Understanding the Purpose of a Job Interview

A job interview is a process in which a potential employee is evaluated by an employer for prospective employment in their company, organization or firm. During this process, the employer hopes to determine whether or not the applicant is suitable for the role.

A job interview typically precedes the hiring decision, and is used to evaluate the candidate. The interview is usually preceded by the evaluation of submitted resumes from interested candidates, then selecting a small number of candidates for interviews. Potential job interview opportunities also include networking events and career fairs. The job interview is considered one of the most useful tools for evaluating potential employees. It also demands significant resources from the employer, yet has been demonstrated to be notoriously unreliable in identifying the optimal person for the job. An interview also allows the candidate to assess the corporate culture and demands of the job.

Multiple rounds of interviews may be used where there are many candidates or the job is particularly challenging or desirable. Earlier rounds may involve fewer staff from the employers and will typically be much shorter and less in depth. A common initial interview form is the phone interview, a job interview conducted over the telephone. This is especially common when the candidates do not live near the employer and has the advantage of keeping costs low for both sides.

Once all candidates have been interviewed, the employer typically selects the most desirable candidates and begins the negotiation of a job offer.

Interview Concepts
In light of its popularity, a stream of research has attempted to identify the constructs (ideas or concepts) that are measured during the interview to understand why interviews might help us pick the right people for the job. Several reviews of the research on interviews constructs revealed that the interview captures a wide variety of applicant attributes. These constructs can be classified into three categories; Job-Relevant Interview Content (constructs interview questions are designed to assess), Interview Performance (applicant behaviours unrelated to the applicant characteristics the interview questions are designed to assess but nevertheless influence evaluations of interviewee responses), and Potential Job-Irrelevant biases (personal and demographic characteristics of applicants that may influence interviewer evaluations of interviewee responses in an illegal, discriminatory way).

Job Relevant Interview Content
Interview questions are generally designed to tap applicant attributes that are specifically relevant to the job for which the person is applying. The job-relevant applicant attributes that the questions purportedly assess are thought to be necessary for one to successfully perform on the job. The job-relevant constructs that have been assessed in the interview can be classified into three categories: general traits, experiential factors, and core elements. The first category refers to relatively stable applicant traits. The second category refers to job knowledge that the applicant has acquired over time. The third category refers to the knowledge, skills and abilities associated with the job.

General Traits:
- *Mental Ability*: Applicants' capacity to learn and process information
- *Personality:* Conscientiousness, agreeableness, emotional stability, extroversion, openness to new experiences
- *Interests, goals and values*: Applicants motives, goals, and person-organizational fit

Experiential Factors:
- *Experience*: job-relevant knowledge derived from prior experience
- *Education*: Job-relevant knowledge derived from prior education
- *Training*: job-relevant knowledge derived from prior training

Core Job Elements:
- *Declarative knowledge*: Applicants' learned knowledge
- *Procedural skills and abilities:* Applicants' ability to complete the tasks required to do the job
- *Motivation:* Applicants' willingness to exert the effort required to do the job

Interviewee Process

A typical job interview has a single candidate meeting with the between one and three people representing the employer, the potential supervisor of the employee is usually involved in the interview process. A larger interview panel will often have a specialized human resources worker. While the meeting can be over in as little as 15 minutes, job interviews usually last 1 hour.

The bulk of the job interview will entail the interviewers asking the candidates questions about his or her job history, personality, work style and other factors relevant to the job. For instance, a common interview question is:

- What are your strengths and weaknesses?

The candidate will usually be given a chance to ask any questions at the end of the interview. These questions are strongly encouraged since they allow the interviewee to acquire more information about the job and the company, but they can also demonstrate the candidate's strong interest in them. When an interviewer asks about the weaknesses of a candidate, they are acknowledging the fact that they are not perfect. However, the interviewer is not really interested in their weaknesses but how they may make up for them. It also displays the skill of self-reflection and the pursuit for self-improvement.

