



Employee Selection: Part 2 – Interviews and Simulations What we know, best practices, and future trends.

Patrick Hauenstein, Ph.D.
Executive Vice-President, Navient Corporation

Overview – This is the second part of a white paper focused on employee selection. In this part, we turn our attention to the latter phases of employee selection and examine the employment interview and the use of job relevant simulations.

What do we know about interviewing?

What is the truth concerning the effectiveness of the interview?

Validity research has been conducted on the employment interview for 80 plus years and the results demonstrate that there is a marked difference in the effectiveness of the interviewer depending on whether the interview is structured or non-structured. Structured interviews are typically characterized as those having pre-planned questions tied to the competency requirements of the job and that follow a pre-planned process for the evaluation of responses. Non-structured interviews are characterized as those conducted by interviewers with little or no structure or guidance.

When interviewers are left to their own devices, the employment interview is no better than flipping a coin. It has little or no predictive power. When interviewers follow a structured approach, the employment interview has been shown to have high validity. Three different statistical reviews (meta-analytic studies) of the literature on the validity of structured interviews yielded overall average validities of .62 (Arvey and J. Campion, 1982), .44 (McDaniel et al, 1994) and .57 (Huffcutt and Arthur, 1994). For those readers unfamiliar with validity coefficients, these results indicate that structured interviews are as powerful or more so than such well accepted selection techniques as ability tests and assessment centers.

What do interviewers need to know?

There are very few (if any) natural interviewers that can make accurate predictions of a candidate's potential without the benefit of additional guidance and training. While approaches to the preparation of interviewers may take different forms, the learning

objectives for professional interviewers have a consistent framework. The following areas of focus are critical for becoming a professional interviewer.

- How to Use Structured Interview Guides

Structured interview guides are the start for interviewing success. Structured interview guides provide a roadmap for ensuring that all critical requirements are covered and relevant aspects of a candidate's background are thoroughly explored. Professional interviewers need to know:

- How to use common competencies to define job requirements.
- How to write and use effective pre-planned behavioral questions that link to those competency requirements
- How to evaluate resumes and generate appropriate educational, work history, and key interest/preference questions
- How to structure interviews to make efficient use of time and provide ideal competency coverage

- How to Obtain Good Interview Data

After planning and structuring the interview, professional interviewers need to be able to help candidates provide good information that reflects their true potential. Professional interviewers need to know:

- How to listen for information that is critical in properly evaluating candidate responses
- How to ask effective follow-up questions to gather useful data
- How to ask difficult or sensitive questions
- How to take effective notes

- How to Manage the Interview Process

In addition to obtaining quality information, a professional interview needs to maintain control over the interview to ensure that both the interviewer's and the candidate's objectives are met. Professional interviewers need to know:

- How to effectively plan and organize the interview time with a candidate
- How to keep the interview on track to meet your objectives
- How to manage the pace of an interview to ensure full and proper coverage of each assigned competency

- How to Evaluate Candidate Responses Accurately

After obtaining good interview data, the interviewer's task is to make an objective evaluation of the quality of the responses and make an accurate prediction about the candidate's likelihood of being successful in the job. Different interviewers

reviewing the same data should come to the same conclusions. Professional interviewers need to know:

- How to recognize and avoid common rating errors
 - How to evaluate the three critical components of a candidate's response (circumstances, approach, and impact)
 - Learn how to accurately provide question and competency ratings
 - How to effectively combine information from multiple interviewers
- How to Adhere to Legal Requirements

In every locality, there are typically legal do's and don'ts that need to be understood and followed. Within the US, professional interviewers need to know:

- How to conduct legally defensible interviews
- How to ensure fairness
- How to interview Americans with disabilities

What are some recognized best practices for optimizing interviews?

- Start with a Competency Analysis – Linking interview questions to the competency requirements of the job ensures that the interview process is job-related and that information is being gathered concerning the full range of competencies that are needed for job success. Typically, competency requirements are established by having one or more job content experts go through a systematic review of behaviorally defined competencies and indicate the competencies associated with job success as well as their relative importance.
- Pre-plan Interview Questions – Planning the interview questions in advance ensures that the questions asked during the interview are designed to elicit the kind of information needed to make an objective determination of candidate potential. It also ensures that each interviewer has a roadmap for success and makes optimal use of their time with the candidate and that the responsibilities for gathering information across interviewers has been carefully thought out. It also ensures that the same questions are asked of each candidate which provides a common framework for a fair and objective review of each candidate's potential.
- Use Behaviorally Based Questions – Not all interview questions are good. Well-designed interview questions provide information about the candidate's behavior in job relevant situations. Perhaps the easiest to design (and many argue the best) behavioral questions are those designed to elicit examples of past behavior in critical job relevant situations. There is ample evidence to support the premise that past behavior predicts future behavior.
- Structure the Evaluation Process – It is essential that all interviewers follow a common evaluation standard and process. The standard should be related to the

requirements of the job and not to the relative quality of the candidates interviewed. The “best of the bunch” still may not be a qualified candidate. Interviewers should be able to defend their evaluations using factual information about candidate responses rather than “gut feel”.

