Why Is The Traditional Human Resources Interview A Flawed Method In Personnel Selection Of Experienced Professionals

Cheryl F. Dixon

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Why is the traditional human resources interview a flawed method in personnel selection of experienced professionals?

By

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
Requirements of the Degree of Master of Arts in Corporate and Public Communications
Seton Hall University

2005
ABSTRACT: “Why is the traditional human resources interview a flawed method in personnel selection of experienced professionals?” – By Cheryl Fentelle Dixon

Human capital is considered by many business leaders to be a company’s most valuable asset. At senior levels, employees’ actions, talent and skill have even more impact on the financial success and overall culture of a company, and are considered critical resources. Even within a large talent pool, finding the right combination of experience, capability, work ethic and personality in one person can be a challenge. Yet the limited time invested in choosing candidates to fill experienced level roles and the evaluation and selection methods used do not necessarily reflect the seriousness of the personnel decision.

Some research estimates that two thirds of hiring decisions are ineffective in that the newly hired employees are not fully capable or sufficiently motivated to do the job they are hired to do. These shortcomings might become evident in a relatively short timeframe and a company can mitigate loss by attempting to correct a hiring mistake quickly. But other undesirable characteristics, such as poor work ethic, dishonesty or lack of managerial skills may make themselves known later in an employee’s career—costing the company increasing amounts of time and money.

The estimated cost of a bad hiring decision in senior level positions has varied: the U.S. Department of Labor reports the cost to be 30 percent of the new employee’s first year’s potential earnings; other sources estimate the impact to be one to two times the employee’s annual salary.
Therefore, the ability to predict employees' performance before they are hired translates into improved service and savings of real dollars.

But something is clearly amiss in the interviewing process. One prominent career advisory expert asserts that more than 75% of "ineffective" or "failed" hires can be traced to flaws or gaps in the hiring process.

Flaws in the interviewing process have been widely acknowledged by business leaders, human resources professionals and researchers. This criticism centers on the interview's unreliability and invalidity due to a number of process contaminants, several of which are detailed in this thesis. However, research clearly indicates the traditional interview remains a common tool in the personnel selection process.
Our lives are shaped not only by our experiences, but also by those with whom we choose to surround ourselves.

The author would like to thank Professor Rick Dool for his honest assessment and genuine encouragement throughout the course of this thesis and Dr. Patricia Kuchon for her guidance throughout the author's four-year graduate experience. She would also like to thank those friends and family members who exuded support and pride, and constantly reminded that, “if it were easy, then everyone would do it.” And most of all, the author would like to thank her husband Steven, for his overwhelming patience, love and balance.
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Chapter I
INTRODUCTION

Human capital is considered by many business leaders to be a company's most valuable asset. At senior levels, employees' actions, talent and skill have even more impact on the financial success and overall culture of a company, and are considered critical resources. Even within a large talent pool, finding the right combination of experience, capability, work ethic and personality in one person can be a challenge. Yet the limited time invested in choosing candidates to fill experienced level roles and the evaluation and selection methods used do not necessarily reflect the seriousness of the personnel decision.

Some research estimates that two thirds of hiring decisions are ineffective in that the newly hired employees are not fully capable or sufficiently motivated to do the job they are hired to do (Inglesi & Milardo, 2004). These shortcomings might become evident in a relatively short timeframe and a company can mitigate loss by attempting to correct a hiring mistake quickly. But other undesirable characteristics, such as poor work ethic, dishonesty or lack of managerial skills may make themselves known later in an employee's career—costing the company increasing amounts of time and money.

The estimated cost of a bad hiring decision in senior level positions has varied: the U.S. Department of Labor reports the cost to be 30 percent of the new employee's first year's potential earnings, (VanDerWall, 1999); other sources estimate the impact to be one to two times the employee's annual salary (Simons, 1995).

Therefore, the ability to predict employees' performance before they are hired translates into improved service and savings of real dollars (Simons, 1995).
Gathering the pertinent information to enable a hiring manager or recruiter to make a prediction about a candidate occurs during the interview process. Ideally, an employment interview is expected to reveal a candidate's skills, experience and glimpse into his or her personality so that the interviewer can make an educated choice on which candidate will perform best and who is likely to be most successful. It is natural to assume that the higher a job level, the more skill and talent the candidate should possess. "And, where skill requirements are greater, other things equal, it should be expected that employers have a greater need for effective employee selection and may engage in more selection activities" (Cappelli & Wilk, 2003, p. 103).

But something is clearly amiss in the interviewing process. One prominent career advisory expert asserts that more than 75% of "ineffective" or "failed" hires can be traced to flaws or gaps in the hiring process (Harwood, 2004).

Flaws in the interviewing process have been widely acknowledged by business leaders, human resources professionals and researchers. This criticism centers on the interview's unreliability and invalidity due to a number of process contaminants, several of which will be detailed later in this thesis. Adding to the challenge is the growing number of experienced interviewees, who have been coached to put their best foot forward and have practiced their answers to tricky interview questions.

Alternate interviewing techniques and supplemental tools aimed to lessen the influence of these contaminants, such as group and behavioral interviewing and candidate testing, are becoming increasingly common. However, research clearly indicates the traditional interview remains a common tool in the personnel selection process (Sears & Rowe, 2003; Graves & Karren, 1996).
According to Graves & Karren, "in spite of evidence that structured interviews are more effective, about 70% of organizations use unstructured interviews in which the interviewer is totally responsible for the nature of the interview. In many cases, the interview consists of superficial, shoot-from-the-hip questions... as it is practiced in most organizations, is not likely to yield good selection decisions." (pp. 29-30).

According to human resources professionals responding to a recent poll conducted by the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM), the interview is a critical factor in personnel selection.

In fact, human resources professionals rated the interview as the most influential attribute in their decision to hire a particular job candidate over other applicants (SHRM Weekly Online Poll, "How Important is Each Attribute in the Hiring Process? July 1, 2003).
A poll conducted by the Society of Human Resource Management revealed that candidate performance during the interview process was the most influential attribute in the decision to hire. Forty-five percent rated this attribute as “very influential,” and 51 percent rated it “influential.”

DEFINITION OF TERMS

Traditional/unstructured interview - For the purpose of this thesis, the “traditional” interview process involves a pool of candidates selected for interview on the basis of their resume or reference. The interview is often first conducted by a member of the human resources department or professional recruiter, who then determines if the candidate should move on to the next round of consideration and discussion with the candidate’s potential supervisor. These interviews typically last from 20 minutes to an hour. Follow up interviews may take place to further narrow the candidate pool.
Flawed method - Identifying an interview method as flawed considers that it is subject to too many variables to consistently result in the best candidate being chosen for a position.

Experienced professionals – Employees in any field or profession whose level of skill and combination of talents and experience make them unique resources; and, whose contributions directly affect the success of their companies.

Recruiter - The recruiter is the person whose job it is to act on a hiring request, generate candidate interest in an open position, solicit resumes and coordinate the screening and selection process.

Hiring Manager - The hiring manager is the person who initiates the hiring request; often the person who will supervise or work closely with the new employee.

**THESIS QUESTION AND SUB-QUESTIONS**

The research question explored in this thesis is, “Why is the traditional human resources interview a flawed method in personnel selection of experienced professionals?”

Related sub-questions are:

- Who is conducting the interviews?
- How do first impressions affect the interview process?
- What skills should/does the interviewer possess?
- How long does it take for the interviewer to make a decision about a candidate?
- How heavily does the interview influence the personnel selection process?

The author’s personal interview experiences and studies in communication have led to her decision to research this topic. She has been interviewed by recruiters who were not knowledgeable about the job for which she was interviewing and did not have an understanding about the communications process. This lack of knowledge raised doubts
surrounding the recruiters' respective abilities to draw educated conclusions about the author's
talent and abilities as a communications professional. The author believes she has experienced
personal bias when a recruiter that had previously been enthusiastic during a lengthy telephone
interview became aloof when meeting in person. When talking with colleagues about good
and bad hires, it seems that everyone had a story to tell: "There was something about her that
told me the fit wasn't right, but she had the experience." "He interviewed flawlessly. He had all
the right answers to my questions." "She was a former magazine editor. How was I to know
that she couldn't write well?" Finally, even before embarking on her research, the author
theorized that the interview process is based largely on interpersonal communication and
therefore subject to a countless combination of variables and human bias.

THESIS LIMITATIONS

This thesis will not examine in detail the levels of success achieved by alternate
methods of personnel selection, including tests, psychological profiles or interview techniques
other than that which has been defined as "traditional."

The resulting effects of "bad hires" on the company and will also not be examined.

Ineffective interview processes and their prevalence of use on the part of the
interviewer will be examined, but the author will not detail the adverse effects of poor
interviewing techniques or processes on the candidate's or interviewee's perception of the
hiring company. However, it is worthy of noting that, especially in an active job market,
research has shown that companies stand to lose promising candidates by prolonging the
interviewing and decision-making processes or giving candidates a bad impression of the
culture either through conducting difficult interviews or administering extensive tests.
Though human bias is explored in some detail, each tenet of the subject is worthy of its own thesis. The affects of perceived physical attractiveness, non-verbal communication and cultural differences on the interview process will not be covered in depth.

