Getting Technical with TV&C...

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Structured Interviews

Introduction

The employment interview is the most widely used employee selection procedure. Researchers, as well as practitioners, have spent a great deal of time and energy in an attempt to improve the quality and predictive value of this assessment technique. Emerging from these efforts is a highly structured approach for the assessment of candidate qualifications. Today, the "structured interview" is recognized as the most valid and reliable employment interviewing technique. It has become the standard interview approach within the human resource profession. The term structured interview refers to a formal, systematic, and standardized interview process in which all candidates are (1) assessed under the same testing conditions; (2) provided the same introductory instructions; (3) asked the same set of job-related interview questions, in the same order; and, (4) evaluated against pre-determined, job-related scoring criteria.

Legal Considerations

Interviews, including formally defined structured interviews, are considered to be examinations under the provisions of the *Uniform Guidelines on Employee Selection Procedures* (29 CFR Part 1607). It is important that provisions of the *Uniform Guidelines* are adhered to when interview processes are developed and administered. The content of the interview, as well as the scoring criteria, must be *job-related* and based upon *job analytic data* for the job classification for which the interview process is being used.

Development of a Structured Interview

Determining the Content of the Interview. The first step in developing a structured interview is to determine the content of the interview. Beginning with a job analysis and working with subject matter experts (SMEs), it is necessary to identify the dimensions (i.e., content areas) to assess. The job analysis will identify the important knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs) required for successful job performance upon entry to the job. Working from the job analysis, those KSAs which can be *best assessed* through an interview process can be identified. The SMEs should then review the proposed KSAs to determine final content of the interview and ensure

appropriate job-relatedness of the dimensions selected. To minimize sampling error and ensure adequate reliability of the interview process, a sufficient number of dimensions should be assessed. As a rule of thumb, ten dimensions should be assessed.

Developing the Interview Questions. Once the general content areas of the interview have been identified, the next step in the development process is to determine the format of the interview questions and develop the questions themselves. Appropriate question types and formats should be used to best assess the KSAs included in the interview. There are four major types of interview questions:

Job knowledge questions assess a knowledge or skill required to successfully perform the duties of the job. Example:

How is exam security related to the reliability of a selection process?

Background questions focus on work experience, education, and other qualifications required for successful job performance. Example:

Describe your experience resolving exam security issues. Include specific details of the security issues.

Situational questions pose hypothetical situations that may occur on the job and ask candidates to describe how they would handle the situation. Example:

Assume you are an exam analyst. In the course of developing an interview process, you are told that one of your SMEs has discussed the interview questions with one of the candidates. How would you handle this situation?

Behavioral questions focus on past behavior by asking candidates to describe what they have done in previous jobs that relates to the requirements of the job for which they are interviewing. Example:

Tell us about a time when you had to resolve a breach in exam security.

Clarity of wording. Apart from the types of questions utilized for the interview process, all questions should be worded clearly and concisely. The candidate should know exactly what is being asked by each of the questions without having to second-guess the wording or intent of the question.

Difficulty level. The KSAs assessed in the interview should be assessed at a level that is appropriate given the requirements of the job. The goal of the interview is two-fold: to determine if a candidate possesses the KSAs required on the job (i.e., is he/she qualified?) and to distinguish better-qualified candidates from less-qualified candidates. Interview questions should be developed with this goal in mind. It is important that each question assess KSAs required of candidates upon entry to the job. Very easy questions which most candidates are likely to answer correctly may not assess the competence of the candidates and will not distinguish better-qualified candidates from the less-qualified candidates. On the other hand, very difficult questions, which few candidates are likely to answer correctly, may require a level of knowledge or skill above that which is required on the job. Questions which assess KSAs at a level higher than that required on the job may be difficult to legally defend as being job-related and appropriate for selection decisions.

Correct answers. Correct answers should be developed for every question. For questions that do not necessarily have just one correct answer or a definite wrong answer, acceptable answers should be listed. In some cases, it

may be appropriate to outline main points to be covered in a response rather than require a definitive answer.