Candidates for lower paid and lower skilled positions tend to have much simpler job interviews than do candidates for more senior positions. For instance, a lawyer's job interview will be much more demanding than that of a retail cashier. Most job interviews are formal; the larger the firm, the more formal and structured the interview will tend to be. Candidates generally dress slightly better than they would for work.

Additionally, some professions have specific types of job interviews; for performing artists, this is an audition in which the emphasis is placed on the performance ability of the candidate.

In many companies, assessment days are increasingly being used, particularly for graduate positions, which may include analysis tasks, group activities, presentation exercises, and psychometric testing.

In recent years it has become increasingly common for employers to request job applicants who are successfully shortlisted to deliver one or more presentations at their interview. The purpose of the presentation in this setting may be to either demonstrate candidates' skills and abilities in presenting, or to highlight their knowledge of a green subject likely to relate closely to the job role for which they have applied. It is common for the applicant to be notified of the request for them to deliver a presentation along with their invitation to attend the interview. Usually applicants are only provided with a title for the presentation and a time limit which the presentation should not exceed.

Interview Process Model

One way to think about the interview process is as three separate, although related, phases: (1) the pre-interview phase which occurs before the interviewer and candidate meet, (2) the interview phase where the interview is conducted, and (3) the post-interview phase where the interviewer forms judgments of candidate qualifications and makes final decisions. Although separate, these three phases are related. That is, impressions interviewers form early on may affect how they view the person in a later phase.

Pre-interview phase: The pre-interview phase encompasses the information available to the interviewer beforehand (e.g., resume, test scores, social networking site information) and the perceptions interviewers form about applicants from this information prior to the actual face-to-face interaction between the two individuals. In this phase, interviewers are likely to already have ideas about the characteristics that would make a person ideal or qualified for the position. Interviewers also have information about the applicant usually in the form of a resume, test scores, or prior contacts with the applicant. Interviewers then often integrate information that they have on an applicant with their ideas about the ideal employee to form a pre-interview evaluation of the candidate. In this way, interviewers typically have an impression of you even before the actual face-to-face interview interaction. Nowadays with recent technological advancements, we must be aware that interviewers have an even larger amount of information available on some candidates. For example, interviewers can obtain information from search engines (e.g. Google, Bing, and Yahoo), blogs, and even social networks (e.g. LinkedIn, Facebook, and Twitter). While some of this information may be job-related, some of it may not be. Despite the relevance of the information, any information interviewers obtain about the applicant before the interview is likely to influence their pre-interview impression of the candidate. And, why is all this important? It is important because what interviewers think about you before they meet you, can have an effect on how they might treat you in the interview and what they remember about you. Furthermore, researchers have found that what interviewers think about the applicant before the interview (pre. interview phase) is related to how they evaluate the

candidate after the interview, despite how the candidate may have performed during the interview.

Interview Phase: The interview phase entails the actual conduct of the interview, the interaction between the interviewer and the applicant. Initial interviewer impressions about the applicant before the interview may influence the amount of time an interviewer spends in the interview with the applicant, the interviewer's behavior and questioning of the applicant, and the interviewer's post-interview evaluations. Pre-interview impressions also can affect what the interviewer notices about the interviewee, recalls from the interview, and how an interviewer interprets what the applicant says and does in the interview.

As interviews are typically conducted face-to-face, over the phone, or through video conferencing (e.g. Skype), they are a social interaction between at least two individuals. Thus, the behavior of the interviewer during the interview likely "leaks" information to the interviewee. That is, you can sometimes tell during the interview whether the interviewer thinks positively or negatively about you. Knowing this information can actually affect how the applicant behaves, resulting in a self-fulfilling prophecy effect. For example, interviewees who feel the interviewer does not think they are qualified may be more anxious and feel they need to prove they are qualified. Such anxiety may hamper how well they actually perform and present themselves during the interview, fulfilling the original thoughts of the interviewer. Alternatively, interviewees who perceive an interviewer believes they are qualified for the job may feel more at ease and comfortable during the exchange, and consequently actually perform better in the interview. It should be noted again, that because of the dynamic nature of the interview, the interaction between the behaviors and thoughts of both parties is a continuous process whereby information is processed and informs subsequent behavior, thoughts, and evaluations.

