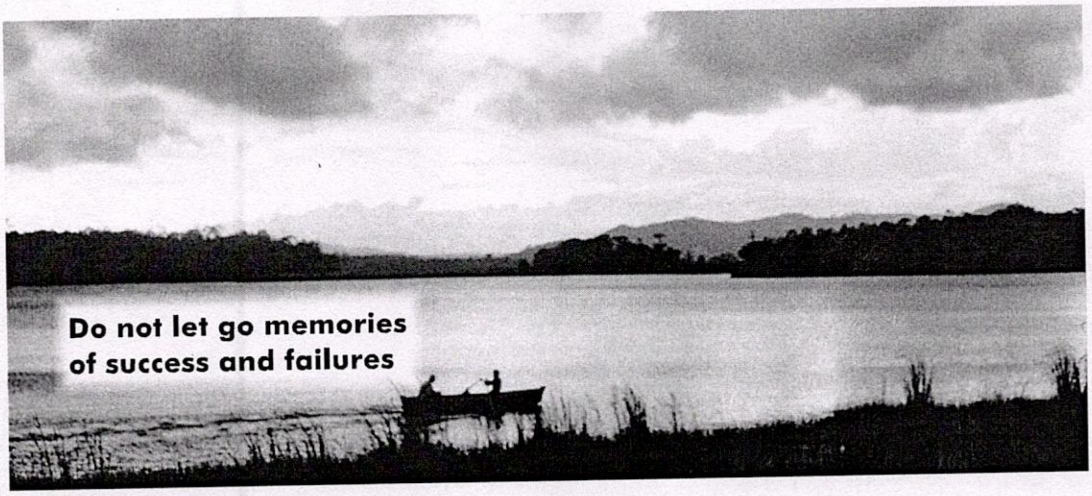
Exit Interviews



What are exit interviews?

Traditionally, exit interviews are conducted with employees leaving an organisation. The purpose of the interview is to provide feedback on why employees are leaving, what they liked or didn't like about their employment and what areas of the organisation they feel need improvement. Exit interviews are one of the most widely used methods of gathering employee feedback, along with employee satisfaction surveys.

More recently, the concept of exit interviewing has been revisited and expanded as a knowledge management tool, as a way of capturing knowledge from leavers. Rather than simply capturing human resources information, the interview also aims to capture knowledge about what it takes to do the job.

What are the benefits of exit interviews?

- vital knowledge is not lost to the organisation when people leave
- the learning curve of new people joining the organisation is shortened
- they can be done relatively quickly and inexpensively
- they can result in the leaver having a more positive view of the organisation.

Done correctly, exit interviews can be a win-win situation for both the organisation and the leaver. The organisation gets to retain a portion of the leaver's knowledge and make it available to others, while the leaver gets to articulate their unique contributions to the organisation and to 'leave their mark'.

How do I go about it?

Traditional exit interviews can be conducted in a variety of ways: face-to-face, over the telephone, using a written questionnaire, or via the Internet using an exit interview management system. In a knowledge-focused exit interview, a face-to-face interview is needed.

You will need to think carefully about the information you would like to gather before the interview and start your preparations early. While the traditional exit interview will tend to collect mainly human resources information, the primary focus of the knowledge-focused interview is on knowledge that would be helpful to the next person who will do the job or to others in the organisation doing similar jobs.

Start planning the handover and exit interview as soon as you know a person is leaving. Identify who in the organisation might benefit from that person's knowledge and what they will need to know. Then work out a plan to capture the leaver's knowledge during the time remaining before he leaves. This should include both explicit knowledge (knowledge that is already documented such as in files and e-mails, and knowledge that can be easily documented), and tacit knowledge (knowledge that is less easy to capture and that needs to be explained or demonstrated).

In the case of explicit knowledge, make sure the leaver moves relevant files – both hard copy and electronic – into shared folders or a document library. Ask them to prune and organise these files and to create role and task folders or notes for their successor.