What do we know about simulations? – Simulations are designed to mirror important challenges within a particular job. When properly designed, they provide candidates with a realistic view of the skill requirements of the position and provide a forum for the candidate to demonstrate job relevant skills in a high fidelity representation of critical job demands.

Types of simulations

- In-Basket Exercises – This exercise requires an individual to respond to a number of items that have accumulated in their in-basket. The items may be presented in paper or electronic form. These items present a number of specific issues that need responses as well as underlying problems that need to be addressed.

An in-basket simulation requires the candidate to demonstrate the following behaviors under time pressure:

- Demonstrate sound judgment in responding to specific problems
 - Organize and analyze the information to identify and appropriately respond to underlying problems
 - Correctly interpret data trends and patterns
 - Prioritize and organize the actions of self and others
- Analysis Exercises – Analysis exercises require candidates to prepare and present recommendations on a complex business problem. A significant amount of quantitative and qualitative information is presented to the candidate for analysis.

An Analysis Exercise requires the candidate to demonstrate the following behaviors under time pressure:

- Identify trends and relate information
 - Identify relevant information from irrelevant information
 - Identify problem causes and new opportunities
 - Make sound recommendations
 - Present recommendations effectively
- Role-Plays - Role-plays simulate critical interpersonal challenges of a job. The candidate is provided background information on their role and their objectives in handling an interaction with an assessor or trained confederate. A properly designed role-play provides a rich sample of interpersonal behaviors that can be evaluated along a number of competencies. The role-play simulations must be designed to

reflect job relevant scenarios and provide adequate opportunity to observe the target behaviors. Some common challenges are:

- Resolving customer problems/issues
 - Negotiating internal/external customer agreements
 - Reaching compromise solutions
 - Persuading others to take actions
 - Coaching others
- Group Discussions – These exercises require the candidate to participate in discussions with other candidates. The discussions can either be designed as a cooperative group discussion where the candidates must work as a team to solve a problem or make recommendations or they can be competitive where team members must champion a particular point of view and persuade or negotiate with others.

Advantages

- Validity – The assessment center method (simulation based assessments) has been studied extensively and has been shown to a valid predictor of managerial success. The technique also has a high degree of face validity or obvious relevance to the job so candidates are more accepting of the technique (compared to many forms of testing).
- Feedback Quality – Simulations provide an opportunity to record and comment on a number of competencies and associated specific behaviors. Extensive feedback to candidates may not be available in all selection scenarios. However, when used to make promotion decisions, candidates are typically provided with rich descriptive information concerning their strengths and weaknesses. Specific behaviors and specific types of situations can be targeted for improvement in developmental planning discussions.

Disadvantages

- Time Requirements – Assessment centers (simulations) can typically take from a half-day to a full day to complete. This is a considerable time investment for both candidates and assessors. Many candidates may be reluctant to participate and it may be difficult to solicit assessors as well.
- Assessor Requirements – Assessors must be highly trained to be effective. This training may take up to a week to complete. Assessors must then be coached and monitored during their first few exercises to ensure they are both comfortable and competent. They must also be used frequently so their skills do not deteriorate over time. It is a challenge for an organization to maintain a pool of qualified assessors.

- Costs – The time commitments to administer, score, and prepare reports and the salary level of most assessors results in considerable costs for conducting simulation based assessments. These costs are hard to justify in today's cost sensitive market.

What are some best practices?

- Use assessment center approaches at the executive level – The time and costs associated with assessment centers can be justified at the executive level. The impact of an executive's performance on the organization argues strongly to take the time to thoroughly review candidate skills and qualifications.
- Outsource assessment centers – There are a number of consulting organizations that specialize in assessment centers. Outsourcing assessment centers helps ensure that assessors are qualified and eliminates the time and effort to recruit, train, and maintain internal assessors.

The Impact of the Internet – Demographic trends in Internet usage indicate that web access is becoming a ubiquitous part of American life and the demographics of the online community are becoming closer to the demographics of the total population. The Internet is constantly changing the face of employee selection procedures.

What is the impact on interviewing?

There are four major ways the Internet can improve interviewing practices:

- Improved collaboration between recruiters and managers

A common problem for recruiters is how to help hiring managers that are distributed in various locations define the hiring requirements for open positions. While hiring managers can define things like experience requirements and primary responsibilities, the conversation can be frustrating when it comes to defining the competency requirements for an opening. This is because a common language for defining requirements is not shared. The Internet allows for the efficient exchange and systematic review of a database of behaviorally defined competency requirements. Even more efficient and powerful is having a web-based application that sits on top of the database that provides an easy way to build the competency requirement profile together on-line.

