

maintaining visibility in the job market are vital to success. As communication teachers and practitioners, we need to highlight strategies such as these that will best equip our graduates for the global job market.

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A REVIEW OF A TELEPHONE-ADMINISTERED BEHAVIOR-BASED INTERVIEW TECHNIQUE

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THE EMPLOYMENT INTERVIEW is intended to provide insight into a candidate's future performance by evaluating the oral responses to the questions presented by the interviewer. For decades, researchers have studied many facets of the interview and have produced mixed results as to the predictive validity of the employment interview (McDaniel, Hartman, Whetzel, & Grubb, 2007; Posthuma, Morgeson, & Campion, 2002). Still, interviewing represents the most popular employee selection method among practitioners. If hiring the right person for the job is crucial to the success of any organization, why do employers continue using the employment interview? We offer some explanations and then describe a technique that has offered promising predictive results for a Midwestern consulting firm.

Why Use Interviews?

The following are offered as reasons that practitioners continue to use employment interviews even though academic research has shown low predictive validity. First, the interview indirectly adds value to the process beyond that of a selection tool in such areas as recruitment, public relations, and feedback. Second, managers believe a face-to-face interview will yield more valid judgments on several observable interpersonal dimensions of behavior (i.e., interpersonal skills, self-assurance, and social poise). Third, managers may continue to use the interview because of company policies, habits, experience, ease, or the feeling of power. Fourth, the employment interview may be a valid predictor of performance that academic researchers have failed to replicate. Recent studies of employment interviews have concluded that structured interviews offer greater predictive validity (Judge, Higgins, & Cable, 2000; McDaniel et al., 2007; Weekley & Ployhart, 2006).

Structured Versus Unstructured

Although academic research has failed to support the predictive validity of employment interviews overall, recent studies of employment interviews have concluded that structured interviews are more valid than unstructured interviews (Cortina, Goldstein, Payne, Davison, & Gilliland, 2000; Ployhart, 2006). It appears that the structured interview is gaining momentum in the workplace as the tool of choice by employers. The behavior-based interview, a type of structured interview, appears to be one the most popular techniques used by employers in the marketplace. A representative of a national management company recently stated to the authors that most Fortune 500 companies use behavioral interviewing to select their candidates. Universal Studios of Florida, for example, used the behavioral method to hire 8,000 hourly workers. Universities are preparing their students for behavior-based interviews, as evidenced by copious information on the Web sites of college career service offices.

The basic premise of the behavior-based interview is that past behaviors predict future behaviors (Bowers & Kleiner, 2005). The interviewer must determine what key behaviors are important for the vacant position. Then the interviewer will ask the job applicants open-ended questions about how they have handled past events that are similar to those they will face in the job they are applying for.

Their answers are rated as to whether they convey the desired behavior for the job. In the business world, a poor hire can lead to additional costs (i.e., poor performance, retention problems, etc.) that can have major effects on the firm's bottom line. The firm that finds the right tool in the selection process will have major advantages among its competitors. The behavior-based interview appears to be a tool that is improving the quality of hires in the marketplace.

Evaluation of a Behavior-Based Interview

We had the opportunity to evaluate a behavior-based interview tool that was conducted by telephone by a large Midwestern consulting company for a client hiring salespeople in the financial industry. The results of the study found that the tool succeeded in predicting the sales candidates who would be more likely to perform well and less likely to leave the company. Whereas most telephone interviews are primarily used as a screening tool to decide if the candidate will be invited for an on-site visit, phone interviews were actually used as the selection tool in the technique we reviewed.

The following is an overview of the technique we reviewed. The firm used a four-step process to develop the behavioral interview.

- Step 1:* The firm conducted focus groups with key executives and top-performing personnel within the organization to determine which behaviors were necessary for success in the positions for which they were hiring.
- Step 2:* The firm conducted in-depth interviews with a sample consisting of the top-performing salespeople, as well as salespeople who had average or below-average performance. Many businesses have concluded that the best way to hire individuals who will succeed within a given organization is to first understand why some of their people are top performers while others are mediocre.
- Step 3:* The final interview consisted of the most predictive questions measuring the dominant behaviors identified with successful salespeople. Examples of behaviors included being a problem solver, competitive, persistent, and optimistic.
- Step 4:* To evaluate the predictive validity of the behavioral interview, job applicants were interviewed by telephone. The interviewers read the questions to the job applicants in the same order and provided no interpretation or clarification. This structured interviewing process ensured equal treatment for each respondent.

Following the telephone interview, an audiotape of the interview was given to a trained job analyst to determine if the interviewee's responses matched the desired behavior for the job. For each response that matched the desired behavior for that question, the candidate received a point. If the response did not match the desired behavior for that question, the response was scored as zero. Results of the interviews were aggregated by behavior and overall score to provide the basis for the firm to judge the candidate.

Findings and Conclusion

The results of the telephone-administered behavior-based interview—measured in terms of performance and retention of salespeople over 29 months—showed considerable promise. The findings suggest that applicants who scored higher in the behavioral interview performed better on five different performance measures and were less likely to leave the company. This type of interview could prove to be an effective cost-saving tool for firms that have job candidates dispersed over a wide territory, thus saving travel costs while also maintaining predictability and lower turnover costs.

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