

The Exit Interview – The Underutilized Tool in the Human Resources Toolbox

By Marcel Faggioni

Throughout our many years of private practice, we are always astounded by the underutilization of the exit interview process. In many organizations, the departing employee is typically not offered the opportunity to share their impressions as to the organization's weaknesses and strengths.

In human resources circles, the exit interview is a process which offers the employer an opportunity to identify and explore, with the help of a departing employee, the things that are done well and areas that can be improved within the organization. A departing employee can offer some valuable insight into areas needing improvement – insight that may ultimately assist the employer in enhancing its future recruitment and retention strategy. Also, in situations where the number of departing employees is increasing, the exit interview may help reveal the root cause of the exit phenomenon.

One of the most useful aspects of the exit interview is the fact that the departing employee has no reason to hold back and therefore is likely to provide honest and frank insight into the organization. In many cases, these sometimes brutally honest opinions can offer up some truly crucial information and advice about organizational aspects that need to be considered when devising a recruitment and retention strategy moving forward. In some cases, the exiting employee may provide an insight as to the “push” factors that lead to increasing rates of employee turnover or can help in pointing to areas of organizational dysfunction leading to increasing turnover levels. In our experience, the exit interview can help an organization in isolating those factors that may impact organizational aspects such as employee morale, job dissatisfaction, and inter-collegial conflict – factors that play an important role in an organization's human resources stability.

In understanding the reasons why the exit interview is so underutilized, one must ask the question why? Some would speculate with the following reasons:

- The exiting employee may be bitter and therefore may harbour some level of resentment;
- The employer simply does not have the time and/or resources to conduct such a process;
- The employer does not want to hear the truth about its deficiencies and the areas requiring improvement;
- Departing employees are not interesting in participating in the process – after all they are leaving for a reason.

Although the above-noted reasons may all seem plausible, the bottom line is that the exit interview could be quite beneficial to employers in identifying some areas that need improvement. And for the exiting employee, the exit interview process can be seen as a form of catharsis, an opportunity to get everything off their chest. Finally, in terms of cost/benefit, it could be argued that the exit interview can offer some important clues at relatively low cost on whether the organization is:

- offering the right compensation package;
- providing a healthy and respectful work environment;
- defining its positions correctly and aligning its organizational structure accordingly;
- offering challenging and rewarding work;
- assessing performance consistently;
- communicating adequately with its workforce.

Paying attention to what is causing departing employees to leave is important in gauging whether the organization is meeting its employees needs while trying to foster a working environment where productivity and job satisfaction go hand in hand.

As final note, employers are advised not discount the exit interview as a trivial and meaningless tool – it can offer you the means of getting information that you may not otherwise obtain from your remaining workforce. It is simply another source of important organizational intelligence to ameliorate the organization's human resources situation.