

# ORGLEARN

## WORK PACKAGE 3

### Interview Manual for Various Target Groups in Partner Companies

#### GENERAL

Interviews will be held with staff at all levels of the organisation to elicit personal accounts of organisational learning.

Interviews will last 90 minutes each. They will focus on current organisational learning activities within the respective companies. These will be selected by prior consultation with the respective company management, and by discussion among the research partners. In this way, the data gathering will concentrate on (a) critical issues for the chemical industry as a whole, and (b) innovative approaches to organisational learning.

The interviews will be semi-structured, and efforts will be made to elicit interviewees' perceptions of the organisational learning activities in the company. The aim is to generate qualitative data consisting of "thick descriptions". A "thick description" is defined as one which gives the context of an act, states the intentions and meanings that organise the action, traces the evolution and development of the act and presents the action as a text that can then be interpreted. (In contrast, a thin description simply reports facts, independent of the intention or the circumstances that surround an action.) To obtain thick descriptions, prompts will be used such as:

**Please explain why you mean**

**Please give an example**

**Can you recall a problem you were involved with in this context? What was done to solve the problem?**

The interviews will be tape recorded and transcribed for subsequent interpretation.

#### CATEGORIES OF INTERVIEWEE

*management and administration*

site manager  
unit manager  
safety officer

environmental officer  
training officer  
quality assurance officer

*scientific/technical staff*

chemical engineer (professional)  
laboratory chemical assistant (associate professional)  
refinery analyst (associate professional)

*production teams*

team leader  
process operator  
field operator  
*support staff*

office staff  
electrical/mechanical craftsman

## **INTERVIEW PROTOCOL**

**1. This project is asking employees about their views of changes that are taking place in chemical industry. The aim is to improve training, especially learning on the job.**

**2. Can you please tell me a little about your current role in the company? (Probe for job title, description of work, department, length of time in company. length of time in department, record gender).**

**3. Like many other chemical companies, [name of company] faces major challenges. For example,**

[refer to challenges that are important for both the European chemical industry as a whole, and the company in question.]

**4. Your company has responded to these challenges by changing the working procedures, for example by [refer to a company initiative to change organisational work routines]**

**Based on your knowledge of the company, how has this changed the way people think and act in this company?"**

[probe in the following areas, where appropriate, to obtain a "thick description". Encourage the interviewee to give his/her own personal account - do not read out the whole

prompt as printed here]

*The organisation's overall market position, strategic objectives and business plan are under constant review and revision*

*Problem-solving groups (either task groups, or self-managing teams) identify and solve problems in standard operating procedures and make recommendations for altering them*

*Finding ways of improving performance, and communicating these when necessary to colleagues and management, is an accepted part of everyone's job.*

*Organisational developments that create opportunities for learning are integrated into the work process.*

*There is a willingness to change procedures to meet quality management and continuous improvement requirements.*

**5. Another way your company has responded to the challenges is by improving the amount of learning, both on the job and by providing courses. For example, [refer to company initiatives to improve formal and informal learning processes]**

**Based on your knowledge of the company, how have these initiatives changed the way people think and act in this company?"**

[probe in the following areas, where appropriate, to obtain a "thick description". Encourage the interviewee to give his/her own personal account - do not read out the whole prompt as printed here]

*There are formal inquiries into organisational learning processes in order to identify learning deficiencies and to draw conclusions from them.*

*Example:*

*- managerially controlled meetings are held regularly*

*People are prepared to challenge assumptions, to question and exchange ideas to gain maximum learning*

*The active exchange of ideas and information is frequently and actively sought across boundaries*

*Learning processes are stimulated, supported, evaluated and results disseminated*

*Managers take on the roles of coaching, mentoring and facilitating learning*

*Example:*

*- managers generate and enhance learning opportunities as well as encourage experimentation and reflection on what was learned so that new knowledge can be used*

*A plurality of modern forms of learning exist.*

*Example :*

*- learning islands, computer aided learning, on-the-job training, learning workshops, etc.*

*Roles and careers are flexibly structured to allow for experimentation, growth and adaptation*

**6. Another way your company has responded to the challenges is by attempting to change the culture of the organisation [refer to a company initiative for changing the culture of the organisation]**

**Based on your knowledge of the company, how have this changed the way people think and act in this company?"**

[probe in the following areas, where appropriate, to obtain a "thick description". Encourage the interviewee to give his/her own personal account - do not read out the whole prompt as printed here]

*Staff perceive a difference between the organisation's current standards and what they ought to be*

*Example:*

- attitudes towards environmental pollution*
- attitudes towards customer care*
- attitudes towards level of co-operativeness*

*Staff feel personally committed to closing the gap.*

*Staff are empowered to change, and are actively participating in the change process.*

*There is a readiness to change the structure of work and learning*

*Example:*

- flattening hierarchies to maximise communication and learning across levels.*

*There is a readiness to introduce and improve artefacts in order to increase learning opportunities*

*Example:*

- participative design*
- computer aided training*

- *knowledge management systems*

*There is a readiness to change rules and common assumptions*

*Example:*

- *company norms*
- *rules of social interaction*

*There are feedback loops in place to evaluate any intervention aimed at achieving change in response to external challenges.*

*There are systems in place to allow people to make different contributions and draw different rewards*

**7. Another way your company has responded to the challenges is by creating and sharing knowledge at all levels [refer to a company initiative for generating knowledge at all levels and sharing it throughout the organisation]**

**Based on your knowledge of the company, how have this changed the way people think and act in this company?"**

[probe in the following areas, where appropriate, to obtain a "thick description". Encourage the interviewee to give his/her own personal account - do not read out the whole prompt as printed here]

*Knowledge creation projects are officially sponsored throughout the organisation.*

*Example:*

- *employees at all levels do R&D*
- *there is an official incident reporting scheme*

*Informal knowledge creation is encouraged*

*Example:*

- *narrating/story-telling/gossip is permitted in the workplace*
- *training courses make use of employees' personal accounts*

*There is a formal system for distributing knowledge throughout the organisation, and everyone has up-to-date information about the performance of the company against its objectives*

*Example:*

- *an intranet and organisation home page used by all*
- *frequent information sharing events such as discussion forums and phone-ins*

*Systems and structures are in place to code, and store knowledge and to make it available to those who need it and who can use it*

**8. Another way your company has responded to the challenges is by learning from the outside world. For example, [refer to a company initiative to learn from the environment.]**

**Based on your knowledge of the company, how has this initiative changed the way people think and act in this company?"**

[probe in the following areas, where appropriate, to obtain a "thick description". Encourage the interviewee to give his/her own personal account - do not read out the whole prompt as printed here]

5.1 *Inter-company learning is an accepted part of the company's overall policy*

*Example:*

- benchmarking best practice*
- staff exchange between companies*
- willingness to participate in joint ventures*
- technology transfer*

*Boundary workers act as environmental scanners*

*Example:*

- attending conferences*
- examining published research*
- meeting regularly with representative groups of customers, suppliers, subcontractors, community members to find out what is important to them.*

*External audits by private and public bodies to evaluate the company's performance are seen as valuable learning opportunities*

*There are systems and procedures for acquiring and sharing information from outside the company.*

*Example:*

- access to internet and local area networks*
- artificial intelligence for production management.*

*Internal training is outsourced to external training providers when doing so offers an outsider's perspective on the company's performance.*

*Informal and formal networking is encouraged.*

*Example:*

- *personal contacts*
- *links with politicians, political groups, lobbies, environmental groups, employers associations, trade unions, academic institutions and business services, etc.*