For tacit knowledge, you will need to interview the leaver face-to-face. Prepare for the interview by reviewing the key tasks the person does based on a job description or annual performance plan. You can then use that information as the basis for discussing how they go about those tasks, what knowledge and skills they need, any problems or pitfalls to be aware of etc. Find out about their network of contacts and sources of knowledge. If possible, create an overlap period between the leaver and their successor so that a 'live' handover can be done.

When conducting exit interviews, think carefully about who will be the interviewer. Someone from the Human Resources Department conducts traditional exit interviews. However this need not be the case in the knowledge-focused interview. Often a peer or a relevant subject expert will be most appropriate. Over and above the obvious interpersonal and interviewing skills needed, you will need to consider issues of trust and honesty. For example, if an employee has had a difficult relationship with a manager or colleague, that person might not be best placed to conduct the interview. Whoever you select, make sure they are appropriately skilled and trained.

I try to use exit interview techniques often at the end of a "career period", so every 4 to 6 years. My key question is: What is my special knowledge worth being shared with colleagues. Pro-actively, I am organizing short sessions to share my experience. In the Rural Development round table, we invite field people and assistants to share experience with an interested audience, especially new staff, using a combination of presentation, common talk and story telling.
In one case, in a COOF context, I wrote "learning sheets" about a particular theme. That was well appreciated by my successors and colleagues.

SDC culture does not include exit interviews as a standard feature. Being pro-active in this respect avoids from being frustrated about disinterested colleagues. Exit interviews are a kind of emergency tool, if experience has not been capitalized throughout the working period.

A risk of exit interviews is to nail down not only experience but also too narrow visions for the future and thus limiting newcomers in their own approaches.

Willi Graf, Senior Advisor, Natural Resources and Environment Division

Exit interviews: I read them on the train, remember the main topic and forget all the details. A phone call of five minutes normally brings exactly the information I am looking for, far more than an exhaustive written interview made at the end of a posting. In my opinion, the latter would be producing too much information for unknown purposes and users.

Peter Meier, Senior Advisor, NGO Section

Are there any other points I should be aware of?

Traditional exit interviews are usually only appropriate for employees who voluntarily resign or retire rather than those who are fired or made redundant. In the case of the knowledge-focused interview, much will depend on the extent to which the organisation has a culture that encourages knowledge sharing.

Be clear about who will use the knowledge gathered and how it will be used, before you begin to gather it; the purpose of the interview is not to gather knowledge per se, but to gather useful knowledge that will actually be used.

The less you capture knowledge on a regular basis, the more you need to capture it at exit. However you may decide that you could gain more value from capturing knowledge at more regular intervals. For example, The Post Office uses exit interviews as one part of a series of 'cradle-to-grave' interviews to collect knowledge, using a method called 3E. The three Es are Entry, Expert and Exit. Entry interviews allow you to gather knowledge when employees first join the organisation when they have 'new eyes' and a fresh perspective, and also to ask them what they would like to know to help them 'get up to speed'. Expert interviews are conducted as they develop skills and become experts in a particular role or field. For more information about this wider approach, see knowledge harvesting.