Post-interview Phase: After the interview is conducted, the interviewer must form an evaluation of the interviewee's qualifications for the position. The interviewer most likely takes into consideration all the information, even from the pre-interview phase, and integrates it to form a post-interview evaluation of the applicant. In the final stage of the interview process, the interviewer uses his/her evaluation of the candidate (i.e., in the form of interview ratings or judgment) to make a final decision. Sometimes other selection tools (e.g., work samples, cognitive ability tests, personality tests) are used in combination with the interview to make final hiring decisions; however, interviews remain the most commonly used selection device in North America.

Interviewees: Although the description of the interview process above focuses on the perspective of the interviewer, job applicants also gather information on the job and/or organization and form impressions prior to the interview. The interview is a two-way exchange and applicants are also making decisions about whether the company is a good fit for them. Essentially, the process model illustrates that the interview is not an isolated interaction, but rather a complex process that begins with two parties forming judgments and gathering information, and ends with a final interviewer decision.

Questions

History of Interview Questions
In interviews that are considered "structured interviews," there are typically two types of questions interviewers ask applicants: *situational questions and behavioral questions* (also known as patterned behavioral description interviews). Both types of questions are based on "critical incidents" that are required to perform the job but they differ in their focus. Critical incidents are relevant tasks that are required for the job and can be collected through interviews or surveys with current employees, managers, or subject matter experts.

Previous examination has found mixed results for which type of question will best predict future job performance of an applicant. In actual interview settings it is not likely that the sole use of just one type of interview question (situational or behavioral) is asked. A range of questions can add variety for both the interviewer and applicant. In addition, the use of high quality questions, whether behavioral or situational based, is essential to make sure that candidates provide meaningful responses that lead to insight into their capability to perform on the job.

Behavioral Questions
Behavioral (experience-based or patterned behavioral) interviews are past-oriented in that they ask respondents to relate what they did in past jobs or life situations that are relevant to the particular job relevant knowledge, skills, and abilities required for success. The idea is that past behavior is the best predictor of future performance in similar situations. By asking questions about how job applicants have handled situations in the past that are similar to those they will face on

the job, employers can gauge how they might perform in future situations.

Behaviour Interview Question Examples
1. Describe a situation in which you were able to use persuasion to successfully convince someone to see things your way.
2. Give me an example of a time when you set a goal and were able to meet or achieve it.
3. Tell me about a time when you had to use your presentation skills to influence someone's opinion.
4. Give me an example of a time when you had to conform to a policy with which you did not agree.

One way individuals can prepare for behavioral type questions is to practice the STAR method. The STAR method is a structured manner of responding to a behavioral-based interview question by discussing the specific situation, task, action, and result of the situation you are describing.

Situation: Describe the situation that you were in or the task that you needed to accomplish. This should describe specifics rather than general descriptions of past behavior.

Task: What goal were you working toward?

Action: Describe the actions you took to address the situation with detail and focus on yourself. What specific steps did you take and what was your contribution?

Result: Describe the outcome of your actions. What happened? How did the event end? What did you accomplish? What did you learn? Make sure your answer contains multiple positive results.

Situational Interview Questions
Situational interview questions ask job applicants to imagine a set of circumstances and then indicate how they would respond in that situation; hence, the questions are future oriented. One advantage of situational questions is that all interviewees respond to the same hypothetical situation rather than describe experiences unique to them from their past. Another advantage is that situational questions allow respondents who have had no direct job experience relevant to a particular question to provide a hypothetical response. Two core aspects of the Situational Interview are the development of situational dilemmas that employees encounter on the job, and a scoring guide to evaluate responses to each dilemma.

