Developing and Using Fair and Valid Employment Interviews

Presented by
Jim Kuthy, Ph.D. and Heather Patchell, M.A.

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Developing and Conducting Effective, Fair, and Valid Interviews

Jim Kuthy, Ph.D.  
&  
Heather Patchell, M.A.

Contact Information

Jim Kuthy, Ph.D.  
Principal Consultant  
jkuthy@biddle.com  
(800) 999-0438 x 239

Heather Patchell, M.A.  
Consultant II  
hpatchell@biddle.com  
(800) 999-0438 x 155
A Little About Us...

- Jim holds Masters and Doctorate Degrees in Industrial & Organizational Psychology
- Heather holds a Masters Degree in Psychology
- More than twenty-five combined years of experience in the employment selection field
- Designed and/or validated interviews and other selection devices for many employers, including conducting validation studies that have been successfully defended in court or passed review by federal agencies
- Jim taught Psychology and Business-related courses at the University of Akron and California State University, Sacramento and Heather is the Director of the BCCI Institute for Workforce Development

Today’s Agenda

- Background and Theory
- What should be measured?
- Using & Scoring Interviews
- Best Practices & Hints
- Addressing Validity Requirements

Employment Interviews

- Can be a very reliable and valid method for helping to choose the best people for a job
- If an interview is used to make employment decisions (such as hiring or promotions), it is subject to the requirements of the federal Uniform Guidelines on Employee Selection Procedures (1978), similar to any other type of test or selection procedure
  - [www.uniformguidelines.com](http://www.uniformguidelines.com)
Theories Underlying the Use of Interviews

- **Goal Setting**: Intentions are the immediate precursor of a person’s actions
- **Behavioral Consistency**: The past is the best predictor of the future


What should be measured during an interview?

- Identify what you want to measure during an interview based upon the findings of a job analysis...
  - Job analyses typically are based on information from those who currently hold the target job and/or from observations of those performing the job
  - Job analyses often include information based on critical incidents
- It is best to limit yourself to several key areas identified during the job analysis as important and/or critical
  - Do not try to measure too much during a single interview

What should be measured during an interview?

- Job knowledge, job experience, and ability to perform job-related behaviors
- Measure appropriate, observable behaviors (and/or knowledge that results in observable behaviors)
  - Not traits or characteristics that only appear over time (such as creativity, dependability, and honesty)
  - Not behaviors that would be more appropriately measured using other methods
It would be more appropriate to use a test of computer skills than an interview to reliably learn if this person is proficient at using a computer.

In the interview he said he had hundreds of hours on the computer.

**Types of Interview Questions**

**Experienced-Based Questions**
- Focuses on evaluation of reactions to actual situations from the candidate’s past that are relevant to the target position
  - “Tell me about a time…”
  - “Describe a time you…”
- Good for many jobs, best for a few
- Not typically appropriate for many types of entry-level jobs or where many of the applicants do not have previous experience in the areas being measured

**Situational Questions**
- Focuses on evaluations of intended reactions to hypothetical job situations
  - “What would you do in this situation?”
  - “Describe how you would handle this situation”
  - “List the steps you would take…”
- Be sure NOT to ask about knowledge, skills, or abilities they would learn “on the job” or during training after being hired
Which type is better?

- In general, there is a relatively strong correlation between the results of situational and behavioral questions (i.e. the results are similar)
  - $r = .85$ (Conway & Peneo, 1999)
  - $r = .76$ (Campion, Campion, & Hudson, 1994)
- Use the type of questions that are most appropriate, considering both the job and the applicant pool

Job Complexity can Play a Role

- Situational interviews
  - Better for low- and medium-complexity jobs than for high-complexity jobs
  - It can be difficult to develop situational interview questions that capture the intricacies and subtle dynamics of high-complexity jobs
  - Also, high-complexity job candidates may be more likely to say what they believe interviewers want to hear as opposed to what they would actually do

- Experience-based Interviews
  - Similar levels of performance-relatedness for high, medium, and low-complexity jobs

Potential wording of a “sticky question” if you must ask...

- **NOT** - “How many sick days off did you take on your last job?”
- **YES** –
  - Describe your attendance requirements and ask if he or she can meet them.
  - “How many days were you absent last year?” or, if you wish to determine potential time-off abuse, “How many Mondays and Fridays were you absent last year?”