Finally, the author will not attempt to offer solutions to correct the flaws believed to be inherent in the interview process.

Chapter II

HISTORY

Considering the popularity of the employment interview as a selection and recruiting device, the amount of attention paid to the topic is not surprising. Much research has been conducted on the validity of the interview and the level of success it brings to the personnel selection process. This research, published in academic and human resources trade publications, psychological and organizational behavior journals, among others, includes studies on interpersonal communications, how personnel decisions are made and various effects of different variables on the interview process. In the past 10 years, the number of studies conducted on the interview process has steadily increased, indicating a heightened interest in the topic (Campion, Morgeson & Posthuma, 2002).

It is important to note that much of the non-academic reference material on the topic of interviewing available today to the general business population is geared toward the interviewee.

Web searches on Google, Factiva, Lexis Nexis and business publication archives generated hundreds of articles targeted to job-hunting professionals. An abundance of information on how to dress, how to answer tricky questions, how to speak, act and put the best foot forward makes for a very prepared job candidate. Less information was observed for
human resource and recruiting professionals on how to interview candidates. Information for managers that participate in the hiring process is far more scarce.

EXAMINING THE INTERVIEW PROCESS

Practically speaking, "the most important property of a personnel assessment method is predictive validity: the ability to predict future job performance, job-related learning (such as amount of learning in training and development programs), and other criteria" (Hunter & Schmidt, 1998).

The concept seems simple—the more information the interviewer can obtain about a candidate to validate his perceptions, the better. But what information is good information? What characteristics can the interviewee display that will give a positive indication of his potential success? How can the interviewer know if the interviewee is being honest and forthcoming in his presentation? And, how much insight into a candidate’s personality and work style can be gathered during the course of a half-hour or hour-long interview? Realistically, interviews, even when handled properly, provide only a small portion of information about an applicant’s potential (Guinn, 1993).

"The (interview) situation is complicated further by the fact that applicants are busy selling themselves in the interview, and companies often are too busy selling the opportunity to potential hires. Research also indicates that 24 percent of job application information is distorted. All of these factors raise the odds against making good hiring decisions" (Guinn, 1993).
THE CHALLENGE OF THE INFORMED INTERVIEWEE

According to recruiting company Robert Half Finance & Accounting, candidates are becoming more interview-savvy with a raft of information and advice helping them to prepare for interviews. Interviewers need to ensure they are at least as well prepared. (The Christchurch Press, 2004).

Industrial psychologist Gregory M. Loung-Nont notes that "for every book written on how to interview job candidates, there is a corresponding one on how to impress an interviewer, complete with pat answers to questions. Interviewees are trained to answer tough interview questions and make it more difficult for the interviewer to truly assess their skills. Employers need to realize that job seekers today are prepared, sometimes even 'groomed, for the interview" (USA Today, Dec, 1996).

Preparing for an interview is easier than ever for job-seekers. There is a plethora of company information and an archive of industry-related news articles readily available on the Internet. Prospective employees can even get the inside scoop on company culture, thanks to Web sites like vault.com, which contains message boards from current and former company employees and tips on how to get hired. So, with some quality time in front of the computer, it is possible to read the company's last annual report, the biographies of key company leaders, learn about recent challenges and competition's activities and perhaps even peruse expert opinions about the company in trade articles.

Survey results prove that job candidates that research their desired employer before their interviews have an advantage over those that don't. According to a Society for Human Resources Management poll, familiarity with the organization was determined to be an
influential attribute in the decision to hire a particular job candidate over other applicants, with
59% of respondents naming it “very influential” or “influential” in their hiring decision. Other
factors of influence included an advanced degree, employee referral and impressive cover letter
(SHRM Weekly Online Poll, July 1, 2003).

RESOURCES AND TRAINING DEDICATED TO PERSONNEL SELECTION

Although many companies acknowledge the importance of finding and selecting the
right people, they often set themselves up to fail by not having good hiring practices in place or
dedicating the time needed to find quality candidates. (Inglese, 2004). According to personnel
consultant M.A. Inglese, “Businesses spend huge amounts on research and development,
marketing, computer systems, etc. and yet will cut corners in the one area that assures the long-
term success of their company—having the right people on board” (Inglese, 2004).

The responsibility of bringing the right people on board usually falls, at least in the
eyearly stages, on the recruiter.

INTERVIEWER SKILL AND EXPERIENCE

Some experts say that skilled interviewers may be able to uncover clues to potentially
undesirable behavior and personality challenges through carefully constructed questions and
experience in interpreting candidate response. But are the people conducting the interviews
indeed skilled recruiters?

Human resources consultant and executive recruiter, Fred Panenter, of Panenter,
Panenter, Brezler and Degnis Limited in Toronto, says that recruitment is often still treated as
an entry-level position into human resources. “In many cases those people are not sufficiently
attuned to the needs of the business and then what happens is, when it comes to presenting people to the hiring manager, there is a mismatch," he says. (Brown, 2003).

A recruiter’s level of professional experience and industry exposure also affects their hiring decisions. In the same SHRM poll mentioned previously, 24% of respondents said that their own familiarity with the candidate’s previous employer(s) was an influential attribute in their decision-making.

Lack of experience in a particular subject matter also affects recruiter perceptions. Even experienced human resources generalists may need to interview candidates in areas where they themselves lack knowledge and skill, affecting their abilities to probe deeply into a candidate’s skill set.

"It's easy [for interviewers] to feel vulnerable when [they] are responsible for interviewing, recommending or hiring technicians with expertise beyond [their] scope. Still, [they’ll] probably have to do it—and make hire/no hire recommendations or decisions. Even supervisors aren't always expected to have the same level of technical competence as the people they hire—especially when you are talking about arcane fields of study" (Falcone, 2002).

Inexperienced interviewers may have an impractical view on the necessary skills required for a job or differ from others in their opinions on the most important factors they seek in a candidate.

Many experts say hiring managers are even less skilled in the interview process, asking questions that lead to a general impression of the candidate instead of seeking information about how he or she would perform in the job. "Most entrepreneurs haven't been trained in the hiring process," said Beau Laskey, a director at venture capital firm EDF Ventures. "Most
people have developed bad habits from being interviewed themselves. The same ineffective questions get perpetuated." (Pope, 2003).

Interview expert William S. Swan, Ph.D., investigated the interview process for the development of an academic program and concluded that most managers and others involved in the interview process have not been trained or provided with the information and techniques necessary to make accurate hiring decisions. He estimated that "no more than 10 percent to 12 percent of those actively involved in hiring new employees have any kind of formal training on how to conduct an interview" (Tapia, 2003). Graves and Karren (1996) found that only 48% of large corporations require interviewers to receive training before conducting campus interviews (p. 30).

A recent online poll by HRTools.com supports Swan's assertion. A majority of respondents to the poll indicated that their organizations do not provide interview training for managers.

Does Your Organization Provide Interview Training for Managers?

Plan To

No

Yes

0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60%

Source: (http://www.hrtools.com/OpinionResults.asp?PollID=1&Action=PreviousResults)
Results based on 783 online responses

Without training, how accurately can interviewers process the information they receive? The validity of the interviewer's perception is likely to decrease when he or she is not experienced. "It's kind of taken for granted that people know how to interview," says Jaine Bentley, regional manager of recruitment agency Adecco. "But nine times out of 10, it's not part of their main role." (The Guardian, p. 9, 2004).

"In many cases managers have been the weak link in the actual selection process because they didn't know how to conduct interviews effectively. This is even more of a problem today because candidates are much more educated about job interviews than they once were" (Brown, p. 7, 2003).

Bentley also points to the lack of time hiring managers and recruiters devote to interviews. Interviews are often fit in during the day around other responsibilities. The inevitable result is a longer and costlier process than would happen if there were time dedicated to personnel selection.

DEcision making

In a study of how recruiters at a large service company evaluated job applicants Graves & Karren (1996) found that recruiters did not base their decisions on the same factors. "When, in fact, they did rely on the same factors, the importance they attached to the factors varied greatly" (p. 167). They also found that the differences in the interviewers' approaches to
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![Diagram of poll results](http://www.hrtools.com/OpinionResults.aspx?PollID=1&Action=PreviousResults)

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Based on this theory, a candidate's chances at being recommended for a job depends on the correlation of their strengths with factors a certain recruiter holds in high regard. Candidate A could have the skills Reviewer B is seeking—but if Candidate A is interviewed by Reviewer A, it is possible the candidate will not be perceived as well.

The study also found that interviewers' actual decision process did not always match their preferred decision processes. Participants in the study were asked to rank five factors for success for a particular job, however, not all interviewers used the factors in a manner that matched their rankings—some were completely contradictory in their methods.
THE RECRUITER/MANAGER RELATIONSHIP

A correlation can be drawn, based on the information presented thus far, between the amount of interview preparation and interviewer skill and the amount of valid information procured during the interview process. The apparent lack of interview training of non-human resources professionals presented earlier becomes significant when considering the level to which these professionals become involved in the interviewing process.

Hiring managers may work closely or not at all with their company's human resource department during the recruiting process. For example, at Ottawa General Hospital, the recruitment and selection team takes care of all initial job postings, but managers conduct their own interviews, calling human resources for assistance only when faced with a unique challenge (Brown, pg. 8, 2003).