Situational Examples
1. You are managing a work group and notice that one of your employees has become angry and hostile in recent weeks, to the point of disrupting the entire group. What would you do?
2. You are in a meeting. Your manager blames you for not doing well on a task, in front of all your peers and managers from other divisions. You believe that your manager is wrong in his critique, and that he might have come to this conclusion hastily without knowing all the information. You feel you are being treated unfairly in front of your peers. You feel that your reputation may be affected by this critique. What would you do in this situation?
3. A general request has bent issued by the Dean for someone to serve on a new joint government /industry/university committee on business education. The objective of the committee is to design the budgeting allocation for the Faculty for the next fiscal year. It is well known that you have the necessary skill and expertise to improve the changes that the Faculty will receive budget increases for future operations. You have been told that it will require 2—3 days per month of your time for the next 9 months. Your tenure review is one year away. Although you think you have a good publication record, you have no guarantee of tenure at this point. You are concerned because you have already fallen behind on an important research project that you are pursuing with a colleague at another university. What, if anything, would you do?

Other Types of Questions
Other possible types of questions that may be asked in an interview include: background questions, job experience questions, and puzzle type questions. A brief explanation of each follows.
Background Questions include a focus on work experience, education, and other qualifications. For instance, an interviewer may ask "What experience have you had with direct sales phone calls?"
Job Experience Questions may ask candidates to describe or demonstrate job knowledge. These are typically highly specific questions. For example, one question may be "What steps would you take to conduct a manager training session on safety?"

Case Interview
The case interview is an interview form used mostly by management consulting firms and investment banks in which the job applicant is given a question, situation, problem or challenge and asked to resolve the situation. The case problem is often a business situation or a business case that the interviewer has worked on in real life.

Panel Interview
Another type of job interview found throughout the professional and academic ranks is the panel interview. In this type of interview the candidate is interviewed by a group of panelists representing the various stakeholders in the hiring process. Within this format there are several approaches to conducting the interview. Example formats include;

Presentation Format – The candidate is given a generic topic and asked to make a presentation to the panel. This format is often used in academic or sales-related interviews.
Role Format– Each panelist is tasked with asking questions related to a specific role of the position. For example one panelist may ask technical questions, another may ask management questions, another may ask customer service related questions etc.
Skeet Shoot Format – The candidate is given questions from a series of panelists in rapid succession to test his or her ability to handle stress filled situations.

The benefits of the panel approach to interviewing include: time savings over serial interviewing, more focused interviews as there is often less time spent building rapport with small talk, and "apples to apples" comparison because each stake holder/interviewer/panelist gets to hear the answers to the same questions.

Stress Interview
Stress interviews are still in common use. One type of stress interview is where the employer uses a succession of interviewers (one at a time or en masse) whose mission is to intimidate the candidate and keep him/her off-balance. The ostensible purpose of this interview: to find out how the candidate handles stress. Stress interviews might involve testing an applicant's behavior in a busy environment. Questions about handling work overload, dealing with multiple projects, and handling conflict are typical.

Another type of stress interview may involve only a single interviewer who behaves in an uninterested or hostile manner. For example, the interviewer may not make eye contact, may roll his eyes or sigh at the candidates answers, interrupt, turn his back, take phone calls during the interview, or ask questions in a demeaning or challenging style. The goal is to assess how the interviewee handles pressure or to purposely evoke emotional responses. The key to SUCCCSS for the candidate is to de-personalize the process. The interviewer is acting a role, deliberately and calculatedly trying to "rattle the cage'. Once the candidate realizes that there is nothing personal behind the interviewer's approach, it is easier to handle the questions with composure.

Example Stress Interview Questions
1. Sticky Situation – If you caught a colleague cheating on his expenses, what would you do?
2. Putting YOU on the Spot – How do you feel this interview is going?
3. Popping the Balloon – (deep sigh) "Well, if that's the best answer you can give ... ' (shakes head) okay, what about this one ...?
4. Oddball Question: What would you change about the design of the hockey stick?

Candidates may also be asked to deliver a presentation as part of the selection process. The 'Platform Test' method involves having the candidate make a presentation to both the selection panel and other candidates for the same job. This is obviously highly stressful and is therefore useful as a predictor of how the candidate will perform under similar circumstances on the job. Selection processes in academic, training, airline, legal and teaching circles frequently involve presentations of this sort.

