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FRA Workforce Development Interview/Focus Group on Performance Management Systems and Organizational Culture and Diversity

Semi-Structured Interview Questions

A semi-structured interview is a qualitative research method that utilizes some structured questions that will prompt discussion with opportunity for unstructured exploration of themes as they emerge during the discussion.^{1,2} Thus, the questions listed below are to serve as a guide to the research team of what we plan to ask interview and focus group respondents. These questions will not be shown to respondents ahead of time or during the interviews or focus groups. Depending on the participants job role and background, we may not ask all of the questions. We may ask additional follow-up questions depending on themes that emerge during the interview and focus groups and may provide clarifications of questions if needed. When utilizing this qualitative method, it is not possible to identify what themes will organically emerge during the semi-structured interviews or focus group, so we are unable to list all follow-up questions. Definitions may be provided if the respondent is not familiar with certain terms. Interviewees will ensure not to use people's names within their interview notes in effort to protect their identity.

Participation in this interview is voluntary. The interviews will include questions that could be perceived as sensitive as there are questions related to attitudes around diversity, equity, inclusion, and workplace culture. However, those questions need to be asked to meet the goals of this project and all of them focus on matters related to the workplace. We will not be asking questions about religious beliefs or other matters that the public would consider private or sensitive in nature. The data from the survey will not be aggregated in a way that is identifiable.

1. What is your current job title?
2. How many years have you worked in the rail industry?
3. What are other positions have you held in the rail industry, if any?

¹ Wilson, Chauncey. (2014). Semi-Structured Interviews. 10.1016/B978-0-12-410393-1.00002-8.

² https://know.fife.scot/__data/assets/pdf_file/0028/177607/KnowHow-Semistructured-interviews.pdf
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4. How did you get introduced to the rail industry? I.e., was it through a family member, friend, acquaintance, schooling, etc.
5. What are the major barriers that racial/ethnic minorities³ face in the railroad industry?
Barriers could be defined as concrete things like work schedule or flexibility or more abstract things such as workplace culture.
6. What are the major barriers that women face in the railroad industry?
7. Please describe how performance management systems⁴ (PMS) function(ed) in your place of work.
8. What impact do performance management systems have in your place of work (e.g., do they result in changes in title, compensation, job responsibilities, negative outcomes, etc.)?
9. What type of informal performance feedback mechanisms exist?
 - a. Could you comment on the frequency that you receive informal feedback (especially compared to formal feedback through a PMS).
 - i. Please comment on the impacts informal feedback may have in the workplace (if any) and compare to formal feedback mechanisms like a PMS.

³ Ethnic minorities in this set of questions refer to non-White/non-Caucasian individuals.

⁴ Performance Management Systems (PMS) can be formal or informal. Some rely on software while others are maintained manually, either digitally or in paper form. They usually include some kind of one-on-one conversation between employees and their leadership to discuss individual performance, professional priorities, and concerns or requests for support.

10. What does today's railroad industry have to offer racial and ethnic minorities and women professionally?

a. Which of these offerings are *unique* to rail opportunities?

11. If applicable/appropriate: please describe your work experience in the rail industry as a woman or racial/ethnic minority?

a. What have the major challenges been?

b. Any benefits?

c. Have there been changes in your experience over time?

d. What has your relationship been with performance feedback?

12. How do you think the rail industry can better recruit and retain new employees, specifically those who are not well represented in the rail industry demographic like women and those of ethnic/racial minorities?