Dividing the responsibility for recruitment efforts between recruiter and hiring manager is more common. If the two are not on the same page, however, "the hiring process could get awfully messy. HR managers are accused of getting in the way of things or not delivering good quality candidates, while some managers continue to insist the best way to make a hire is on 'gut feelings'" (Brown, pg 7 2003).

INTERVIEW METHODS

Interviewing is not just about the type of questions asked, it is about how the interview is structured and the technique used to draw out information that matters. (The Christchurch Press, pg. 1, 2004).
Years of study have led to some best practices in the interview process. Experts agree on some techniques, such as using several interviewers to get a well-rounded picture, letting the applicant do most of the talking and eliciting anecdotes about past behavior rather than speculating on future actions. However, they disagree on other tactics.

Novice managers sometimes think that asking difficult "trick" questions is a good way to test how a candidate reacts under stress. "Not only is that method ineffective in assessing a candidate's future behavior, it is likely to distort the interviewer's judgment of the candidate's aptitude for the job" (Journal of Accountancy).

Industrial psychologist Michael Mercer believes in lengthy, high-pressure interviews for high-pressure jobs. Barry Shamis, president of Selecting Winners, a Mercer Island, Wash., consulting firm insists there's no correlation between handling pressure in an interview and on the job (Lancaster, 1998).

Advancements in interview research methodology and in interviewing techniques have shown that interviews can achieve impressive reliability and validity (Stevens & Kristof, 1995).

As the flaws in the traditional interview process became commonly acknowledged, other interviewing techniques aimed at lessening bias and making the process more equitable and productive have evolved. Following are some of the more commonly used methods:

Structured interviews
Structured interviewing involves approaching the interview with a pre-planned agenda. The interviewer knows ahead of time what questions he will ask the applicant. According to a Society of Human Resources white paper, some interviewers will ask the questions in order and others will take a more relaxed approach but are still sure to address all of the pre-planned
questions. This type of interviewing style generally provides the interviewer with the
information needed to make the hiring decision. It is also important as a defense against
discrimination in hiring and selection, because all applicants are asked the same questions.

Several studies have reported practically useful validities for structured interviews and
results of several meta-analyses indicate that structured interviews are more valid and more
reliable than unstructured interviews. Of course, the potential psychometric advantage of a
structured interview format depends entirely on interviewers' willingness to actually follow it.
"As shown in a study by Latham and Saari (1984), however, we cannot always assume that
interviewers use a structured format as its developers intended, and if they do not, there is no
reason to expect their judgments to be any more valid than judgments based on an unstructured
format" (Brck, & Motowidlo, 2002).

Situational Interviews

The situational interview is a structured interview in that all applicants are asked the
same questions, but is more focused on questions on real scenarios. The situational interview
can take several forms, such as asking an applicant to deal with an angry "customer" played by
one of the interviewers or having an applicant pose a step-by-step strategy to handle a business
problem (Penttila, 2004).

Penttila references the Handbook of Industrial and Organizational Psychology, which
reports that the situational interview is 54 percent accurate in predicting future job
performance, compared to the traditional interview, which is just 7 percent accurate.

Some managers find the situational interview to be more practical than either the
patterned or unstructured interview because it allows them to compare the applicants on an
objective basis, and thus hire them on job-related, legally defensible criteria. (Latham & Sue-Chan, 1999).

Behavioral-based Interviews

Behavioral-based interviewing relies on a series of specific questions designed to give an employer a better idea of exactly how a candidate has successfully completed projects or dealt with difficult situations in previous jobs. Candidates answer hypothetical work challenges and also give insight to what experience they identify as the most career-significant.

For example, a potential hire might be asked: "What steps would you follow to successfully handle an irate client?" "Smart companies that do a good job of interviewing will absolutely do case-study questions," says Cheri Paulson, senior vice president at Keystone Associates, a career management company in Boston. "People are looking for answers to prove a track record. Companies are saying, 'Prove it to me. Don't just say you did it, but prove it.'" (Watterson, 2004).

According to human resources consultant Linda Pittenger of People 3, in a typical, unstructured, one-on-one interview, a hiring manager has a 19% chance of making a good match for the job. That likelihood rises to 35% during unstructured team interviews. Using behavioral interviewing, the chances of getting the hire right jumps to 72%. (Schultz, 2003).

A key finding from analyses performed by Huffcutt, Conway, Roth & Stone (2001) was that low-structure and high-structure interviews do not tend to measure the same constructs. In particular, low-structure interviews often focus more on constructs such as general intelligence, education and training, experience, and interests, whereas high-structure interviews often focus more on constructs such as job knowledge and skills, organizational fit, interpersonal and social skills, and applied mental skills (e.g., problem solving, decision making). "Thus, π
would appear that structure influences not only the procedural conduct of the interview (e.g., consistency in the asking of questions and the manner in which responses are scored) but also what constructs are rated,” said the researchers. (Huffcutt, Conway, Roth & Stone, 2001)

Though it is generally accepted that structured interviews have higher validity in part because they represent more reliable assessment of responses, “our evidence suggests that structured interviews also have higher validity because the constructs rated more frequently in them (e.g., job knowledge, interpersonal skills, organizational fit) tend to be better predictors of performance than the constructs rated more frequently in low-structure interviews (e.g., interests, education, experience)” (Huffcutt, Conway, Roth & Stone, 2001).

SOCIAL FACTORS AND INTERVIEWER BIAS

At a fundamental level, the interview is a social interaction between the interviewer and applicant.

The results of a study by Huffcutt, Conway, Roth & Stone (2001) suggest that personality traits and applied social skills are rated more often in employeement interviews than are any other type of construct. These constructs reflect behavioral tendencies and provide employers with an idea of how potential employees are likely to act on the job and how well they can interact with other employees. Given the frequency with which they appeared to be rated (combined, they accounted for more than 50% of all the rated characteristics), it would seem that many employers are interested in behavioral tendencies and that they are an important part of many jobs.

Interpreting behavior and social skills can be quite a subjective process. Of all the contaminants present in the interview process, rater bias is considered one of the most influential. (Sears & Rowe, 2003) and (Morgeson & Campion, 1987).
Human bias may affect the selection process even before actual interviewing takes place. Because interviews are time intensive and costly, interviewers generally prescreen job applicants on the basis of their resumes before granting interviews. “Not surprisingly, research suggests that interviewers make many inferences about applicants’ abilities and interpersonal attributes on the basis of the biodata listed on applicants’ resumes. [This screening process] precludes many applicants from further consideration and it establishes interviewers’ initial perceptions of job applicants” (Cable & Gilovich, 1998).

As such, a number of scholars have examined how various social factors can influence interview outcomes. This research is predicated on the notion that individuals act and reside in a social context and this context can influence their behavior and the processes and outcomes of an interview (Campion, Morgeson & Poshuma, 2002).

It can be assumed that experienced professionals, and certainly those that have received interview coaching, know to put their best foot forward during the interview.

“Organizations that rely heavily on interviews to screen applicants need to be aware of how interviewee influence tactics affect their hiring decisions” (Kay & Kristof, 1995).

Flattery, it seems, does indeed get the interviewer somewhere. In a study that measured impression management tactics used by applicants during the interview process and whether there is a relationship between these tactics and their interview outcomes, the resulting research indicates that participants modify their self-presentations to match interviewer preferences during mock interviews (Kay & Kristof, 1995). For example, verbal praise given by the interviewee to increase interpersonal attraction has shown to be successful, even when contextual cues suggest that the he or she may have ulterior motives for providing praise.
The very fundamentals of human behavior lead to inconsistencies in our day-to-day social interaction.

Said Bentley, "the problem [with interviewing] is that on one day you’re not in the same mood and frame of mind as you may be on another." Therefore, one candidate gets asked one set of questions, which looked right at the time, and another candidate gets asked an entirely different subset (The Guardian, pg. 9, September 2004).

Some interview methods, such as testing and structured interviews, may aim to level the playing field. However, research findings suggest that the traditional interview enables the interviewer to make subjective interpretations based on non-job related variables (McShanem, 1993).

**FIRST IMPRESSIONS**

One of these social influences affecting the interview process is the natural tendency to form a perception based on first impressions.

"Studies show that as many as four out of five hiring decisions are made within the first 10 minutes of an interview" (Otting, 2004). Those decisions can be based on little more than the applicant's clothing or hairstyle, a subconscious stereotype or a preconceived notion about a particular candidate or type of candidate (Otting, 2004).

According to the recruitment agency Angel Human Resources, employers still rate appearance and performance at the interview as the most important criteria when choosing a new employee (Rentshaw, 2004).

A recent national survey carried out by the firm found that 42 percent of recruiters questioned are swayed by their first impression of a candidate. Good technical skills come second at 36 percent, followed by social skills at 20 percent (Rentshaw, 2004).
A Field Study of Interviewer Behavior of first impressions and their effect on the employment interview found that favorable first impressions were followed by interviewers' use of confirmatory behavior and styles, including a positive style of interviewing, selling the company, providing job information to applicants, less information-gathering from applicants, more confident and effective applicant behavior, and more rapport of applicants with interviewers (Callender, Dougherty & Turban, 1993).

