Exit interviews

‘Exit interviews’ aim to limit the loss of knowledge by capturing what staff know and have learned from their time spent in the organisation, before they leave to work elsewhere.

The aim is to capture tacit knowledge (e.g. their experiences and ‘know how’) to turn it into explicit knowledge (e.g. a document / record / report) that can be stored and shared.

Tool	Time	Resources	Physicality	Interactivity
Exit interviews	★★☆☆☆	★☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆	★★★☆☆

When?

‘Exit interviews’ should be conducted whenever a member of staff leaves the organisation. It should coincide with the handover process.

Who?

The leaving member of staff is the interviewee and either their line manager or a nominated member of staff should conduct the interview.

Before the interview takes place it is useful to identify what in particular a project team needs to know from the individual leaving.

How?

The overall time required for the session is around a day – this includes all preparation.

Firstly, the interviewer should collate themes and topics that will be covered with the leaving member of staff. You may have a corporate interview structure, however if not, our checklist below may help to start your thinking here.

It might also be useful to ask the leaving member of staff what they think they can share that would be beneficial to the team and wider organisation to ensure you do not miss any key areas of knowledge.

An ‘exit interview’ cannot gather everything a leaver knows, so it is important that the knowledge gathered adds value and will be actionable. The outcomes of the interview should be assessed to pick out what is useful and actionable, to store and share this in the organisation.

Checklist:

- Make sure the explicit knowledge that the leaving member of staff has (e.g. how to guides, lessons learned logs etc.) is accessible and **not held in a personal email file or hard drives**

- Identify the leaver's **key knowledge sources** (e.g. people they network with, teams they link to in the organisation, professional institutions, partnerships etc.) to ensure the team can connect after the employee has left the organisation
- Review the day-to-day tasks the leaver carries out, even if they seem mundane, the team will benefit from knowing anything that can speed up processes, or reduce barriers to completing these tasks
- Ask the leaver what significant problems or barriers they have previously experienced in carrying out their work and how they overcame them (if applicable)

Top tips:

- Ensure the person carrying out the interview is a trusted member of staff. People are more likely to share freely if it is with someone they know well and that they know will not judge them
- Avoid asking personal questions and be mindful of how questions regarding barriers to success are worded – the objective is to learn, not to place blame anywhere. People are likely to close up or become defensive if they believe they are being blamed for something
- Exit interviews may not be appropriate with members of staff who have been dismissed or made redundant

Further reading:

- NHS eLearning – Knowledge harvesting
- Health and Social Care Information Centre - Knowledge harvesting postcard