Exit Interview: A Bridge between Management Perception and Employees' Aspirations

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Abstract- This paper indicates that exit interviews provide an excellent opportunity and comment relating to talent retention strategies by minimizing the gap between management perception and employee aspiration. Meritorious people often leave organizations because they are denied the opportunity to grow and advance. Wherever it is happening, the organizations need to know and respond accordingly. Preferably, they have to be conducted face-to-face, in order to promote better communication and understanding between the two sides. The HR department should devise various methods that could facilitate "workplace alliances" helpful in molding the people who feel isolated from the mainstream. The exit interview is something more than a "damage control" exercise, with a definite objective of building up a work climate by assimilating the diverse attitudes and aspirations. Undoubtedly, the interviews are an excellent "catalyst" for identifying specific mistakes and improving opportunities in the vital area of management development and succession. Done correctly, they can be a win-win situation for both the "organization" and the "leaver". It is widely felt that the findings of the "exit interviews" can motivate the management to concentrate on the job of "nurturing" the organization, rather than "crisis management" in the wake of high "staff turnover".

Key Words- Catalyst, Crisis management, Damage control, Staff turn-over, Work place alliance.

I. INTRODUCTION

An exit interview is an interview conducted by an employer of a departing employee. They are generally conducted by a relatively neutral party, such as a human resources staff member, so that the employee will be more inclined to be candid, as opposed to worrying about burning bridges. Exit interviews are conducted by paper and pencil forms, telephone interviews, and in-person meetings or online through exit interview management systems.

II. OBJECTIVE OF EXIT INTERVIEWS

The exit interview is an interview of a departing employee. This is typically held for employees who voluntarily quit rather than those who are handed over the pink slip. HR departments conduct exit interviews to gather perceptions on organizational aspects like working conditions, pay packages, interpersonal relations, policies and related issues. The idea is to obtain information from the departing employees on the various issues and cross check for authenticity. As the conventional belief goes, combined with interpersonal issues and supervision are the major culprits for employee migration. Nevertheless, exit from any organization may have "organization specific" reasons. Exit interviews become one of the best sources for getting a broader understanding into these "organization specific" issues. An exit interview amongst other things offers an opportunity to:

- Ascertain the actual reasons for an employee's resignation
- Gather reliable data on problem areas, in order to help the management take corrective actions
- Retain a competent employee by understanding the origin of discontent and agreeing on feasible solutions
- Encourage good relations with the separated employee.

Given the nature of this interview and the kind of information that tends to be exchanged in the process, it is imperative that these interviews are conducted with utmost care and precision. While all organizations run on explicitly proclaimed vision, strategies and rules, it is a fact that most day-to-day activities and strategy implementation is done on a tacit plane of mutual cooperation, adherence and group norms. Conformity to the culture and an existing style is warranted from all employees and any deviation is considered a violation. Exit interviews can provide vital clues into this tacit functioning, which would have got embedded into the culture and ethos of the organization. A clear understanding of these issues is important for strategic orientation and sometimes can throw up revealing and embarrassing issues which when addressed can bring about dramatic and revolutionary progress in organizations. Thus these interviews need to be effectively designed and executed.

III. NATURE OF EXIT INTERVIEWS

- Exit interviews accelerate participating managers' understanding and experience of managing people and organizations. Hearing and handling feedback is a powerful development process.
- Sometimes an exit interview provides the chance to retain a valuable employee who would otherwise have left (organizations often accept resignations far too readily without discussion or testing the firmness of feeling - the exit interview provides a final safety net).
- Exit interviews provide direct indications as to how to improve staff retention.
- They provide an opportunity to 'make peace' with
Exit interviews are seen by existing employees as a sign of positive culture. They are regarded as caring and compassionate - a sign that the organization is big enough to expose itself to criticism.

The results and analysis of exit interviews provide relevant and useful data directly into training needs analysis and training planning processes.

Exit interviews provide valuable information as to how to improve recruitment and induction of new employees.

Every organization has at any point in time several good people on the verge of leaving because they are not given the opportunity to grow and develop, at the same time, ironically, that most of the management and executives are overworked and stretched, some to the point of leaving too. Doesn't it therefore make good sense to raise the importance of marrying these two situations to provide advantage both ways - i.e., facilitate greater delegation of responsibility to those who want it? Exit interviews are an excellent catalyst for identifying specific mistakes and improvement opportunities in this vital area of management development and succession.

Exit interviews help to support an organization's proper HR practices. They are seen as positive and necessary for quality and effective people-management by most professional institutes and accrediting bodies concerned with quality management of people, organizations and service.

IV. TYPES OF EXIT INTERVIEW

There are a variety of ways available for conducting these interviews. Each of them has its own pros and cons. It is up to the discretion of the top management and the HR department of the organization to select the method. There are mainly four types of Exit Interview.

