



Exit Interviews and Handover Documents Miss Expert Knowledge

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Your last expert left with an exit interview and a handover note. Do you know what they took with them?

The interview told you why they were leaving. The note listed their tasks. Neither was built to capture the judgement that made them good at the job.

THE SHORT ANSWER

Exit interviews learn why people leave, and handover documents list what they do. Neither is designed to capture what they know. Use both to surface hidden value, not as a box-tick: add a knowledge conversation, and ask about decisions, not just tasks.

What is an exit interview, and what is a handover document?

An exit interview is a structured conversation, usually held near the end of someone's employment, to learn why they are leaving and how they experienced the job. A handover document is a written note for the person taking over, usually listing tasks, status, contacts and where files are kept.

Both are useful. Both are also about the job rather than the knowledge. What an expert knows about the work is often called tacit knowledge, and neither tool is designed to reach it.

What does the evidence say about exit interviews?

Many leavers are never asked. In a survey of 1,500 respondents who had resigned from a job within the previous five years, reported by theHRDIRECTOR from research by Cpl's Talent Evolution Group, 55% of UK employees were not invited to a formal exit interview when they resigned from their last job.

Some who are asked doubt it matters. In the same survey, over a quarter of ex-employees felt their feedback would not make a difference to their workplace.

Guidance warns against collecting without acting. Guidance for social work employers, developed by Research in Practice with the Department for Education, cautions against organisations that “collect data without analysis”, or that analyse data without acting on it.

This is one survey from 2023, so treat it as an indication, not a UK-wide measure. It does suggest that the exit interview is a patchy source of insight even before the question of expert knowledge arises.

Why do exit interviews miss what experts know?

They ask about the experience of work.

The usual topics are job satisfaction, workload, supervisors, culture, development and work-life balance. These tell you why someone is going. They do not ask what the person knows that nobody else does.

People find it hard to say. Experts often cannot explain how they know what they know. Asked “what do you do?”, they describe the process, not the judgement behind it.

The timing is wrong for capture. An interview in the last days of employment leaves little time to talk through real cases, which is how this kind of knowledge tends to be passed on.

Findings go nowhere. If nobody owns the analysis and the follow-up, the interview becomes a box-tick and the feedback is lost.

Why do handover documents fall short?

They list tasks, not reasons. A note can say what to do on the first of the month. It rarely says why, or what to do when something looks odd.

They are written by the person who knows too much. Experts skip what feels obvious to them, and that is often exactly what a successor needs.

Nobody tests them. The reader cannot tell what is missing until the situation arrives, and by then the author has gone.

How do you turn exit interviews and handovers into something useful?

- 1. Add a knowledge conversation.** One NHS England toolkit case study lists “a knowledge exit interview” as part of a retirement workshop on valuing your knowledge legacy, but does not describe the format. Design your own around what the person knows, not why they are leaving.



2. Ask about decisions and surprises.

“What would you warn your successor about?” and *“What did you do the last time this went wrong, and why?”* bring out the how and why.

3. **Start earlier.** Hold the exit interview close to departure, as the Research in Practice guidance suggests, but begin capturing knowledge well before notice is given, especially for people whose roles would be hard to cover.
4. **Make the handover a conversation.** Let the successor ask questions and work through live cases, and record the reasoning as well as the steps.
5. **Act on what you learn.** Give the findings an owner, analyse them for patterns, and tell people what changed as a result.

Decisions that affect people's jobs carry legal obligations. This post does not cover them, so take specialist employment advice on the process.

Where does Bloor's thinking fit?

Under *OAISM (Original Augmented Intelligence)*, the human stays at the centre, which suggests capturing knowledge as a continuing habit, not a one-off exercise at the exit. Bloor's *Hire to Heir* describes roles as *“assembled from skills, knowledge, judgment, and augmentation”*. That is a useful test for any handover note: does it record more than the tasks?

Bloor Research helps organisations understand where they are now, where they need to be and what is happening inside the business, including through its X-RAY diagnostic. If experienced people are leaving and you are unsure what is leaving with them, [contact Bloor Research](#).

Frequently asked questions

1. What is an exit interview?

An exit interview is a structured conversation, usually held by HR or a manager near the end of someone's employment, to learn why they are leaving and how they experienced the job. It is a source of feedback on the organisation. It is not designed to capture what the person knows.

2. What questions should you ask in an exit interview?

Guidance for social work employers, developed by Research in Practice with the Department for Education, suggests a consistent set of open-ended questions covering job satisfaction, workload and support, supervisors and leadership, inclusion,

culture and team dynamics, career development, and work-life balance. To surface expert knowledge, add questions about decisions: what the person would warn a successor about, and what they did the last time something went wrong.

3. What is a handover document?

A handover document is a written note passed to the person taking over a role. It usually lists current tasks, their status, key contacts and where files are kept.

4. What should a handover document include?

Beyond tasks, status and contacts, a useful handover records the reasoning behind decisions, the exceptions and warning signs, and the history behind how the work is done. Pair it with a conversation in which the successor asks questions about real cases.

5. Why do exit interviews and handover documents miss expert knowledge?

They are built to record feedback and tasks, not judgement. Much of what experts know is hard to put into words and is often called tacit knowledge. In a survey of 1,500 respondents who had resigned from a job within the previous five years, reported by theHRDIRECTOR, 55% of UK employees were not invited to a formal exit interview, and over a quarter felt their feedback would not make a difference.

6. When should you hold an exit interview?

The Research in Practice guidance suggests holding it as close to the person's departure as possible. Knowledge capture works better if it starts well before that point, while the person still has time to talk through real cases.

Sources

- [theHRDIRECTOR, UK employers simply don't know why talent is leaving](#), 31 October 2023, reporting research by Cpl's Talent Evolution Group. Survey of 1,500 respondents who had resigned from a job within the previous five years; fieldwork dates not stated in the article.
- [Research in Practice with the Department for Education, Make exit interviews count](#), employer standards guidance for social work employers, published 30 October 2024, last updated 21 November 2025.
- [NHS England, Knowledge and Library Services, Knowledge legacy](#), Knowledge Mobilisation Toolkit case study from Buckinghamshire Healthcare NHS Trust (November 2019). Page last reviewed 8 June 2023; next review was due 8 June 2024.