However, this study found little support for the prediction that interviewers would spend more time with applicants for whom they had positive first impressions.

"The first impression a job candidate makes in an interview becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. In other words, if the interviewer feels favorably disposed to the candidate in those first few seconds that lead up to a handshake, it's likely that from then on, he or she will be judged positively. If responses to questions are self-assured, they will be judged as evidence of outstanding character; on the other hand, if the candidate creates an unfavorable first impression, those same self-assured responses will be interpreted as evidence of arrogance and bluster" (Journal of Accountancy, 2002).

More than half of all first impressions are driven by body language, posture, facial expressions and eye contact, according to psychological studies (Otting, 2004).

Several studies have shown that visual cues displayed by interviewees, such as physical attractiveness, eye contact, body orientation, smiling and hand gestures, affect the favorability of interviewers' judgments about their suitability for employment (DeGroot & Motowidlo, 1999).

Such cues send signals about a candidate's preparation and confidence. Moreover, studies show that attractive people are implicitly imbued by interviewers as having better
personalities, higher intelligence, more poise and greater honesty, just as neat people are presumed to be efficient, punctual and detail-oriented. (Otting, 2004).

The interviewer’s tendency to base perceptions on physical attributes, as one might expect, has negative effect when the candidate is thought unattractive. For example, Pingitore, Dugoni, Tindale & Spring, (1994) report “Considerable evidence suggests that, in Westernized cultures, those who are overweight are stereotypically perceived as having defects of will power, character and responsibility.” The stereotype that the obese are emotionally impaired, lazy, and selfish might be expected to lead to employment discrimination (Pingitore, Dugoni, Tindale & Spring, 1994).

Otting goes on to examine the fundamental flaws in false realities created by interviewers, such as presuming that a candidate who arrives late for an interview is always late. He stated, “Forming negative impressions about candidates who may have been caught in situations out of their control–or positive impressions about candidates because they’re attractive–can be self-serving.”

Emotional and cognitive evaluations may both influence the hiring decision, and the former are less likely to be educable by the provision of information. These findings provide little encouragement for the prospect that employment bias against the obese can be dispelled through training. Although training may discourage employers from making stereotypical attributions about personality traits, it may be much more difficult to prevent bimodal, affective, gut responses from influencing employment decisions (Pingitore, Dugoni, Tindale & Spring, 1994).

"LIKE ME" SYNDROME
Rater biases that result in positive perceptions include candidates that remind the interviewer of themselves, or another employee held in high regard.

"If the interviewer compares applicants to an "ideal-employee" stereotype — the more similar a given applicant to the ideal-employee, the more likely he or she will be selected" (Sears, DeGroote, & Rowe, 2003).

The "similar-to-me effect" results in more favorable interview ratings to candidates who possess similar demographic and attitudinal characteristics to the interviewer.

The same source reports data supporting the existence of an ideal-employee schema; however, it was also discovered that the similar-to-me effect was most striking when incumbents for the target position served as interviewers. These results suggest that when interviewers feel they possess the competencies required for the job (i.e., they perceive themselves as the "ideal-employee"), interviewer-applicant similarity will exact a substantial effect on interview judgments. Therefore, interviewers often invoke an "ideal-employee" schema in their applicant evaluations and gauge each applicant's compatibility with their own skill/trait profile.

Several explanations for the similar-to-me effect have been offered. One theory is that similarity increases the likelihood that one will receive consensual validation for one's own views and opinions. This reinforcement, in turn, evokes favorable feelings toward the similar other (Sears, DeGroote, & Rowe, 2003).

Lin, Dobbins, & Fahr (1992) found that stronger "similar-to-me" effects emerged with the conventional structured interview relative to the situational interview, and suggested that the less structured interview affords the opportunity for candidates to share favorable information not expressly requested by the interviewer, while more rigorous formats force
raters to make evaluations on the basis of whether a response corresponds to a predetermined benchmark.

Dipboye & Gaugler (1993) maintain that “unstructured procedures are more vulnerable to interview bias, and judgments made in the unstructured interview are fuelled, to a large extent, by affect” (Sears, DeGroote, & Rowe, 2003).

Simons (1995) also asserts that “carefully planned and focused interviews reduce the chances that hiring decisions will be influenced by subtle and not-so-subtle biases and errors.”

CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

Cultural differences can affect behavior, to negative consequence—again, depending on the ability of the interviewer to recognize cultural characteristics. For example, applicants from cultures that place emphasis on relationship building may be put off by aggressive or abrupt interview styles. Martinez (2004) posed this scenario: “A candidate comes into your office for a job interview. Instead of looking right at your face, he casts his eyes downward—a gesture that signifies respect in his Asian culture. But your immediate first thought is, ‘Can I trust him?’ This is a very realistic example of how behavior can take on negative consequences if the parties involved aren’t aware of cultural differences.”

NON VERBAL COMMUNICATION AND INTERACTION DURING THE INTERVIEW PROCESS

Nonverbal communication is considered by the interviewer and the applicant during the interview.

Recruiters give their own non-verbal cues during the interview process, often the basis of the candidate’s impression of the organization. For example, in a study by Rynes and Miller (1983), positive recruiter affect (including steady eye contact, verbal indications of applicant
response approval, frequent smiling and nods of encouragement, and positive reactions to the applicant's attempts at humor) was related to how well the company was perceived to treat its employees, the perceived likelihood of an offer being extended, and perceptions of the recruiter as a good representative of the organization (Chapman & Uggerslev, 2003). An interviewer who is pressed for time and glances at his watch frequently, or one who does not feel comfortable in the situation and neglects eye contact, is sending strong negative signals to the interviewee. When considering the effect of the interviewer's non-verbal language on the interview, it is important to remember that the interviewee is also seeking information to make his own decision about the job and the company.

Applicants often look to verbal and nonverbal feedback from the interviewer as an indication of how they are performing. These cues may prompt them to provide additional information or to curtail a response. In addition, applicants may try to use certain nonverbal behaviors or verbal cues in an effort to convey themselves favorably and to exchange information efficiently (Chapman, Uggerslev & Webster, 2003).

Studies found that visual cues are often more important than verbal information, though a combination of visual and verbal was most important in predicting interviewer ratings (Campion, Morgeson & Posthuma, 2002).

Visual and vocal cues also explain significant variance in the favorability of personal reactions that people form about interviewees.

A study by DeGroot & Motowidlo (1999) tested the relationships between nonverbal visual and vocal cues displayed by interviewees and (a) personal reactions, such as liking, trust and attributed credibility, that interviewers might form toward interviewees and that coworkers
might form toward managerial job incumbents; (b) interviewers' judgments about interviewees' suitability for employment; and (c) interviewees' job performance.

The researchers found that both the combined effects of specific visual cues and the combined effects of specific vocal cues explain significant variance in interviewers' judgments about applicants' suitability for employment in managerial positions.

Said DeGroot & Motowidlo, "we expect that interviewees who are physically attractive, smile more, gaze more in the interviewer's direction, use expressive hand movements more and lean toward instead of away from the interviewer are most likely to create a favorable impression" DeGroot & Motowidlo (1999).

Interviewers react to applicants' nonverbal visual and vocal cues by developing positive reactions related to the extent to which the applicants, as future employees, might be willing to help them, accept their suggestions, cooperate with them and so forth. These reactions affect the interviewers' judgments about applicants' suitability for employment, perhaps because interviewers assume that if applicants elicit these favorable personal reactions in the interview, they can elicit them on the job as well.

Chapter III
RESEARCH DESIGN AND DEVELOPMENT

The secondary research conducted for Chapter two supports the author's theory that a number of factors contribute to the limitations of the traditional interview process. To determine how, knowingly or unknowingly, the human resources professionals and hiring managers affect the interview process, the author devised two slightly different surveys to probe the level of preparation, interview techniques, factors affecting decision-making and
interviewing expertise of: 1) human resources professionals and recruiters; and 2) professionals in any industry that have interviewed job candidates or have at some point in their career been involved in a hiring decision.

There are several considerations the author will make when surveying these two groups separately. First, the survey analysis process must recognize and accommodate a certain expected level of interviewing expertise. A human resources professional whose job it is to recruit candidates can reasonably be expected to have more advanced interviewing skills than hiring managers. As such, it is expected that those professionals answering the survey will feel an obligation to possess a certain level of expertise in the field and answer accordingly. Similarly, as a target group, HR professionals may tend to collectively answer questions surrounding the effectiveness of the interview process and their effectiveness and influence in the hiring process in a positive manner. The author theorizes that hiring managers may be less convinced about the effectiveness of the interview—either because they have not received training, have experienced the ramifications of bad hires, or because they believe that personnel selection is the job of the human resources department. The HR professional target group, especially if the members have received interview training, is likely to recognize classic interview techniques and commonly made mistakes. Even if they are inconsistent in their personnel selection efforts, they are less likely to reveal this behavior in their survey responses.

The surveys include statements measured similarly to the Likert scale, as well as true/false and questions with “multiple choice” answers. As supported in the literature review section of this thesis, one of the main theories regarding the ineffectiveness of the traditional interview is the influence of human bias, which can be evident in countless combinations. The survey respondent may either not be aware that he is being influenced by personal bias, or may
be unwilling to admit it. The multiple choice answers provided are based on the findings of the literature review and reflect the most widely acknowledged contaminants in the interview process.