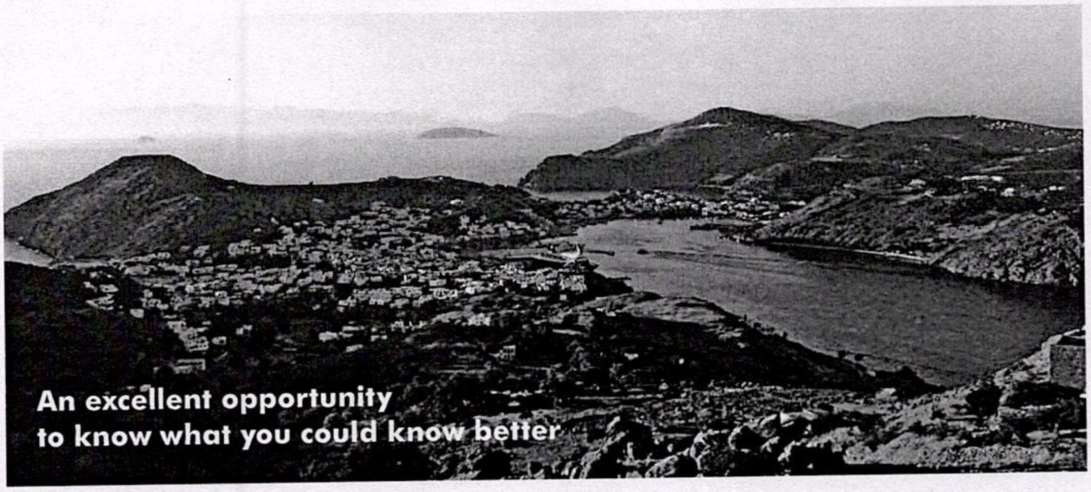
Source

NLH http://www.library.nhs.uk/knowledgemanagement/ViewResource.aspx?resID=93605&tabID=290&catID=10404

Reference / Link

Disappearing knowledge: are exit interviews the wit's end?
by David Skyrme – I3 Update, 2001, November, No 55

Experience Capitalization



Accumulating experience capital to prepare change processes

A conceptual definition of experience capitalization

Experience capitalization refers to the transformation of (individual and institutional) knowledge into capital by those directly involved in order to change a collective, institutional practice. It aims at changing one's own practices or structures.

Experience capitalization is one method of reviewing experiences in order to produce knowledge. It is a **learning process** which brings about **changes** by reverting to existing but latent experiences. Capitalizing on experiences paves the way for change – or is a partial step in a process of change already in progress. It supplies a basis for the planned and purposeful sequence of changes. Although experience capitalizations are performed by experience holders, they can be used by anyone desiring to change a practice.

Experience capitalizations can be directed at both the **strategic orientations** of organizations and activities and their conceptual basis, as well as at improving **operations** and processes. In both instances the initiative may stem from the geographical divisions or from a topical department.

All of us continually undergo a learning process in the scope of our activities so that capitalizing on experiences is an ongoing process. But only when individual knowledge is made relevant to the organization it is **capitalized institutionally.** Only if experience capitalizations are configured and planned as collective events, when a procedure is agreed upon by all participants and is directed towards achieving a predefined goal, do they exhibit a useful and communicable form or become processes with controllable results which can be implemented methodically in order to improve a practice.

Conceptual differentiations

Experience capitalization is not the same as **experience documentation**. In addition to archiving and accountability functions, experience documentation is directed at „learning in the future", and making information available to third parties. The objective is to create a retrievable memory.

Experience capitalization is a form of organizational learning. It overlaps with a variety of other procedures, with the documentation and exchange of experiences, with evaluations, case studies, cross-section analyses and other methods used to evaluate, present and apply experience. One important difference is the fact that in the process of experience capitalization, available experience is collected from the "stakeholders", from the persons and organizations directly involved, and then assimilated and used to plan and implement changes.

Regarding contents, the experience capitalization process does not require the involvement of third parties. The processes and results of experience capitalization belong to the participants themselves – although its results can be made available to other organizational units or third parties.

Experience capitalization cannot be delegated. External players will only be called in when those directly involved – the experience holders – ask them to participate. In such case, a specific role is delegated to them, such as that of structuring processes.

Purpose of experience capitalization

Experience capitalization aims at changing a practice – within projects or programs (country programs, sectorial or thematic programs, etc.), or within concepts, strategies and policies. The accumulated and structured experience capital is then to be invested and implemented in order to achieve improved performance.

Typical questions in experience capitalization are e.g.:

- "What do we know that can help us improve our future performance?"
- "What experiences can we use to realize our project or program more purposefully and how can we accomplish this, or how can we do more justice to context when shaping our concept or strategy?"
- "Our project or master plan is improved with respect to these aspects (cite aspects)."
- "We need insights on the following aspects (cite aspects) to improve our project or strategy."

Experience capitalization must been seen as a part of a bigger organizational learning process.

Experience capitalization is a learning process which paves the way for change. Capitalizing experience means consolidating already acquired experience into common viewpoints within organizational learning processes and translating them into a basis for a new orientation of activities, for the adaptation of concepts.