Handout 9: Interviewing Requirements

Acknowledging and addressing difficulties

Sometimes interview sessions don't seem to be getting anywhere, or worse, seem headed for disaster. Interviewees may use tactics of avoidance, resistance, aggression, or passivity to thwart what you thought was an agreed way of relating in the interview, or a planned course of action.

First off, don't assume the interviewee is wrong! Are you sure they agreed in the first place, or did you steamroll them into it? Perhaps they just cooperated initially to keep the peace or please you, without having the willingness or ability to follow through. Perhaps they've changed their mind and haven't told you directly.

Situations of disagreement first require that you listen, state your needs, and explore the situation with the other person. Work hard to maintain a respectful and solution-focussed communication climate. Try to promote a sense of partnership, in which you work with the conflicting party on the problem, rather than against them. By cultivating a win-win vision you are more likely to achieve cooperation than polarisation.

Whether or not you succeed in establishing an atmosphere of cooperation, there are strategies to head-off building tension and eventual crisis (which could result in active hostility or withdrawal and isolation). These include the need to:

- Acknowledge the viewpoint, perceived needs, and mood (perhaps frustration) of the other person
- Respond if they appear anxious or threatened as appropriate - for instance give them the opportunity to tell their side of the story, or that they will be treated fairly
- Take time-out if necessary, and back off from using challenging and confrontation if it is engendering hostility
- Maintain focus on the original problem, rather than introducing a load of other issues that make resolution feel impossible
- Point out the rewards of the process as you go along. 'Well we're talking frankly about things, it's good to have it out in the open', or 'This seems to be an important issue for you, it's good we're talking about it'.
- If you think the interviewee is being competitive and trying to win some kind of ego driven battle, remind them - and yourself - that it is 'their hour', and if they would like to suggest a different approach you would be happy to try it. (This is not to sound like a smart-alec, but at the same
time don't bang heads with each other. It is the interviewee who the interview is ultimately for, and trying to force them to do it your way is a waste of time).

Use the problem solving approach - it puts the finding of solutions at the centre of the interaction, not the personalities involved.

**Recording interviews**

Typically interviews are recorded using objective language, often using forms, checklists or other instruments to ensure comprehensive coverage or comparison of records. If notes are to be written up following the interview this should be done as soon as possible. Usually the information collected is of a confidential nature and should be stored securely. It should not be accessible to inappropriate third parties. For example a record of interview for a job applicant should not be available to others within the organisation who may also be applying for the position. When no longer required they should be destroyed, archived, or returned to candidates according to the relevant policy or legislation. Records stored electronically should be backed-up, and protected from unauthorised access by means of password and firewall protection.

**Observing protocols**

A protocol is an arrangement that one service has with another which formalises procedures such as transferring files and referring interviewees. For instance if information gathered in an interview is to be passed on to another worker or agency, a consent to release of information form should be signed by the interviewee.

Just as it is advisable to state the purpose and format of the interview before it begins, protocols too need to be explained and followed. For example a service may assess an interviewee by means of an interview, then pass the assessment on to another agency who will determine whether the interviewee is suitable for their program. The interviewee needs to be informed of this process. ‘What happens next’ should be explained and documented. If the interviewee is awaiting a decision as a result of the interview they need to know the timeframe in which the decision is to be made. Keeping interviewees informed of procedures and timeframes not only respects their right to stay informed, but also saves the agency getting swamped by enquiries from interviewees wanting to know what is happening.