- Improved distribution of documents and data

Another common problem is trying to track down interviewer ratings for review and storage. Often this means tracking down pieces of paper and placing them in a folder. This practice is both tedious and time consuming for hiring managers and HR professionals alike. Often interviewers also have to be scheduled for a meeting to discuss their ratings and arrive at summary ratings and overall

conclusions about the candidate. The Internet allows for electronic forms to be sent and used for recording ratings and comments. Interviewers can view their ratings and others online and consolidate the data in a conference call. Again, an even more efficient and powerful solution is to use web-based applications that allow for interview data to be collected and managed online and stored for future reference in a database.

- Web-based interviewer training

Another common problem is how to drive interviewer consistency and help ensure interviewers are adequately prepared. Most interviewer training is workshop based. These events are very expensive and take managers away from their jobs for one or more days. A large number of workshops must be scheduled and conducted to meet the needs of a large management population. The Internet allows managers to review interviewer training content online at their own pace and when their schedule allows time for review. Remote instructors can be used to answer questions and provide coaching or skill practices. Of course, the most efficient and powerful approach is to offer a well designed and interactive web-based interviewer training application that includes assessment and certification components.

- Improved communications and support for field personnel

Field personnel can often feel like they are all by themselves when it comes to getting the support and information they need related to hiring. One of the most common needs of field personnel is getting help in preparing interview questions and structuring the interview process. Another need is how to stay current and informed about required procedures and best practices related to hiring. The Internet allows you to provide a common forum for exchanging and updating policies, procedures, forms, and information concerning best practices. Message boards, common resource centers or knowledge management centers are relatively easy to establish. A database of proven legally defensible questions related to common competencies can be shared to help in building interview guides. Of course, the most efficient and powerful approach is to provide a web-based application that allows HR professionals and interviewers to create, store, and distribute professional interview guides online.

What is the impact on simulations?

There has been limited usage of the Internet in providing simulations for assessment purposes. However, there are at least three types of simulations that could be delivered via the web:

- Web-based in-baskets

A secure web-based application could be used to present instructions, in-basket items, and capture responses to individual items as well as provide candidates

with item grouping organization capabilities and capture their responses to a group of items.

This type of in-basket provides a better reflection of how managers are likely to receive much of their information today. Email more likely to be received than paper based memo's. It also provides a more realistic option for responding than hand writing messages and using paper clips to related information. Telephone follow up could be used to explore insights, rationale for actions, and clarify responses.

- Web-based analysis exercises

A secure web-based application could be used to present instructions and provide various folders with both quantitative and qualitative information. The candidate would be provided with time to review the data and then would respond to a online interview with close ended questions. Answers to these questions would be captured and used, in part, to evaluate a candidates insights and recommendations.

The amount of time spent reviewing each data set could be captured as well as the individual data points that were reviewed. The sequence of data points reviewed could also be captured. These data could be used in conjunction with a telephone interview to better understand the quality of a candidates analysis and judgment skills.

- Web-based role-plays

A secure web-based application could be used in conjunction with telephone interactions to provide an effective role-play simulation. The web application would present instructions, simulate actual email and simulate IM interfaces in a secure environment. The application would capture actual responses to these stimuli for later evaluation or audit.

Telephone interactions could be used to provide interactive discussion around problems and issues requiring fact-finding, coaching, problem resolution, etc. Discussions could be recorded for later evaluation or audit. The combination of written and oral stimuli adds potential value for some jobs such as call center positions by creating an opportunity to view multi-tasking ability.

Where is the Future Taking Us?

HRIS/ATS/Assessment Integration

Applicant tracking systems allow recruiters to effectively administer a hiring process. These systems primarily focus on:

- Requisition approval
- Electronic job postings
- Resume review and storage
- Status and progression of candidates
- Candidate communications

HRIS systems are primarily focused on capturing and reporting on employee information. They are receivers of relevant hiring information for successful candidates.

Assessment platforms are focused on providing support and functionality to do a better job of evaluating candidate potential by providing and distributing assessment tools, capturing and managing assessment data, and providing appropriate record keeping capabilities and reports.

Today these systems are not seamlessly integrated. Providers of the various systems are more likely to view each other as competitors or minimize the contribution being made by the other. Loose partnerships may be formed but solutions will not be integrated. Customers will drive the integration. They will want to combine the efficiency gains of applicant tracking solutions with the effectiveness gains of assessment solutions and seamlessly share relevant information with their HRIS. A significant consolidation of major players is likely to be part of the near future

Virtual interviews

Technology already exists that could be used for conducting virtual interviews over the web. They have simply not been used. In the future as companies upgrade their computer equipment, integrated web-cams and audio technology will be more prevalent and there will be the option of using them to establish virtual visual contact with a remote candidate. There would be the option of posing questions to the candidate so they could view them as well as hear them or the interviewer may simply use an electronic version of an interview guide to conduct the interview and record ratings and responses in real time.

Virtual interviews may not ever replace face-to-face final interviews but could realize significant cost and time savings for certain positions or for earlier interview stages.

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