Using Interviews

Use Interviews Wisely

• It is a good idea to use interviews in combination with other selection tools
  – Using only an interview in an attempt to measure everything about a job candidate may be inappropriate
  – Only give as much weight to the interview as is justified by the job analysis
Use Formal, Structured Interviews
Ask the same questions in the same way... every time (write it out in advance!)

We’re sick of asking the same old questions to each applicant, so we’ve decided to be flexible and creative... What’s your favorite football team?

Allows for an Apple to Apple Comparison

1. Reliability is a pre-condition of validity
2. Standardizing interviews increases their reliability
3. Thus, standardizing your interviews will almost always increase their validity
4. Strong evidence of validity helps insure that your interview is job related and consistent with business necessity
Example of a “Clean” Structured Interview Process

- Briefly introduce the interviewers
  - Consider having nameplates in front of each interviewer
- Explain the purpose and structure of interview
  - Set the ground rules, such as time limits
- Ask same/similar situational and/or experience-based questions
- Thank the interviewee and excuse them

Use Interview Time Wisely

- If you have limited time, there are a number of areas that may be better measured at other stages of the process and/or using other methods, such as...
  - Asking why they want the job
  - About their minimum qualifications
  - Asking if they have anything to add

Some Types of Follow-up and/or Customized Questions Can be Okay

- It is okay to ask follow-up questions so the interviewee can clarify their response or provide more detailed information
  - However, all interviewees should be asked the same types of follow-up questions if they present similar information
  - You might consider “prompts” such as: “Can you tell us more about that…” or “Can you please describe that in another way for us…”
- Customized questions regarding specific aspects of the candidate might be acceptable (such as specifics about information contained in resume), as long as all interviewees who present the same information are asked similar customized questions
  - Write these out in advance of the interview to help insure consistency
Train your Interviewers/Raters

- Provide structured training to standardize process and minimize inconsistency across raters
  - Interview process
  - "Frame of Reference" training - Rating dimensions
  - Rating scales (including how to use anchors when rating)
  - Potential rating errors
- Provide examples
- Practice/role-playing
- Provide feedback and then practice again
- Test Raters
- Monitor the interview process as it progresses
- Repeat/update training if sufficient time has passed between the last training session and an interview

Hint: Document your training!

Anchor Your Rating Scales

- Anchors are benchmarks that provide examples of poor, acceptable, and highly-acceptable responses
- These remind raters of different levels of competence
- At least one study found that when ratings of naive raters were compared to job experts, the use of anchored rating scales resulted in similar reliability and accuracy for both groups (Maurer, 2002)


In addition to question responses you can also train how to...

- ...rate other types of observable behaviors, such as speaking and/or decision-making, if supported by a job analysis
  - We generally suggest that these be scored after all of the questions have been asked
Example of Characteristics that Make Up Speaking Ability Dimension

Frame-of-Reference Training

- Designed to provide a common evaluation standard of interviewees’ responses
- Target rating dimensions are presented and explained using behavioral examples at different performance levels
- Discussion of rating dimensions follows
- Practices actual evaluations (role playing)
  - One alternative to actual role playing is to provide examples of poor, acceptable, and highly acceptable responses using video or in writing and have the raters assign each to the appropriate performance level
- Provide feedback with explanation
- Continue cycle until raters share a similar frame of reference

Which is Better?
Frame-of-Reference Training or Anchored Rating Scales?

- Both substantially improved rating accuracy and inter-rater agreement in a recent study
- Using both led to greater improvements than using either one alone


Also...Train About Potential Rating Errors

Rating errors tend to make the interview process less effective for selecting the best people for the job

- First impressions (studies show early impressions can crystallize in only FOUR minutes!)
- Self-fulfilling prophesies (Be careful what pre-interview information is provided to the interviewer)
Other Potential Rating Errors

- Raters should be familiar with:
  - Halo errors
  - Leniency/Harshness errors
  - Primacy and Recency effects
  - Contrast effects – comparing one applicant to another, rather than to a “standard”
  - Stereotyping interviewees
  - “Similar to me”/“Different than me” biases

Reinforce learning by performing “mock” interviews and providing feedback/insight.

Panel vs. Single Interviewers

Panel Interview
- More expensive (-)
- Typically more reliable, thus more valid (+)
- More information is used when making selection decision (+)
- Allows decisions to be reviewed by others before decision is made (+)

Single Interviewer
- Less expensive (+)
- Lower reliability & validity (-)
- Typically does not allow decision to be reviewed by others (-)
- Individual interviewers do not get better without formal feedback (-)

You might Increase Fairness with Panel Interviews

- Mixed race/gender panels may help reduce the “similar-to-me”/“different from me” biases that individual interviewers might introduce
Take notes during the interview

*Without notes: Less than half of managers could accurately report on the information produced during a 20 minute interview*


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Do NOT rely on...