Developing the Scoring Criteria. To ensure objective, reliable ratings by the interview panel, a comprehensive scoring system should be developed. The scoring system should provide for every interview question to be scored, rather than one holistic rating of overall candidate performance in the interview process. The scoring of the interview process should follow a criterion-referenced model in which candidate responses are evaluated against pre-established scoring criteria. The assessment of individual candidate performance should be based on job-related criteria, as opposed to the relative comparison of one candidate to another. The scoring system should utilize benchmark answers and a numeric rating scale.

Benchmark answers. The benchmark answers should be developed for each question, based on job-related criteria, and tied (or anchored) to the rating scale. The benchmark answers will provide the interview panel with a detailed means of rating specific candidate responses and will assist the panel in making objective, reliable ratings. When thoroughly developed and appropriately utilized, benchmarks determine how a particular response should be rated, regardless of any other factor present in the interview.

Rating scales. Rating scales of 5, 7, and 9 points are common in the assessment field and work extremely well in rating candidate interview performance. Rating scales with more than ten points are difficult to use and often result in diminished inter- and intra-rater reliability. The rating scale selected for the interview process should be tied to the benchmark answers developed.

Setting Pass Points

As with other selection procedures, it is necessary to establish job-related pass points for interview processes. By definition, the anchored rating scales and benchmark answers used to score the interview process will assist in establishing the pass point.

Administering the Interview

Scheduling the Interview. During the development phase of the interview process, it is important to ensure that adequate time is provided for the administration of the interviews. Candidates should have sufficient time to answer all of the questions asked, and the interview panel should have sufficient time to evaluate each candidate immediately after each interview. To ensure the reliability of the interview process, all candidates must be afforded the opportunity to answer all of the interview questions. The most important consideration in scheduling the interviews is to ensure adequate time for each candidate to be asked every question.

Selecting the Interview Panel. Interview panels should consist of at least three panel members. One panel member, typically functioning as the panel chairperson, should be thoroughly familiar with conducting structured interviews. The other two panel members should be subject matter experts in a job class above the level for which the interview is being conducted. It is extremely important that the interview panel members be knowledgeable of the job class for which the interviews are being conducted and thoroughly familiar with the job requirements.

Training the Interview Panel. Training on the structured interview process should be provided to the interview panel members

prior to the commencement of the interviews. The panel members should be given clear direction on what is expected of them throughout the process. Training for the panel members should include the following:

- An overview of the structured interview process, including a discussion of the interview process and the role of each panel member
- An overview of the job duties and KSA requirements for the job class for which the interviews are being conducted, which could include distribution of the exam bulletin, class specification, and/or duty statement
- A review of each question, answer, and corresponding scoring benchmarks
- A review of the rating scale, including the pre-defined pass point. The panel members should also understand how the rating scale works in conjunction with the benchmark answers.

Additionally, the panel members should be instructed that when asking the interview questions, they should read each question exactly as it is written to ensure consistency across all interviews.

Confidentiality. Each panel member should be reminded of the confidentiality of the interview process. The questions, answers, benchmarks, and rating scales are confidential. The names of competitors are also confidential. Any discussions held by the panel members during the interviews, including specific comments made by individual panel members, are confidential, as well. It is the responsibility of each of the panel members to preserve the integrity and confidentiality of the interview process before, during, and after the interviews are conducted.

Conducting the Interviews. The role of the interview panel is to assess candidate qualifications for a specific job class in the most objective manner possible. The behavior of the panel members should be consistent throughout the interview process to ensure fair and equitable treatment of all candidates. It is imperative that the interview panel administer the same interview to all candidates (i.e., ask all candidates the same questions in the same order, use the same scoring criteria for all candidates). The interview panel should not deviate from the prepared interview questions, nor should the panel members rely on prior knowledge of the candidates when rating the candidates' qualifications. The panel members should understand that the intent of the interview process is to afford each candidate the opportunity to demonstrate his/her qualifications in a structured and standardized manner.

Conclusion

A properly developed structured interview can provide a valid, reliable assessment of candidate qualifications. This monograph has introduced some of the principles that are fundamental in the development of psychometrically sound structured interviews.

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