SURVEY OBJECTIVES

By reviewing the results from the two different surveys and control groups, the author hopes to compare and contrast the interviewers’ priorities, methods and decision-influencing factors. Also, the surveys are designed to determine how influential each group believes it is in the hiring process and to what extent it considers the recommendations of the other. This will prove to be especially important when considering the interview skill of each target group. If one target group indicates that it is generally more knowledge about the interview process and more objective in its decision-making than the other target group, then an analysis of which group is more influential in the process becomes increasingly critical.

The author will also seek to determine the level of interview preparation for both target groups. A quote in the introduction of this thesis introduces the concept that more time, money and effort are expended on other business decisions besides personnel selection, though recruitment of the right people is the most important company asset. By assessing the level of preparation and interview methods used, as well as discovering why the current methods are in place and if they’ve been improved upon, the author will attempt to support or counter the theory of inadequate recruiting resources.
CHAPTER IV

SURVEY RESULTS

Two groups, human resource professionals and non-HR or hiring professionals were surveyed. Surveys were sent to approximately 570 HR professionals, with an 18% response rate. The survey created for hiring professionals was distributed via email by several individuals to an unknown number of people, therefore the rate of return can not be determined for the 115 responses. As explained in Chapter III of this thesis, the questions of the two surveys differed slightly to take into account the assumed experience of HR/recruiters with the hiring process. The full surveys with statistical data are included as Appendices C and D.

The results presented in this chapter will compare and contrast the responses of the two survey groups when appropriate and as such, may not appear in the same order as on the respective surveys.

First, the surveys assessed the demographics of the respondents in terms of professional experience and level of interview frequency.

Years of Professional Experience:

![Graph showing years of experience](image)

Figure 1 - Years of experience
The author assumed that HR/recruiting professionals interview candidates on a rather consistent basis, so this group was not asked how often they interview. According to the survey results, the majority of hiring professionals (52%) conduct fewer than four interviews yearly. One respondent stated, “Interviewing makes me really nervous, I try not to participate in them. I think the person I’m interviewing is more confident that I am, and they usually end up controlling the interview.”
Other than your professional experience, have you had any formal (classroom or other) interview training?

![Diagram showing percentages of Hiring Professionals and HR Recruiters with training vs. no training.]

Figure 4 – Interview training

With a never-ending stream of information targeted at candidate preparation for job interviews, it is easy to overlook the role of the interviewer, according to Kim Smith of Robert Half Finance & Accounting (The Christchurch Press, 2004).

The findings of this survey are consistent with Smith’s statement. The majority of hiring professionals (57%) responded that they have not had formal interview training, considerably less than the percentage of HR/recruiting professionals (74%) that have received formal training.
What is the best method to prepare for an interview?

Figure 5 - Best method of interview preparation – Hiring professionals only

Again, it is assumed that the HR/recruiting professional has some level of expertise and would not prepare for an interview in the same way as one who did not conduct interviews regularly or as part of their job, therefore, only hiring professionals were polled. The majority of hiring professionals (67%) responded that preparing a list of questions to ask during the interview is the best way to prepare. In Chapter II, experts pointed to the lack of dedicated time spent on finding quality candidates as a hindrance in the process. Only 30% of respondents indicated that setting aside a dedicated amount of time is the most important preparation method.

The hiring manager typically shares a specific list of desired qualifications and personality criteria for a candidate.
Figure 6 – Hiring manager shares candidate criteria
True 92%  False 8%

I usually have a good understanding of the qualifications most important to the hiring manager.

Figure 7 – Hiring manager communicates qualifications
True 98%  False 2%

I receive enough feedback from the hiring manager to make good recommendations.

Figure 8 – Feedback from hiring manager
True 91%  False 9%

The answers to these questions largely portray a positive perception of the HR/hiring professional relationship. The HR/recruiter responses indicate that they receive the information and feedback they need to add value to the interview process.

HR generally has a good understanding of what I'm looking for in a candidate and helps in my search.
In contrast to the findings above, only 11% of the hiring professionals “strongly agree” that the working relationship between them is positive.

In response to the statement, “HR generally has a good understanding of what I’m looking for in a candidate and helps in my search,” the majority (63%) of hiring managers “somewhat agree.” The second strongest response (12%) to this statement was “disagree.”
On average, how much influence does HR in your company have on the decision-making process?

![Bar chart showing levels of HR influence on decision-making process](image)

**Figure 10 - Level of HR Influence on the decision-making process**

The majority of hiring manager respondents (43%) believe that HR has "some influence," followed by 30% who think it has "not much influence" on the decision-making process; only 7% of HR/recruiters agree with this belief. The majority of HR/recruiter respondents (43%) believe they have a strong influence on the decision-making process; only 11% of hiring professionals agree.

Do you vary the questions you ask of candidates applying for the same position?

![Bar chart showing incidence of question variance](image)

**Figure 11 - Incidence of question variance**
This question was asked to determine the level of use of structured interviews. This interviewing method, in which all candidates are asked the same series of questions, is praised by experts who believe it to contribute to a more equitable interview process. This question was also asked to ascertain the level of knowledge of the survey respondents – if they knew exactly what a structured interview entailed.

Of the 62 HR/recruiting respondents that claim to use structured interviews, 16 (26%) said they vary the questions they ask during the interview process – directly contradicting their original claim. In the hiring professional group, of the 24 respondents that claim to use structured interviews, 18 of them (75%) vary their questions during the interview process. These findings show a clear lack of understanding of the structured interview method.

How much time do you typically spend with an applicant before forming an opinion about his or her candidacy?

![Bar chart showing time spent with applicants before forming an opinion]

Figure 12: Time spent with applicants before forming opinions about candidacy.

The responses from HR/Recruiters were evenly divided, with only a 2 – 3% deviation from one response to the next. The 0 – 20 minute time frame was slightly more common than the 20 – 40 minute time frame for both survey groups. Hiring professionals, however, are much...
least likely to spend more than 40 minutes with a candidate. Only 12% responded that they needed this amount of time to form an opinion.

![Bar Chart](image)

**Figure 13:** Time spent with applicants before forming opinion about candidacy, broken down by level of recruiter experience

As a group, HR/Recruiter responses were evenly distributed. However, closer examination of the data, when broken out by recruiter experience level, reveals a distinct trend among this representative sampling. Inexperienced recruiters (0 – 3 years of experience) form an impression much more quickly than mid-level and experienced recruiters. The majority of experienced recruiters (50%) require more than 40 minutes to make a decision, compared to the 9% required by inexperienced recruiters.
What factors do you rely on most heavily to make your personnel recommendations? Check three.

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Figure 14: Factors relied on most heavily to make personnel recommendations.
(HR/Recruiters not polled on first two categories.)

"After resume screening and perhaps a phone interview, by the time a candidate actually walks through the door, the interviewer knows that he or she has the skills for the job and on paper, is a good fit," says Christine Fay, an account executive for recruiting firm Robert Half International. "So, you're looking for what you can't know by reading a resume."

What characteristics are interviewers looking for? The strength of the resume and skill set weigh in heavily on personnel recommendations, according to these survey findings. 79% of HR/recruiting professionals and 61% of hiring professionals chose this as one of the top three most important factors affecting their recommendations. The other factors deemed more important for hiring professionals were "overall positive impression" (61%), "interview performance" (51%), and "positive attitude/work ethic" (42%). The HR/recruiter group selected "fit within culture" (62%) and "previous employment" (59%) as influential factors. Consistent
with the findings above, where the majority of hiring professionals thought HR did not have much influence on their hiring decisions, only 3% of hiring professionals relied heavily on the recruiter’s or HR’s assessment of a candidate to make their own recommendations.

Some respondents added comments in their answer to this question:

- “I realized that not everyone will walk into position able to produce at 110%, and as an interviewer, I need to allow for candidate’s potential to grow within the position and company.”

- “I’m a bit more concerned these days with fit and company values.”

- “There is a certain type of person that will be successful in my company. Anyone joining the group really needs to fit, regardless of how good they are.”

What factors do you rely on most heavily to make your personnel recommendations? Check three. (Answers broken down by experience level.)

![Figure 15: Factors relied on most heavily to make personnel recommendations (broken down by experience levels)](image)

To determine if there was a difference in the factors highly sought in a candidate by experienced and inexperienced recruiters, the overall responses were broken down by group.

An analysis of factors chosen by experienced recruiters compared to those chosen by
inexperienced recruiters did not show much variance, though inexperienced recruiters (81%) place more emphasis on the “strength of resume/skill set” than experienced recruiters (63%). Experienced recruiters also seem to value “interview performance” (31%) and “overall positive impression” (44%) more highly than inexperienced recruiters (18%) and (27%), respectively.

Do you use any of the following interview methods in your everyday recruiting activities?

Figure 16: Interview methods commonly used

This question was asked of both groups not only to determine the most commonly used methods, but as with survey question #2 (Figure 15), also the level of familiarity of the different tools, i.e., if a hiring manager knew what “situational interviewing” was or what kinds of questions were “behavioral based.” Resume review was the most commonly used method by both hiring professionals (82%) and HR/recruiters (90%). Conversational questions were also common to both survey groups, hiring professionals (74%) and HR/recruiters (67%).

