe on three levels – what's going on for the individual? What am I learning about the organisation? What am I learning about the wider system?

It is helpful to explore and practice ways in which you become more conscious of external events, emotional states, and perceptions that we might ordinarily ignore.

Before the sessions take time to consider the following questions:

- What do you know about the person you're going to observe?
- What don't you know?
- What are your worst fears about the process?
- What are your hopes for what it will achieve?
- What might get in the way and what can you do to mitigate this?
- What assumptions, values, beliefs, knowledge do you bring to the process – about the individual, their organisation and their work?
- In what way are these assumptions, values, beliefs, and knowledge helpful / unhelpful?

Stage Two: The observation sessions

Observations are up to 1 full day per person. We appreciate that some parts of the observations may be conducted virtually.

For Observers: Observers, try and tune in to three levels:

i. Your host as an individual

- What are you noticing about them and their leadership?
- What do they do particularly well?
- How do they manage themselves / their interactions with others?
- What opportunities and threats do they see?
- How are issues of accountability and responsibility handled?
- What are their coping mechanisms?

ii. Their organisations

- What's going on in these organisations? What are the dilemmas they face?
- What do you notice in terms of the culture of the organisation?
- What signs and symbols tell you about the power relations in this place?

iii. The wider system?

- How does the work of the organisation relate to the wider health and care system?
- Where do the needs of the system complement / conflict with what you observe?

Here are some reminders about how to observe:

1. **Just observe:** Remember you're there to observe only – you will add value but it's not by jumping into the action.
2. **Be receptive and curious to new experiences:** Let go of everyday expectations of how things should be. Don't jump to conclusions. Observe and reflect.
3. **Pay attention to your own experience:** Your experience becomes the sensory tool for picking up information. If you trust your intuition, you will find that you pick up on things that you usually ignore.
4. **Observe yourself observing another:** This unusual skill is key. You may experience boredom, frustration, anger, impatience or excitement. Think about why this might be. Are others feeling the same? Are you reinforcing or challenging common interpretations and feelings?

For Hosts:

As the 'host' you are likely to be unusually aware of what your observer is seeing. To be able to self-reflect whilst actively engaged in facilitating a meeting gives you a leading edge on what's happening in the meeting and your part in it.

Stage Three: Reflection in pairs

A meeting with your partner to take place on a different day to the visits. It is important that you make time for individual reflection between the visit and sharing feedback and we would recommend allowing at least an hour for this session.

The reflection consists of three parts:

1. Take it in terms to give your feedback based on what you have observed
2. Each of you reflect on the feedback you've received and draw conclusions on what it means for you
3. Discuss what and how you will share back with your LBB colleagues

General advice on reporting back to your Exchange partner:

- Prepare for this meeting both in terms of what and how you are going to share back. Think about what you would want if you were recipient of the feedback – we assume here that you would expect the feedback to be sensitive to any vulnerabilities, but also to be courageous and honest in stating what was observed. and any theories about what might have been going on.
- Remember that you are not passing assessment or judgment.
- There should be minimum description of events: both of you know the situation referred to. Concentrate on analysis and interpretation.
- Giving feedback to your host on their leadership style, and how they perform in their role, would probably be useful for them. In doing so it may be helpful to distinguish between:
 - What you saw them do or heard them say
 - What you felt, or thought
 - Your hypothesis about why they behaved or acted as they did
- It's generally useful to make sure that whatever you say is clearly owned by you. Start statements with 'I' rather than 'you'.
- Include explanatory theories, but also general impressions which can help your partner understand your perspective and the things that struck you.
- The feedback should be insightful of course, but it should also be part of a conversation rather than the final word.