Technical Interview
Further Information: Microsoft Interview
This kind of interview focuses on problem solving and creativity. The questions aim at the interviewee's problem-solving skills and likely show their ability and creativity. Sometimes these interviews will be on a computer module with multiple-choice questions.

Telephone Interview
Telephone interviews take place if a recruiter wishes to reduce the number of prospective candidates before deciding on

a shortlist for face-to-face interviews. They also take place if a job applicant is a significant distance away from the premises of the hiring company, such as abroad or in another state or province.

Interviewee Strategies and Behaviors

Nonverbal Behaviors

It may not only be what you say in an interview that matters, but also how you say it (e.g., how fast you speak) and how you behave during the interview (e.g., hand gestures. eye contact). In other words, although applicants' responses to interview questions influence interview ratings, their nonverbal behaviors may also affect interviewer judgments. Nonverbal behaviors can be divided into two main categories: vocal cues (e.g., articulation, pitch, fluency, frequency of pauses, speed, etc.) and visual cues (e.g., smiling, eye contact, body orientation and lean, hand movement, posture, etc.). Oftentimes physical attractiveness is included as part of nonverbal behavior as well. There is some debate about how large of a role nonverbal behaviors may play in the interview. Some researchers maintain that nonverbal behaviors and interview ratings a great deal, while others have found that they have a relatively small impact on interview outcomes, especially when considered with applicant qualifications presented in resumes. The relationship between nonverbal behavior and interview outcomes is also stronger in structured interviews than unstructured, and stronger when interviewees' answers are of high quality.

Applicants' nonverbal behaviors may influence interview ratings through the inferences interviewers make about the applicant based on their behavior. For instance, applicants who engage in positive nonverbal behaviors such as smiling and leaning forward arc perceived as more likable, trustworthy, credible, warmer, successful, qualified, motivated, competent, and socially skilled. These applicants are also predicted to be better accepted and more satisfied with the organization if hired.

Applicants' verbal responses and their nonverbal behavior may convey some of the same information about the applicant. However, despite any shared information between content and nonverbal behavior, it is clear that nonverbal behaviors do predict interview ratings to an extent beyond the content of what was said, and thus it is essential that applicants and interviewers alike are aware of their impact. You may want to be careful of what you may be communicating through the nonverbal behaviors you display.

Physical Attractiveness

When hiring the best applicants for the job, interviewers form judgments, sometimes using applicants' physical attractiveness. That is, physical attractiveness is usually not necessarily related to how well one can do the job, yet has been found to influence interviewer evaluation-s and judgments about how suitable an applicant is for the job. Once individuals are categorized as attractive or unattractive, interviewers may have expectations about physically attractive and physically unattractive individuals and then judge applicants based on how well they fit those expectations. As a result, it typically turns out that interviewers will judge attractive individuals more favorably on job-related factors than they judge un-attractive individuals. People generally agree on who is and who is not attractive and attractive individuals are judged and treated more positively than unattractive individuals.

Within the business domain, physically attractive individuals have been shown to have an advantage over unattractive individuals in numerous ways that include, but are not limited to, perceived job qualifications, hiring recommendations, predicted job success, and compensation levels. As noted by several researchers, attractiveness may not be the most influential determinant of personnel decisions, but may be a deciding factor when applicants possess similar levels of qualifications. In addition, attractiveness does not provide an advantage if the applicants in the pool are of high quality, but it does provide an advantage in increased hiring rates and more positive job-related outcomes for attractive individuals when applicant quality is low and average.

Just as physical attractiveness is a visual cue, vocal attractiveness is an auditory cue and can lead to differing interviewer evaluations in the interview as well. Vocal attractiveness, defined as an appealing mix of speech rate, loudness, pitch, and variability, has been found to be favorably related to interview ratings and job performance. In addition, the personality trails of agreeableness and conscientiousness predict performance more strongly for people with more attractive voices compared to those with less attractive voices.