1. Telephone Exit Interviews: Telephone exit interviews are conducted over the telephone by an HR representative or an outside third party consultant. Using this, the interviewer can probe for more information on each question and enter data into a tracking system while conducting the interview. In addition, this can be easier to schedule than an in-person interview. The disadvantages of this method are that, it is time consuming if done in-house by an HR representative, expensive if done with an outside consultant and employees are often reluctant to verbally share sensitive or negative information.

2. In-Person Exit Interviews: For "in-person exit interviews" an HR representative meets individually with each leaving employee. It gives a personal touch to each employee and provides an opportunity to probe for more information on each exit interview question. The downside of conducting an in-person exit interview is that employees may be afraid to share sensitive information. For larger companies, it may be too time consuming to exit interview every employee. Also, it’s difficult to track information received verbally during an exit interview.

3. Paper and Pencil Exit Interviews: These interviews are usually conducted by using a "form" that is given to the employee on their last day or mailed to the employee's home. The advantages of conducting a paper pencil exit interview are that it takes less time to provide an exit interview form compared to conducting an in person or phone exit interview and that, employees can share information on paper which they may be reluctant to say in person. The negative aspects of using this method are that the return rates for "Exit Interview forms" average just 30-35%. It is difficult and time consuming to compile and track the data from paper and pencil exit interviews.

4. Online Exit Interview Management Systems: Online exit interviews are easy for the HR staff to administer, employees are comfortable sharing information through computer and so there are more honest responses, and information is automatically compiled and tracked. Added advantages are that reports are available at the click of a button and participation rates are double than for paper and pencil exit interviews.

V. RULES FOR EVALUATING THE EXIT INTERVIEW CONTENT

As with all questionnaires, it is important to strike the right balance between information needs and survey length when putting together an exit survey instrument. There are six key guidelines that should be kept in mind to help ensure that the end result is a useful and effective survey:

1. Do not focus solely on the employee’s reasons for leaving – although this is extremely important information, it is also critical to include broader measures about the employee’s attitudes and experiences so as to help identify the issues and concerns that may not surface when asking about reasons for leaving.

2. Ensure that there is more than one way for employees to express their reasons for leaving – including several open-ended questions for them to include their own comments – so as to get a full perspective on the decision to leave.

3. In order to get beyond a focus on the decision itself, incorporate key attitudinal measures such as the employee’s satisfaction with the job itself, an assessment of the organization’s work culture and effectiveness of its various lines of communication, how well the employee’s job responsibilities were defined, perceived opportunities for advancement and the employee’s perspective on the amount of training, feedback and recognition received.

4. Recognize that, for maximum effect, any exit survey system needs to be implemented consistently and in such a way as to encourage employees to share their opinions as honestly and candidly as possible.

5. Incorporate the ability to examine results not only on the basis of individual results but for the organization as a whole, as well as on the basis of the relevant diagnostics, such as region, department or manager.

6. Remember that there is an important distinction to be made between idiosyncratic reasons for leaving, over
which the organization has little control and systemic reasons for leaving, over which the organization can exercise substantial control.

VI. PRINCIPLES OF EXIT INTERVIEW PROCESS

A. Environment

- Getting the right environment is essential to an open and honest discussion. Aim to arrange the interview in a neutral office away from the employees day to day workplace. Ensure that the room is not too imposing or confrontational. This can be done by arranging seating in a circle rather than having the employee facing a panel of managers.

B. Guarantee Confidentiality

- Whilst the employee may be leaving the organization, it is important to guarantee confidentiality of their exit interview discussion to encourage them to be as open as possible. Staff will soon learn not to reveal their real reasons for leaving if they hear about why other colleagues have left from gossiping exit interviewers.

C. Ensure Appropriate Staff Conduct the Interview.

- Ideally you should always use a neutral third party, perhaps a member of the human resources staff or a senior manager to conduct the exit interview. This needs to be someone who is unconnected or has had little day to day contact with the employee rather than a direct line manager, to encourage them to be as open as possible.

D. Don't Get Defensive

- During the interview their will undoubtedly be things said by the employee about the organization or working practices that you don't like. Don't become defensive as this will simply lead to a confrontational situation. Remember you want the employee to be as honest as possible so listen carefully. You can always seek to verify information after the employee has left and the details they provide may prove beneficial to improving staff retention in the future.

E. Keep a Written Record

- Having a written record of the exit interview is essential to enable you to act on concerns raised to reduce the chances of other staff leaving.

F. Arrange Exit Interviews in the Final Week of Employment.

- Timing is important for an exit interview to be effective. Don't rush to conduct the exit interview as soon as the employee resigns as they may not be as open about their real reasons for leaving if they know they still have four weeks of work remaining. They may fear that information could leak to colleagues about their reasons for leaving or that they will be treated harshly for the remainder of their time with the organization.