The results of two questions likely reflect common interview processes. In the traditional hiring process, one HR representative is assigned to fill a position, and if peer
review takes place, it is likely to be done among the hiring professional (38%) and his or her peers as opposed to the HR representative conducting peer reviews (21%). Because it is an administrative process, it can be assumed that testing would commonly be managed by the HR/recruiting professional (37%) instead of the hiring professional (20%).

Have your interview methods changed in the past five years?

![Graph showing interview methods changed](image)

Figure 17: Interview methods changed

The majority of hiring professionals (65%) and HR/recruiters (69%) have changed their methods of interviewing candidates in the last five years. To determine if this change was based on increased knowledge gained from interview experience or other factors, respondents were asked their reasoning.
Figure 18: Reason for changing interview methods

The answer "discovered need from past hiring mistakes" was not included on the HR/recruiter survey, because the author assumed that hiring managers have more direct experience working with good and bad hires, and observing first-hand what combination of skills and characteristics has proven successful and what has not. It is assumed that HR professionals and recruiters would not know the day-to-day operations of a department and how well a candidate is or isn't doing without the feedback of the hiring manager.

The majority of hiring professionals (53%) chose this answer, "discovered need from past hiring mistakes," as the reason they changed their interviewing methods. One respondent said, "We had someone come in with a cleverly written cover letter, flawless resume and interesting writing samples. But once he got here, we never saw that clever and careful writing again. That's why we now give everyone a writing test." The most popular answer given by HR/recruiting professionals (77%) was "advancements in interviewing techniques makes interviewing easier."
If no, why not?

Figure 19: Reason for keeping same interview methods

The overwhelming majority of those that did not change their interviewing method believe their interviewing process is usually successful. 95% of hiring professionals and 93% of HR/recruiters chose this answer. 7% of respondents identified a lack of support from their organization to change or upgrade their interview process.

The interview process provides me with enough information about a candidate to be confident in my hiring decision.

Figure 20: Confidence in hiring decisions.

The topic that is the basis of this thesis is the general acknowledgement that the traditional interview process is flawed. Therefore, it is interesting to gauge the confidence level
of those doing the interviewing. According to survey results, the majority of hiring professionals (55%) and many HR/recruiters (47%) "somewhat agree" that the process provides enough information to achieve a level of confidence in their hiring decisions. Most HR/recruiters (47%) and some hiring professionals (32%) "strongly agree" this to be true.

For the most part, these survey results support confirm several of the author's theories, which will be detailed in the next chapter. Though a comparatively small sampling of HR/recruiting professionals and hiring professionals, these survey findings are consistent with facts and statistical findings in academic studies on the interviewing process observed by the author in her secondary research. However, the results of the two survey groups become far more interesting and worthy of study when they are compared together.

Chapter V

ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

"Interviewing is a process—like democracy, it's not the most effective system, but it's the best we've got," said Janina Waclawski, Human Resources Director, PepsiCo. "Most companies use it, and most people think they're good at it."

It is widely acknowledged, and the author's primary and secondary research supports, that the traditional interview process contains some serious flaws. Among the most commonly examined are the influence of human bias; the invalidity and inconsistency of the technique, administration and results analysis of the interview; the lack of time spent on the decision-making process and the challenge of the overly-prepared or untruthful candidate. Thousands of academic papers, news articles and books have examined each of these flaws, sometimes offering alternate methods and suggestions that are, in turn, criticized by others. The theory that first inspired the author to pursue this topic—"how can a process that is so dependent on
interpersonal communication and social perceptions be as effective – or fair?” has become
the author’s overarching conclusion – it is not effective, nor is it a level playing field.
However, digging deeper into understanding why the process is not effective, when disconnects
happen in the interview process, and how some simple, realistic changes might be made could
lead to some improvement in the process.

First, one must revisit the criteria of a successful interview, so any improvement in less-
than-successful methods can be noted.

On page nine of this thesis, the author provided a definition of a flawed method:
“Identifying an interview method as flawed considers that it is subject to too many variables to
consistently result in the best candidate being chosen for a position.”

It can be concluded that successful interview methods are those that remove or lessen
the influence of contaminants, human bias and subjectivity; those that have higher levels of
reliability and level the playing field; and those that can best determine the candidate’s
likelihood of success on the job based on knowledge, skills, abilities and fit within the
organization.

RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY

Traditional interviews lack the reliability and repeatability of a consistent, scientific
process. Simply speaking, there is no way to ensure that each candidate can be judged equally
and fairly.

Candidates are individuals, and the managers may be looking for a combination of
skills – and more than one candidate might fit well within the job description and in the
company culture. One candidate may possess desired characteristic, such as good sales
experience, and another may possess customer service expertise. If both have desired, but
different qualifications—who will get the job? If one has better interview skills, is a sharper or
more stylish dresser or reminds the interviewer of himself, it is more likely that this candidate
will be offered the position, or at least will get further in the interview process. Would this be a
more successful hire than if the other candidate was chosen? And, when several hires are made
with the same criteria and personal bias, will all the people in the department begin to look the
same? This theory may related to the larger issue of diversity and corporate America’s
challenge to maintain a diverse workplace. Several HR professionals divulged in confidence
that in order to maintain the appropriate levels of minority employees in certain areas of the
company, or to satisfy the employees’ expectations of a department’s cultural balance,
recruiters may begin the search looking for “a Hispanic female” or “an Asian male.” The
author once worked for a big four accounting firm that was very involved in supporting
minority educational programs at the high school level, because it realized that the talent pool
simply did not contain enough minorities and diversity for companies to hire them—companies
would have to search much harder for fewer candidates that may or may not have been at the
same skill level as non-minorities.

So, when an interviewer has “someone in mind” with characteristics that have little to
do with the experience and skills required for the position, the interview process is tainted from
the beginning.

Structured interviews, during which all interviewees are asked the same set of questions
every interviewee, are supposed to have increased reliability. There is considerable evidence
that structured interviews are more reliable than are unstructured interviews (Conway, Jako, &
Goodman, 1995; McDaniel et al., 1994), and it is well known that, other things being equal,
higher reliability leads to higher validity and lower reliability leads to lower validity (Schmidt & Zimmerman, 2004).

Of the 62 HR/recruiting respondents that claim to use structured interviews (shown in Figure 11), 16 (26%) said they vary the questions they ask during the interview process—directly contradicting their original claim. In the hiring professional group, of the 24 respondents that claim to use structured interviews, 18 of them (75%) vary their questions during the interview process. These findings show a clear lack of understanding and improper execution of the structured interview method.

The observations the author found most interesting were around the relationship between HR and hiring managers.

**LEVEL OF INFLUENCE OF HUMAN RESOURCES ON THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS—PERCEIVED AND ACTUAL**

The findings of this study suggest a large discrepancy in the perceptions of HR’s overall value and influence on the hiring process and the working relationship between HR and hiring professionals.

As Figure 10 shows, the majority (43%) of hiring manager respondents believe that HR has “some influence,” followed by 30% who think it has “not much influence” on the decision-making process. The majority of HR/recruiter respondents (43%) believe they have a strong influence on the decision-making process; only 11% of hiring professionals agree. As illustrated in Figure 14, survey findings show that only 3% of hiring professionals relied heavily on the recruiter’s or HR’s assessment of a candidate to make their own recommendations.
Why is HR influence an important factor when studying the overall interviewing and hiring process? As with most questions associated with the interview and recruiting process, the author believes the answer is, "it depends."

First, actual "influence" on the process, versus how seriously the hiring professional considers the "opinion" of the HR representative, must be clarified. If a recruiter screens candidates and chooses who should have the opportunity to proceed further with the interview process, he or she is, in fact exerting quite a level of influence on the process. As stated earlier in this thesis and substantiated by the author's primary research, the recruiting position is often an entry level job—therefore, a less-experienced professional is likely making some important decisions. And, according to the findings above, the inexperienced professional is making those judgments relatively quickly—in less than 20 minutes. In the author's primary research efforts, she came across two recruiters with little or no human resources or recruiting background whose responsibilities included screening lawyers and investment bankers, respectively. The first recruiter had less than 2 years of college education; the second was a career bartender whose clients suggested he give recruiting a try. The hiring manager may or may not strongly consider HR's opinion on the candidate when forming his or her own opinion, but if the HR/recruiter has autonomy in initial screening, his or her influence has already affected the process. This process and the level of experience and influence of those who are making decisions is worthy of further research.

Conversely, knowledgeable and experienced recruiters and HR professionals are more skilled in personnel assessment and with a broad knowledge of the company culture, can provide an objective evaluation on the candidate's fit. They have more experience weeding out candidates who exhibit undesirable characteristics, know how to negotiate and can "I know
enough about the culture of this company and who will be successful and who won't," said Jeff Cahn, Human Resources Director for PepsiCo. "A candidate may look right on paper, but it's my job to be a matchmaker -- and make sure that the person taking a job has what it takes to fit in and be successful. I've become very good at it and can't give only one reason why that is."

