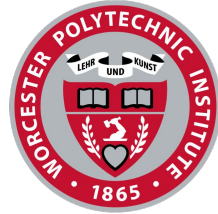


UNITED STATES
PATENT AND TRADEMARK OFFICE



WPI

Investigating the Viability of Stay Interviews

December 12th, 2022

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What is the challenge?



Image Credit: Jen Mills

- USPTO wants to increase retention of patent examiners
 - Substantial training investment
- Improve communications and feedback mechanism

Key data points from USPTO

- 14,665 examiners hired since 2001
 - ~50% active at beginning of FY23.
- Distribution of total attritions
 - In year 1: 43%
 - 1 to 3 years: 28%
 - After 3 years: 29%
- Avg. length of service after 1st year: 4.7 years

What is a stay interview?

Think opposite of an exit interview

Conducted while the employee is still at the job, rather than as they are leaving

Learn what an employee likes or dislikes about their job

Retention strategy

Goal Statement

The goal of this project was to determine the viability of a stay interview and design a process that will assist the USPTO with addressing retention challenges.



Image Credit: Jen Mills

Objectives



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1. Research best practices from other organizations
2. Engage in ideation sessions with USPTO
3. Develop questions

1. Create vignettes of outside organizations that conduct stay interviews.

- Researched organizations that use stay interviews
- Wrote 3-5 sentence descriptions of each organization focusing on:
 - Themes
 - Procedure
 - Impacts



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Objective 1 Result: Vignettes

Sample of Vignettes

Appendix A. Vignettes

The vignettes below are the result of the first objective in our methodology. Each vignette is a summary of a company that was found during research as having a stay interview implemented. These summaries were then further categorized using the method presented in Appendices B, C, and D.

Paylocity

On a small scale, this company prioritizes high-performing and at-risk employees first when it comes to performing stay interviews. By focusing on this group, the managers receive a potential wealth of information about their employees' opinions of the company. Additionally, they value letting the employee pick an interview format that they are most comfortable with, such as video conferencing, phone calls, or in-person meetings. To engage the employee and foster a two-way conversation, managers encourage them to ask questions or raise any concerns that they have. After the stay interview, it is very important to follow up with the employee because it reiterates the employer's commitment to improving the company culture (Paylocity, 2022).

2. Engage in ideation sessions to identify stay interview themes and administrative procedures.

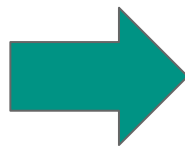
Ideation session: A “brainstorming” method

Duration: 1 hour

- Frequency: Once or twice a week
- With whom: Team of 9 experts from USPTO
- Purpose: To brainstorm 8 major themes, and expand those themes in future sessions

Objective 2 Result: Lotus Blossom

<u>Mental health/Well-being</u>	<u>Promotion potential</u>	<u>Employee Development</u>
<u>Engagement</u>	Themes	<u>Organizational Culture</u>
<u>Relationships</u>	<u>External factors (outside USPTO control)</u>	<u>Diversity and Equity</u>



Do you feel valued?	Do you feel recognized?	Is work/projects being done/ worked on?
Are you participating in companies outings or events?	Engagement	Is work more than just a paycheck?
Collaboration and trust	Are you following the company's goals, objectives and motto?	Is the USPTO just a stepping stone for an employee?

Objective 2 Result: Interview → Conversation

- Discussed how the terms may sound to employees
 - Interview
 - Conversation

Ultimately, with the guidance of our sponsor in our ideation sessions, we changed the terminology for our entire project.

3. Develop stay interview questions.

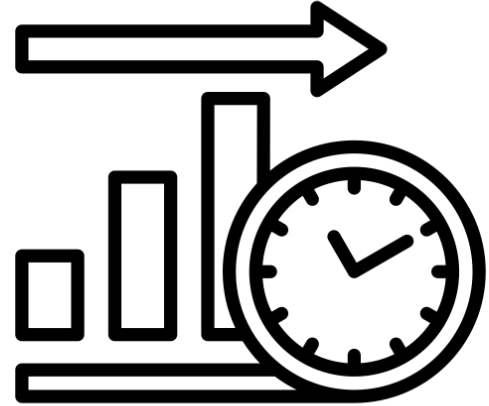
- Created open-ended questions based off of:
 - Background knowledge
 - Vignette research
 - Lotus Blossom themes
- Compiled into document categorized by themes



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Objective 3 Result Pt. 1: Tier System