As important as it is to understand how physical attractiveness can influence the judgments, behaviors, and final decisions of interviewers, it is equally important to find ways to decrease potential bias in the job interview. Conducting an interview with elements of structure is a one possible way to decrease bias.

Coaching

An abundance of information is available to instruct interviewees on strategies for improving their performance in a job interview. Information used by interviewees comes from a variety of sources ranging from popular how-to books to formal coaching programs, sometimes even provided by the hiring organization. Within the more formal coaching programs, there are two general types of coaching. One type of coaching is designed to teach interviewees how to perform better in the interview by focusing on how to behave and present one-self. This type of coaching is focused on improving aspects of the interview that are not necessarily related to the specific elements of performing the job tasks. This type of coaching could include how to dress, how to display nonverbal behaviors (head nods, smiling, eye contact), verbal cues (how fast to speak, speech volume, articulation, pitch), and impression management tactics. Another type of coaching is designed to focus interviewees on the content specifically relevant to describing one's qualifications for the job, in order to help improve their answers to interview questions. This coaching, therefore, focuses on improving the interviewee's understanding of the skills, abilities, and traits the interviewer is attempting to assess, and responding with relevant experience that demonstrates these skills. For example, this type of coaching might teach an interviewee to use the STAR approach for answering behavioral interview questions. An example coaching program might include several sections focusing on various aspects of the interview. It could also include a section designed to provide feedback to help the interviewee to improve their performance in the interview, as well as a section involving practice answering example interview questions. An additional section providing general interview tips about how to behave and present one-self could also be included.

It is useful to consider coaching in the context of the competing goals of the interviewer and interviewee. The interviewee's goal is typically to perform well (i.e. obtain high interview ratings), in order to get hired. On the other hand, the interviewer's goal is to obtain job-relevant information, in order to determine whether the applicant has the skills, abilities, and traits believed by the organization to be indicators of successful job performance. Research has shown that how well an applicant does in the interview can be enhanced with coaching. The effectiveness of coaching is due, in part, to increasing the interviewee's knowledge, which in turn results in better interview performance. Interviewee knowledge refers to knowledge about the interview, such as the types of questions that will be asked, and the content that the interviewer is attempting to assess. Research has also shown that coaching can increase the likelihood that interviewers using a structured interview will accurately choose those individuals who will ultimately be most successful on the job (i.e., increase reliability and validity of the structured interview). Additionally, research has shown that interviewees tend to have positive reactions to coaching, which is often an underlying goal of an interview. Based on research thus far, the effects of coaching tend to be positive for both interviewees and interviewers.

Faking

Interviewers should be aware that applicants can intentionally distort their responses or fake during the interview and such applicant faking has the potential to influence interview outcomes if present. Two concepts that relate to faking include social desirability (the tendency for people to present themselves in a favorable light), and impression management (conscious or unconscious attempts to influence one's image during interactions). Faking in the employment interview, then, can be defined as "deceptive impression management or the conscious distortion of answers to the interview questions in order to obtain a better score on the interview and/or otherwise create favorable perceptions". Thus, faking in the employment interview is intentional, deceptive, and aimed at improving perceptions of performance.

Faking in the employment interview can be broken down into four elements. The first involves the interviewee portraying him or herself as an ideal job candidate by exaggerating true skills, tailoring answers to better fit the job, and/or creating the impression that personal beliefs, values, and attitudes are similar to those of the organization. The second aspect of faking is inventing or completely fabricating one's image by piecing distinct work experiences together to create better answers, inventing untrue experiences or skills, and portraying others' experiences or accomplishments as ones' own. Thirdly, faking might also be aimed at protecting the applicant's image. This can be accomplished through omitting certain negative experiences, concealing negatively perceived aspects of the applicant's background, and by separating oneself from negative experiences. The fourth and final component of faking involves ingratiating oneself to the interviewer by conforming personal opinions to align with those of the organization, as well as insincerely praising or complimenting the interviewer or organization.