If interviewing experience improves skills and increases the chances of successfully finding a suitable candidate, it can be assumed that if hiring professionals conduct fewer interviews on regular basis than HR/recruiting professionals, they are less skilled in the interview process. This theory is significant when you consider the limited influence of HR/professionals on hiring professionals' decisions -- as illustrated in Figure 5.

The factor of interviewer experience also affects the quality of the information received during the interview process. As mentioned on page six of this thesis, 70% of organizations use unstructured interviews in which the interviewer is totally responsible for the nature of the interview (Sears & Rowe, 2003; Graves & Karren, 1996). Findings in the author's primary research support this theory. If the interviewer, regardless of HR/recruiting professional or hiring manager, is totally responsible for the nature and flow of the interview, then it is critical to ask, who is it that is doing the interviewing? How well do they know the culture of the department for which they're hiring? How much do they know about the requirements of the job, the skills needed to be successful and complement their prospective team members, and how will they fit in with their manage? According to Kim Smith of Robert Half Finance & Accounting, candidates are often hired for their skills but leave because of the culture or management style (The Christchurch Press, 2004). These facts and questions suggest that the interview process must be examined in a holistic manner, but also point to the balance and factors needed for interview success -- knowledge sharing, close working relationship between
hiring managers and HR/recruiter, experience in decision-making, asking relevant, important questions of the candidate and having the knowledge to successfully interpret the answers.

Before embarking on this study, the author assumed that training would solve some of the issues associated with professionals who had little experience in conducting interviews. After her primary research, however, she is not convinced this would be true.

After two very senior HR professionals with impressive qualifications stated they never had formal interview training, the author began to reconsider the importance of formal training. The number of years of experience, the number of interviews conducted and the awareness of one's own bias seem to the author to be greater strengths than formal training alone. If a recruiter receives training to conduct an interview in what is presumed to be a "correct" or efficient manner, how does this skill fare when faced with an experienced interviewee coached to give certain answers and present themselves according to what they believe the company is looking for? Are these recruiters taught to interpret the responses they receive to their carefully constructed questions? In a process largely entirely on human interaction, can the trained, but inexperienced, recruiter understand their own frame of reference well enough to cast aside their biases, which remain the clear and consistent contaminant? All HR/recruiting professionals interviewed admitted that their perception of a candidate could differ from one day to the next, especially if they were having a bad day personally or if they were not feeling well. It is the author's conclusion that it requires experience and practice for one to acknowledge one's own bias and adjust their perceptions and decisions accordingly.

TRAINING
The majority of hiring professionals (57%) responded that they have not had formal interview training, considerably less than the percentage of HR/recruiting professionals (74%) that have received formal training.

What influence does training have on the interview process? According to the survey findings, both groups that received training were more likely to use more or advanced interviewing methods, including structural, behavioral and situational interviewing. The author believes that a margin of error must be assumed, as those who are aware of the technique may be more inclined to affirm that they use it. However, though techniques differed slightly, there was little difference in how hiring managers and HR/recruiters that received training rated applicants (Figures 21 and 23).

Following is a comparison of the answers from survey respondents that received training, and those that did not.

![Bar chart showing factors relied on most heavily by hiring managers to make personnel recommendations, broken down by training experience.](image-url)

Figure 21: Factors relied on most heavily by hiring managers to make personnel recommendations, broken down by training experience.
Figure 22: Interview methods commonly used by hiring managers, broken down by training experience.

Figure 23: Factors relied on most heavily by recruiting professionals to make personnel recommendations, broken down by training experience.
WHAT ARE INTERVIEWERS LOOKING FOR?

The majority of hiring professionals (57%) responded that preparing a list of questions to ask during the interview is the best way to prepare (Figure 5). The types of questions they list and how they come up with them is worthy of further research. Do they work with the HR representative or recruiting professional to build on the information already gathered about the candidate? Do they seek assistance in knowing what to ask? In hindsight, the author would have included the survey question for this group, “Do you identify needed and desired characteristics before interviewing candidates?” By drawing up a list of questions, it is assumed – or at least, it is hoped – that this group is preparing to explore desired characteristics in depth. Another suggestion for further research would be to focus on how interviewers interpret the information they receive in answer to their questions. If they have a list of questions to ask, but are not skilled in evaluating responses, what good are the questions? If a candidate is asked, “where do you want to be in five years?” and the answer is, “I’d like to own a consulting business,” does the interviewer react positively, thinking, “Wow, this person has
drive and ambition.” or do they think, “I'll have to replace him in five years and he'll probably take all of his clients with him”? The answer depends on the interviewer’s own experiences and frame of reference.

Second to the strength of the resume and skill set, an “overall positive impression” was most important to hiring professionals (61%), according to survey findings (Figure 14). Arguably, a “positive impression” is the most subjective characteristic used to judge talent. It is also the most difficult for the author to interpret. Professionals who selected this answer could either not be able to pinpoint exactly what characteristics are important to them and therefore chose the easiest answer; they could act according to instinct and not be sure why they like or dislike a candidate; or they could feel that they have good interviewing skill and be able to assess all the characteristics evenly to form one solid impression. This theory is supported by the survey results illustrated in Figure 20. These findings show that the majority of hiring professionals either “somewhat” or “strongly” agree that the process provides enough information to achieve a level of confidence in their hiring decisions.

The HR/recruiter group selected “fit within culture” (62%) and “previous employment” (59%) as influential factors. “Interviewers may be swayed by applicants working for Fortune 500 companies or by other organizations employers perceive to be prestigious,” said Churchman. The prestige of a previous position does not always translate into a good fit for the job and may even cause the interviewer to assume a certain level of expertise or skill set. The author experienced this bias first hand. On a job interview for a leading telecommunications company, she saw the recruiter’s notes to the hiring manager written on her resume—“Big Four candidates have good work ethic, used to heavy workload.” The job was a complete
mismatch for the author's skills, but she was granted an interview, presumably because she worked for the Big Four accounting firm.

**FINDING "FIT WITHIN CULTURE"**

As shown in Figure 14, 62% of the HR/recruiter group selected "fit within culture" as the factor they relied on most heavily to make personnel recommendations.

Of the hiring managers, 49% of those that received training selected cultural fit, whereas only 29% of untrained hiring managers selected this as an important criteria.

How does HR truly know the "culture?" The number of employees and departments in large companies makes it likely that there are many cultures within the company—dependent upon colleagues, management style of a certain division, and the effectiveness of the leaderships' effort to cascade one culture and company vision to different departments. And, without deep knowledge of personality traits and how certain human characteristics and work styles complement others, how can anyone—HR or hiring manager—staff a well-balanced department? If strong, outgoing personalities seem to be the norm in a certain department, won't those personalities eventually clash? And does it make sense to balance out extrovert personalities with deep-thinking introverts? Having lots of skill and ability doesn't guarantee a winning scenario, explains interview and retention strategist Greg Churchman. It's critical to have a balance of talent in the company, including top- and mid-level performers and those that carry out work as requested of them. Companies that only have top- and mid-level performers can result in an environment with excess competition, backstabbing and company politics as these people position themselves to make it to the top, according to Churchman (Churchman, 2004).
So, is finding a candidate who exhibits the same qualities and characteristics as the incumbents in the department the best candidate for the job and the addition to the team that will help it be most successful? The author concludes, not necessarily. Yet this quality remains a focal point of many HR/recruiter searches.

CONCLUSION

Though flawed, the traditional interview process is not likely to be replaced by another process any time in the foreseeable future. Nor is it likely that many of the flaws will be corrected. In a process based on social interaction, human bias will always be a contaminant.

Much effort has focused on the nuances of the interview, increasing validity and examining interviewing methods and tools aimed at eliminating bias and leveling the playing field. At the same time, there is probably even more attention and training focused on preparing interviewees to present themselves and answer questions in a way that leverages their personalities and appeals to the interviewer's bias.

Tests and improved interview methods and structures may well take some of the guesswork out of candidate assessment. However, the interviewer must have the experience and knowledge necessary to be able to interpret the results so that they add value to their assessment process. This notion deserves further research.

It seems to the author that much more attention should be paid to the level of experience of those making personnel decisions, and the relationship between HR/recruiters and hiring managers. From the research performed for this thesis, it seems as though the people that have the most influence on the hiring decision have the least interviewing skill and experience. This observation takes on more importance when one considers the vast
contradiction is the perceived value of the HR/recruiter function. The interview process would benefit from being approached in a holistic manner, with HR/recruiters working more closely together with the hiring manager, leveraging each others' strengths and in-depth knowledge of the job requirements and giving the process the time and attention that would be given to any other business investment. Peer reviews and sharing interview notes and feedback would contribute to a collaborative effort.

In addition, the author believes the effect of training is subjective—increased success depends on how much an interviewer employs the knowledge and tools gained from training, and is also dependent upon their subjective and analytical skills and willingness to accept and diffuse their own bias in the interview process.

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APPENDIX A
Survey for Hiring Managers/Professionals

Please indicate the number of years of your professional experience:

☐ Less than 5
☐ 5-10
☐ 10-15
☐ More than 15

How many job interviews do you participate or conduct in a typical year?

☐ 0-4
☐ 3-7
☐ More than 7

Have you had any formal interview training?

☐ Yes
☐ No

1) What is the best method to prepare for an interview?