- Tier 1: Casual Conversation
- Tier 2: Job Related Conversations
- Tier 3: Career-Oriented and Organizational Excellence



[Image Link](#)

Objective 3 Result Pt. 2: Question Library

Portion of Table of Contents

Tier 1: Build Connection
Tier 2: Basic Job Conversation
Tier 3: Career Oriented and Organizational Excellence .
1. All Employee
1.1 Mental Health
1.2 Promotion Potential
1.3 Employee Development

Sample Topic - First Year Employee

2.2 Promotion Potential

- Do you see yourself in a higher leadership position?
 - o If not, what are you looking for in your position?
 - o Is there anything that we (USPTO) can help you with?
- What is your planned or desired career path at the USPTO?
- Have we given you a clear roadmap for how to be promoted?
 - o If we haven't, is this something you would be interested in?
 - o What can be done to make it well-defined?

Objective 3 Result Pt. 3: Quick Reference Guides

Portion of Mid-Career Stay Conversation QRG

- This sheet is to be used after building a connection with employees through Tier One and Tier Two Questions or other means.
- Please pay special attention to employee responses regarding employee development, engagement, and promotional potential

Resources:

- If the employee gives a concerning answer, please provide them with (insert necessary info)

Mental Health

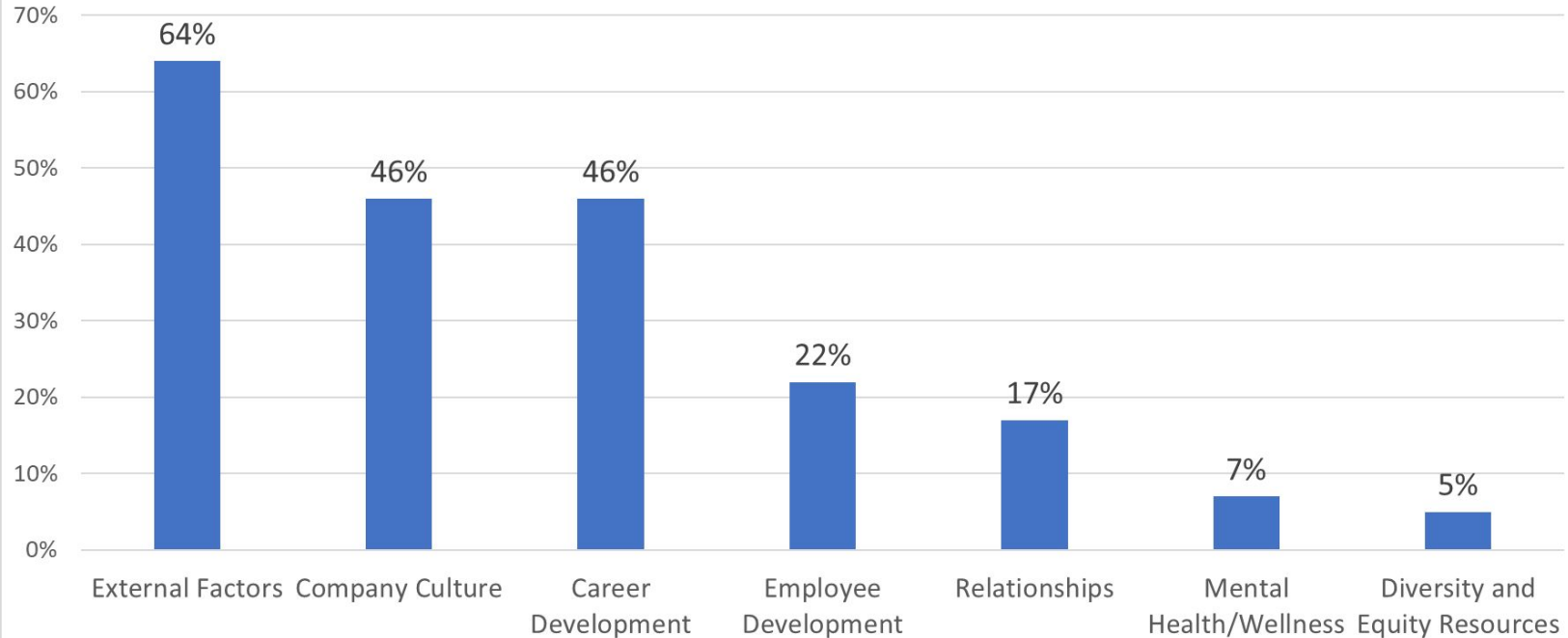
- Is there anything you used to find overwhelming that now comes rather easy to you?
- At this stage of your career, what are the pain points that you just continue to endure, but if removed, would make you think you could work here until retirement?