VII. EXIT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Listed below are samples of the types of exit interview questions that employers commonly ask departing employees.

- What is your primary reason for leaving?
- Did anything trigger your decision to leave?
understanding and experience of managing people and organizations. Hearing and handling feedback is a powerful development process.

- The results and analysis of exit interviews provide relevant and useful data directly into training needs analysis and training planning processes.
- Exit interviews provide valuable information as to how to improve recruitment and induction of new employees.
- Exit interviews provide direct indications as to how to improve staff retention.
- Sometimes an exit interview provides the chance to retain a valuable employee who would otherwise have left (organizations often accept resignations far too readily without discussion or testing the firmness of feeling - the exit interview provides a final safety net).
- Exit interviews, and a properly organized, positive exit process also greatly improve the chances of successfully obtaining and transferring useful knowledge, contacts, insights, tips and experience, from the departing employee to all those needing to know it, especially successors and replacements. Most leavers are happy to help if you have the courage and decency to ask and provide a suitable method for the knowledge transfer, be it a briefing meeting, a one-to-one meeting between the replacement and the leaver, or during the exit interview itself.
- Exit interviews help to support an organization's proper HR practices. They are seen as positive and necessary for quality and effective people-management by most professional institutes and accrediting bodies concerned with quality management of people, organizations and service.

IX. USEFULNESS OF EXIT INTERVIEW DATA

The data collected from individual interviews must be aggregated for the organization as a whole to identify the prime causes for employee turnover. Depending on the size of the organization and the prevailing level of employee turnover, such aggregation may be made semiannually, if not quarterly. The same may be made accessible to all those concerned with working climate in the organization and its improvement. There is a strong debate on the issue of making an outgoing employee's feedback available to the immediate supervisor or manager. Some argue that anonymity must be maintained by not giving specific feedback to the immediate supervisors of the outgoing employees, while others argue that sharing of feedback can be productive. In any case no useful purpose would be served by keeping the proceedings of exit interviews away from the immediate supervisors. Hence, it is necessary that at least the interviewer share his understanding of the outgoing employee's feedback in generic terms with the concerned supervisor or manager so that they would read just their management style for the common good of the organization. It should also be highlighted to the supervisors that whether the feedback is positive or negative they should assess it objectively and non-defensively to identify the value of the feedback for improving the overall work atmosphere in the organization. In the ultimate analysis, organizations must realize that there is no single solution to employee turnover, but if exit interviews are properly conducted, the feedback so received can be best used to improve organizational culture that paves the way for employee retention and loyalty.

X. PRIME CAUSES FOR EMPLOYEE TURN-OVER

Generally, there are five major causes of employee turnover. Those are;

1. Corporate leadership - the strength of the vision and mission statement of the organization and the clarity that the leadership offers to the employees; management culture; the level of respect and support that an employee enjoys at the workplace.
2. Career opportunities - as perceived by the employee for his advancement; presence or absence of a well-laid career graph in the organization; and the clarity about such development plans provided by the organization.
3. Training support - opportunities to acquire new sets of skills as reflected in the organizational commitment to training and development of employees.
4. Compensation - pay structure, performance-linked payments, recognition of performance by way of open acknowledgments etc.
5. Job satisfaction - an employee's perception about the usage of his skills in the given job; his "fit" with the job; and the balance that the job affords between work and life.

XI. PROPER MANAGEMENT RETENTION POLICY

There are some general policies to consider that have been shown to improve satisfaction and in return, reduce the level of turnover that should be part of any formal employee-retention program:

- Properly incorporate new employees into the organization and manage their expectations and initial experiences with the organization – in fact, a large financial services firm found that it could effectively reduce turnover among new hires by deliberately improving the process of socializing new employees into the corporate culture, particularly through the use of mentoring.
- Establish and maintain both the practice and the impression of fair treatment of all employees, so as to help foster a positive, consistent and reassuring work environment.
- Ensure that senior management and immediate supervisors demonstrate their own sense of commitment to the organization.
- Communicate realistic and attainable expectations of performance to all employees, so as to avoid the potential for “shock” and the development of dissatisfaction.
- Offer clear-cut opportunities for job enhancement, advancement and career development.

XII. CONCLUSION

Though exit interviews are being used extensively across all the industries, utilization of the information so
collected is questionable. Lack of proper documentation of the information and lack of follow up activity defeats the very purpose of this interview. The information collected during the exit interviews must be properly documented so that a trend analysis can be made and results analyzed. It is a common refrain that the senior officers designated to conduct these interviews do not find time for the same. Action on the issues raised in these interviews also has to be addressed with some urgency. Companies should note that inordinate delays not only undermine the employees' perceptions about the entire process but send negative signals about the company's commitment. Exit interviews are excellent tools, the onus however lies on the organizations to utilize them not only as indispensable tools for retention, but also for the overall organizational development.

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