DFA

HUMANIZING WORK CULTURES

EXIT INTERVIEW IMPLEMENTATION GUIDE

The Power of Listening on the Way Out

Transforming culture is not a one-time project but an ongoing commitment that requires clarity, consistency, and accountability. The process begins with a deep understanding of where you are today and moves toward embedding culture into every system and practice across the organization.

When an employee moves on to a new opportunity, it's both an ending and a beginning. Their departure marks the close of one chapter, and the chance to open another filled with learning, reflection, and connection.

Exit interviews allow organizations to capture that unique moment in time, gathering insights that can strengthen culture, inform future strategies, and build lasting relationships with alumni.

When approached with care, exit interviews become more than a procedural step. They are a meaningful exchange and opportunity to thank employees for their contributions, celebrate what worked well, and listen for ideas that can shape what comes next. The best exit interviews are built on trust and curiosity. They encourage open, thoughtful dialogue and allow departing employees to share their stories in a way that benefits both them and the organization.

This Action Step outlines **The Listen–Log–Learn–Link Model**, a framework for creating a meaningful, data-informed exit interview process that supports both people and progress.

It begins with **Listen**, designing thoughtful conversations that explore the full spectrum of an employee's experience, from culture and workload to mentoring, feedback, and advancement. Open-ended questions encourage departing employees to share their stories in their own words, offering rich insights that go beyond surface-level data.

Next is **Log**, building a consistent and confidential process for capturing what is shared. One-on-one interviews led by members of the Talent team create trust and psychological safety, while standardized questions, recorded responses, and centralized data storage ensure that feedback can be analyzed and acted on effectively.

The third pillar, **Learn**, turns insight into impact. By regularly reviewing trends, sharing findings with leadership and other departments, and weaving those insights into strategic plans, organizations can strengthen engagement, retention, and culture across every level. This ongoing learning demonstrates a true commitment to growth and continuous improvement.

Finally, **Link** transforms the exit interview into a bridge for lasting connection. Departing employees often remain part of an organization's story as mentors, collaborators, or advocates. By intentionally maintaining relationships through alumni networks, speaking opportunities, or future collaborations, organizations extend their culture of belonging well beyond employment.

Together, the **Listen–Log–Learn–Link Model** offers a simple, human-centered system that honors each employee's journey while helping organizations evolve with insight, care, and connection.

Phase 1: Listen

The first phase begins with listening—creating space for open, honest, and thoughtful dialogue that captures the full employee experience.

We recommend launching a comprehensive exit interview process. The most effective interviews explore a broad range of topics, including organizational culture, workload and work quality, mentoring and sponsorship relationships, feedback and evaluation processes, advancement opportunities, and compensation. By taking a holistic approach, organizations can identify both patterns and nuances that inform future strategy.

To ensure a balanced and inclusive perspective, gather input on questions and focus areas from multiple stakeholders, such as practice groups, offices, talent, recruiting, and marketing teams. This helps ensure that the interview reflects the diversity of experiences across the organization.

Exit interviews are also an opportunity for employees to share their stories in their own words. Open-ended questions create a space for reflection, helping individuals feel heard and respected while providing richer insight than closed-form responses can capture.

Some examples include:

- What made you decide to leave the organization? Anything the organization could have done differently that might have changed your decision?
- Where will you be going? What are some aspects of this new opportunity that attracted you to it?
- What are some things that you liked about the organization?
- What are some things that could improve at the organization?

- How was your experience with quality and quantity of work?
- How was your experience with your group in terms of relationships, culture, and support?
- Any thoughts on informal and formal feedback, the evaluation process, and the advancement process? Any changes that would make these processes better?
- Did you feel you had a path forward at the organization? Any additional resources that could have been helpful?
- Did you feel you had the support of mentors or sponsors at the firm? Anything specific any mentor or sponsor did that particularly helped?
- Anything else you would like to share?
- Anything that the organization can help with in the future?

These types of questions invite storytelling and reflection, allowing the organization to gather authentic insights that might otherwise go unspoken.

Phase 2: Log

The second phase focuses on Log—building a consistent, systematized process that ensures every exit interview captures meaningful data in a trusted, repeatable way. Standardization helps organizations maintain fairness, protect confidentiality, and make the most of the insights shared by departing employees.

A standardized process means the format, questions, interviewer style, and data storage methods are consistent across all interviews. This ensures reliability in the information collected and helps employees feel confident that their feedback will be treated thoughtfully and equitably.

We recommend conducting one-on-one interviews to create an open and safe environment where departing employees can speak candidly about their experiences. Reserve at least one hour for each conversation, allowing enough time for discussion and reflection. When needed, follow-up sessions can be scheduled to address additional insights or clarify key points.

All interviews should be facilitated by a member of the Talent team. This approach provides consistency in tone and structure, as well as valuable firsthand knowledge for those most closely involved in people processes. Because the Talent team has visibility into key areas like recruiting, retention, and development, they are uniquely positioned to identify trends and take proactive steps based on what they hear.