Promotion Potential

- If a more senior position, including management positions, is of interest to you, what can we do in the short term to assist you?
- Do you feel that you aren't making any progress towards promotion if that's your current goal?

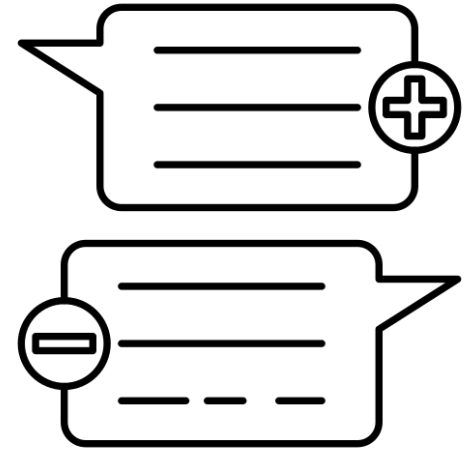
Additional Result: Peer Survey

Imagine you are in your first year out of college: What are the TWO most important things that would attract you to work at the USPTO?



Recommendation: Implement a stay conversation

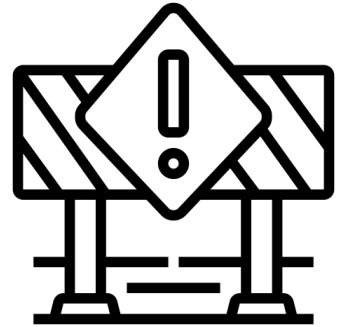
- Transparency
- Two-way conversation
- Direct supervisors should conduct the stay conversations
- Tier 1 & 2 questions have a flexible time frame
- Tier 3 questions are asked in a scheduled environment



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Implementation Challenges

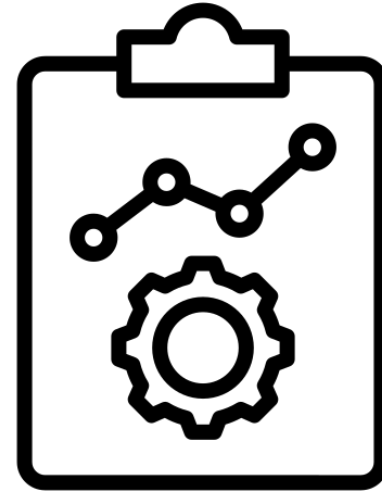
- Concerns over employee willingness to be open and candid
- What to do after a stay conversation?
- How to track responses
- How to measure success



[Image Link](#)

Future Recommendations

- Resources and training for stay conversations
- Measure effectiveness
 - Survey participants
 - Participation rate
 - Retention comparison
- Explore and monitor the continuity and consistency



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Simulated Stay Conversation

Yu-Chi, the facilitator and a manager at the USPTO. Andrew is one of his employees.

Andrew, a 1st year employee at the USPTO. Yu-Chi is his manager, who he selected to facilitate his stay conversation.

Acknowledgements

USPTO

Gregory Tryder, Technology Center Director, Chemical and Material Engineer

Daniel Sullivan, Technology Center Director, Biotechnology, Chemical and Pharmaceuticals

Martin Rater, Chief Statistician

William Kelleher, Supervisory Patent Examiner

Kara Geisel, Supervisory Patent Examiner

David Fitzpatrick, Management Analyst

Robyn Sirkis, Supervisory Statistician

Amber Beam, Senior Talent Management Strategist

WPI

Dean Kent Rissmiller, Project Site Director

Professor Linda C. Looft, Advisor

Professor Fred J. Looft, Advisor

Professor Carol L. Stimmel

Thank you!

Questions?

Contact us at gr-DC22-USPTO@wpi.edu



References:

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Consider the 'stay interview,' to keep valued
employees and avoid the need for an exit interview.
Winnipeg Free Press

[https://www.commerce.gov/bureaus-and-offices/uspto#:~:text=The%20mission%20of%20the%20U.S.,\(IP\)%20policy%2C%20and%20delivering](https://www.commerce.gov/bureaus-and-offices/uspto#:~:text=The%20mission%20of%20the%20U.S.,(IP)%20policy%2C%20and%20delivering)