- **Non-verbal behaviors that are not directly related to the job**
  - The TV show, “Lie to me,” was based on research by Dr. Paul Ekman. However, his work was “adapted for TV” (in other words, much of it is not “really true”)
  - Studies consistently show that humans, even trained ones, make lousy lie detectors
  - Decisions should be made on actual behaviors, such as the person’s responses or the clarity of their responses
  - Relying on non-verbal behaviors that are not job-related is not defensible in the event of litigation
- **Body type**
  - Relationships between body type and personality or behaviors are generally based on false stereotypes
  - Do not rely on this information when making decisions

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Get Some Sleep!

- Research finds that suppressing stereotypes and prejudices requires self-control over one’s thoughts
- Sleep is necessary for exerting self-control
- A recent study suggests that lack of sleep (or when raters are sleepy) can negatively influence the suppression of prejudice
  - Even relatively small amounts of lost sleep can have effects on prejudice

**Best Practices**

- Combine rating scores mechanically
  - Average or sum them
  - Consensus among raters is good goal, but different raters do not need to absolutely agree for ratings to be valid
    - You can average ratings if multiple raters do not agree
    - Some large interview panels automatically remove the highest and lowest rating to minimize the effects of extreme ratings
- **Listen… do not talk too much**
- Document everything

**Strengthening your Interviewers**

- Provide your interviewers with feedback
  - Without feedback, experienced interviewers agree with each other to no greater extent than do interviewers with differing experiences

**Possible Enhancements**

- Video- or Audio-tape interviews for later review
  - Potentially save time and money
  - Eliminate discrepant raters
  - Record of interview retained
- If appropriate under the job analysis, ask some interview questions via a telephone or other non-visual medium
Is There a Connection Between Interview Process and Success in Court?

- Research...
  - Study involving 84 disparate treatment and 46 disparate impact cases where interviews were litigated.
  - 17 interview characteristics were evaluated (e.g., objective, subjective, standardized, etc.).
  - Study resulted in clear findings that revealed the three primary ingredients for successful interview validity defense.

Is There a Connection Between Interview Type and Success in Court?

- The Three Primary Factors Are...
  - Interview **objectivity and job relatedness**, such as:
    - Objective and specified criteria
    - Trained interviewers
    - Validation evidence
  - **Standardized administration**, including:
    - Scoring guidelines being followed
    - Minimal rater discretion
    - Common questions across candidates
    - Consistency
  - **Multiple Interviewers**
    - Implies a shared decision making process
    - Increases rater reliability

Validation: Have a Job Expert team evaluate and rate interview questions using the following ratings:

- Is the question clear and understandable?
- Is the question at an appropriate difficulty level?
- Does the question measure a Knowledge, Skill, Ability that is needed on the first day on the job (i.e., before training)?
- Is the question job related?
  - Does it represent a situation that has occurred or is likely to occur on the job?
- What job-related Knowledge, Skill, Ability is measured by this question?
- Will applicants be able to provide a sufficient response without possessing job-specific (or employer-specific) knowledge?
  - Job specific or employer specific knowledge prior to entry is that job must be justified by the Job Analysis.
**Interview Question Danger Zone!**

- Marital Circumstances
- Age
- Disabilities
- Gender & Physical Appearance
- Citizenship & National Origin

*Use validation as your guide*

-- BE CAREFUL OF “SMALL TALK” --

**“Small Talk”**

- If you wish to informally talk with candidates to “break the ice,” stick to a pre-planned script to minimize potential problems or misinterpretations
  - *Do this even if you know the candidate*
- To help to maintain the perception of fairness, try to keep the length of the “small talk” similar across interviewees
- Limit informal conversations with candidates outside of the formal interview area

**Did you know?**

- Applicants react negatively to recruiters or interviewers with poor interpersonal skills
- Applicants also generally have a low impression of the company if the interviewer lacks good interpersonal skill
- So… make sure your interviewers are competent communicators
Finally...

It is **your** responsibility, **not** the interview’s developer, to ensure that the interview is fair and valid.

- Be proactive
  - Periodically review the validity report and modify the interview as needed and/or as the job changes
  - Monitor the interview process for potential issues on a regular basis
    - *Look out for biased raters*
  - Retrain or retire interviewers when appropriate
  - Stay current in your research

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Questions  Answers

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