To maintain integrity in the process, we encourage interviewers to record responses by writing or typing notes during the discussion. It is important to remind employees that their feedback will remain confidential and that notes are used solely to capture themes and insights in aggregate form. This transparency helps build trust while ensuring that critical information is not lost.

Finally, store all data centrally in a secure database accessible only to designated members of the Talent team. Centralized storage makes it easier to track patterns over time, standardize reporting, and uphold confidentiality. It also ensures that valuable feedback is not siloed or forgotten but instead contributes to ongoing organizational learning.

A well-logged process transforms exit interviews from isolated conversations into a rich, reliable source of knowledge. With structure and consistency in place, organizations can more effectively identify opportunities, celebrate strengths, and continue building a culture grounded in trust and continuous improvement.

Phase 3: Learn

The third phase focuses on Learn—analyzing and applying the data gathered through exit interviews to drive meaningful progress. Collecting feedback is only the beginning. The true value comes from using that information to guide strategy, strengthen culture, and reinforce the organization's commitment to listening and improvement.

To ensure insights lead to impact, we recommend that the Talent team report exit interview data and trends to leadership at least once a year. Sharing aggregated results helps leaders stay directly informed about successes and challenges across the organization. Regular updates also promote transparency and accountability, showing that the organization values and acts on employee feedback.

In addition to leadership reporting, share relevant trends with other departments on a consistent basis. For example, if exit interviews reveal strengths in certain development programs or highlight areas for improvement in the feedback process, these findings should be shared with teams such as Recruiting, Learning and Development, or Diversity and Inclusion. Collaboration across departments ensures that insights are translated into coordinated action rather than isolated adjustments.

Finally, integrate exit interview data into broader strategic planning and goal-setting efforts. When revisiting the organizational strategic plan, include findings from exit interviews to inform new programs, policies, or processes that address recurring themes. Incorporating these insights into business cases also strengthens buy-in and demonstrates the organization's responsiveness to employee experiences.

By analyzing, reporting, and applying what is learned through exit interviews, organizations turn feedback into forward motion.

Phase 4: Link

The final phase is Link, which focuses on transforming exit interviews into bridges for lasting connection. When approached with intention, this process provides closure for departing employees and extends the organization's network, community, and culture far beyond employment.

Every departing employee represents an opportunity to build a long-term relationship. By staying connected, organizations create a supportive and engaged alumni network that can promote business development, strengthen recruitment pipelines, and reinforce a shared sense of belonging.

If your organization has an alumni group, use the exit interview as a natural point of introduction. Share information about the group's purpose and activities, and connect the departing employee to those who manage it. For organizations without a formal alumni program, it is still valuable to ask whether the departing employee would like to remain connected. Keeping accurate records of alumni contact information ensures future opportunities for collaboration, such as guest speaking, mentoring, or participation in panels and networking events.

It is also beneficial to track employees taking a career break. Many individuals who step away temporarily remain open to future contract work, consulting, or reemployment when the time is right. Maintaining a positive relationship during this period keeps the door open for continued collaboration.

Similarly, retiring employees can continue to make meaningful contributions. Many retirees are eager to stay connected through mentorship, speaking engagements, or advisory roles. Inviting them to lead training sessions, participate in panel discussions, or share their professional networks benefits both the organization and its people.

By linking thoughtfully with departing employees, organizations signal that relationships extend beyond tenure. This ongoing connection fosters goodwill, strengthens community, and demonstrates a genuine commitment to people at every stage of their professional journey.

Take Action

Exit interviews provide an invaluable opportunity to learn from departing employees, strengthen culture, and build lasting alumni connections. Using the Listen–Log–Learn–Link Model, organizations can turn these conversations into a strategic advantage that supports both people and progress.

- **Listen:** Design comprehensive, open-ended interviews that explore all aspects of the employee experience and invite authentic storytelling.
- **Log:** Establish a consistent, confidential process for conducting and recording interviews, ensuring every conversation is captured with care and accuracy.
- **Learn:** Review and report key themes regularly, share insights across departments, and integrate findings into strategic planning and talent initiatives.
- **Link:** Maintain connections with alumni, retirees, and employees on career breaks to foster continued engagement and community beyond tenure.

By following this model, organizations can create an exit interview process that transforms endings into opportunities for reflection, learning, and long-term connection.

Want Support Putting This Into Practice?

As a DFA member, your organization has access to a range of exclusive resources to help you design and implement an effective exit interview process.

- **Strategy Session:** Each member organization receives a one-hour strategy session annually. Use this time to explore ways to structure, launch, or enhance your exit interview approach.

- **Policy Review:** Submit an annual policy review on any topic, including draft frameworks, policies, or plans related to exit interviews or other key talent processes.

- **Advisory Hours (Champion & Leader Members):** Access up to 2 (Leader) or 4 (Champion) hours of one-on-one advising to deepen your impact. Whether you're piloting a new program, refining strategy, or identifying next steps, we'll help you bring your vision to life.

- **Customized Trainings and Workshops:** Members receive discounted pricing on tailored trainings and workshops designed to meet their organization's specific needs.

Connect with the DFA team to explore how we can help you strengthen your talent processes and continue building a thriving, human-centered culture.