☐ Providing the recruiter with as much information about the position as possible.
☐ Considering the recruiters' recommendations
☐ Setting aside a dedicated amount of time to interview candidates.
☐ Prepare a list of questions to ask before the interview.

2) Do you vary the questions you ask of candidates applying for the same position?

☐ Yes
☐ No

3) How much time do you typically spend with an applicant before forming an opinion about their candidacy?

☐ 0 – 20 minutes
☐ 20 – 40 minutes
☐ 40 minutes or more
4) What factors do you rely on most heavily to make your personnel recommendations?
Check three.

☐ Likability
☐ Recruiter's or human resource's assessment of candidate
☐ Strength of resume/candidate's skill set
☐ Previous employment
☐ Performance during interview
☐ An overall positive impression of the candidate
☐ Positive attitude and work ethic
☐ Fit within company culture

5) Have your interview methods changed in the past five years?
☐ Yes
☐ No

5a) If yes, what reason best applies?

☐ Discovered need from past hiring mistakes
☐ Previous process wasn't producing adequate results
☐ Advancements in interviewing techniques and tools make recruiting easier
☐ To comply with employment laws

Other:

5b) If no, what reason best applies?

☐ My interviewing process is usually successful
☐ Cost of testing or lengthy interview process is prohibitive or wasteful
☐ Lack of support from organization to change/upgrade process

Other:

6) Do you use any of the following interview methods in your everyday recruiting activities?

☐ Resume Review
☐ Conversational Question and Answer Dialogue
☐ Structured interview
☐ Behavioral-Based Questions
☐ Situational Interviewing
☐ Peer Review
☐ Testing
7) On average, how much influence does HR in your company have or the decision-making process?
- [ ] No influence  - [ ] Not much influence  - [ ] Some influence  - [ ] Strong influence

8) The interview process provides me with enough information about a candidate to be confident in my hiring decision.
  - [ ] Strongly Disagree  - [ ] Disagree  - [ ] Somewhat Agree  - [ ] Strongly Agree
APPENDIX B

Survey for Recruiting/Human Resources Professionals

Demographic information:

Are you:
- [ ] In-house recruiter or human resources professional
- [ ] External recruiting or human resources consultant

How long have you been recruiting?
- [ ] 0 – 3 years
- [ ] 4 – 7 years
- [ ] 7 – 10 years
- [ ] More than 10 years

Aside from your professional experience, have you had any formal interview training?
- [ ] Yes
- [ ] No

1) Please indicate true or false.

- The hiring manager typically shares a specific list of desired qualifications and personality criteria for a candidate. [ ] True [ ] False

- I usually have a good understanding of the qualifications most important to the hiring manager. [ ] True [ ] False

- I receive enough feedback from the hiring manager to make good recommendations. [ ] True [ ] False

2) Do you vary the questions you ask of candidates applying for the same position?
- [ ] Yes
- [ ] No
3) How much time do you typically spend with an applicant before forming an opinion about their candidacy?

☐ 0 – 20 minutes  ☐ 20 – 40 minutes  ☐ 40 minutes or more

4) What factors do you rely on most heavily to make your personnel recommendations? Check top three.

☐ Strength of resume/candidate skill set
☐ Previous employment
☐ Performance during interview
☐ An overall positive impression of the candidate
☐ Positive attitude and work ethic
☐ Fit within company culture

5) Have your interview methods changed in the past five years?

☐ Yes
☐ No

5a) If yes, why?

☐ Previous process wasn’t producing adequate results
☐ Advancements in interviewing techniques and tools make recruiting easier
☐ To comply with employment law

Other:

5b) If no, why not?

☐ My interviewing process is usually successful
☐ Cost of testing or lengthy interview process is prohibitive
☐ Lack of support from organization to change/upgrade process

Other:
6) Do you use any of the following interview methods in your everyday recruiting activities?

☐ Resume Review
☐ Conversational Question and Answer Dialogue
☐ Structured Interview
☐ Behavioral-Based Questions
☐ Situational Interviewing
☐ Peer Review
☐ Testing

7) On average, how involved is the hiring manager in the interview process?

☐ Not involved at all
☐ Somewhat involved
☐ Very involved

8) Are hiring managers at your company formally trained in interviewing skills and technique?

☐ Yes
☐ No

9) On average, how much influence does HR in your company have on the decision-making process?

☐ No influence
☐ Not much influence
☐ Some influence
☐ Strong influence

10) The interview process provides me with enough information about a candidate to be confident in my hiring decision.

☐ Strongly Disagree
☐ Disagree
☐ Somewhat Agree
☐ Strongly Agree
APPENDIX C

Survey for Hiring Managers/Professionals Results

Please indicate the number of years of your professional experience:

2% Less than 5
28% 5-10
24% 10-15
45% More than 15

How often do you participate in or conduct interviews?

52% 0-4 yearly
20% 5-7 yearly
36% More than 7 yearly

Other than your professional experience, have you had any formal (classroom or other) interview training?

39% Yes
57% No

1) Check One. What is the best method to prepare for an interview?

16% Providing the recruiter with as much information about the position as possible.
2% Considering the recruiters' recommendations
30% Setting aside a dedicated amount of time to interview candidates.
57% Prepare a list of questions to ask before the interview.

2) Do you vary the questions you ask of candidates applying for the same position?

80% Yes
18% No

3) How much time do you typically spend with an applicant before forming an opinion about their candidacy?

45% 0 – 20 minutes
41% 20 – 40 minutes
12% 40 minutes or more

4) Check three. What factors do you rely on most heavily to make your personnel recommendations?

18% Likeableness
3% Recruiter's or human resource's assessment of candidate
61% Strength of resume/candidate skill set
24% Previous employment
51% Performance during interview
61% An overall positive impression of the candidate
42% Positive attitude and work ethic
32% Fit within company culture

5) Have your interview methods changed in the past five years?

63% Yes
35% No

5a) If yes, what reason best applies?

53% Discovered need from past hiring mistakes
19% Previous process wasn’t producing adequate results
20% Advancements in interviewing techniques and tools make recruiting easier
5% To comply with employment law

Other:

5b) If no, what reason best applies?

95% My interviewing process is usually successful
2% Cost of testing or lengthy interview process is prohibitive or wasteful
2% Lack of support from organization to change/upgrade process

Other:

6) Do you routinely use any of the following interview methods in your everyday recruiting activities?

82% Resume Review
74% Conversational Question and Answer Dialogue
21% Structured Interview
28% Behavioral-Based Questions
38% Situational Interviewing
38% Peer Review
20% Testing

7) On average, how much influence does HR in your company have on the decision-making process?

10% No influence 30% Not much influence 43% Some influence
11% Strong influence
8) HR generally has a good understanding of what I'm looking for in a candidate and helps in my search.

7% Strongly Disagree  12% Disagree  63% Somewhat Agree  11% Strongly Agree

9) The interview process provides me with enough information about a candidate to be confident in my hiring decision.

3% Strongly Disagree  6% Disagree  55% Somewhat Agree  32% Strongly Agree
Survey for Recruiting/Human Resources Professionals Results

Demographic Information:

Are you:
72%  In-house recruiter or human resources professional
25%  External recruiting or human resources consultant

How long have you been recruiting?
11%  0 – 3 years
28%  4 – 7 years
16%  7 – 10 years
45%  More than 10 years

Aside from your professional experience, have you had any formal (classroom or other) interview training?
74%  Yes
26%  No

Survey Questions:

1) Please indicate true or false.

The hiring manager typically shares a specific list of desired qualifications and personality criteria for a candidate.  True 92%  False 8%

I usually have a good understanding of the qualifications most important to the hiring manager.  True 98%  False 2%

I receive enough feedback from the hiring manager to make good recommendations.  True 91%  False 9%
2) Do you vary the questions you ask of candidates applying for the same position?
   41% Yes
   57% No

3) How much time do you typically spend with an applicant before forming an opinion about his or her candidacy?
   35% 0 – 20 minutes  33% 20 – 40 minutes  30% 40 minutes or more

4) What factors do you rely on most heavily to make your personnel recommendations? Check top three.
   70% Strength of resume/candidate skill set
   59% Previous employment
   37% Performance during interview
   35% An overall positive impression of the candidate
   32% Positive attitude and work ethic
   62% Fit within company culture

5) Have your interview methods changed in the past five years?
   69% Yes
   29% No

5a) If yes, why?
   9% Previous process wasn’t producing adequate results
   77% Advancements in interviewing techniques and tools make recruiting easier
   24% To comply with employment law/legal concerns

   Other:

5b) If no, why not?
   93% My interviewing process is usually successful
   3% Cost of testing or lengthy interview process is prohibitive
   7% Lack of support from organization to change/upgrade process

   Other:
6) Do you use any of the following interview methods in your everyday recruiting activities?

- 90% Resume Review
- 67% Conversational Question and Answer Dialogue
- 61% Structured Interview
- 69% Behavioral-Based Questions
- 50% Situational Interviewing
- 21% Peer Review
- 37% Testing

7) On average, how involved is the hiring manager in the interview process?

- 2% Not involved
- 12% Somewhat involved
- 29% Adequately involved
- 57% Very involved

8) Are hiring managers at your company formally trained in interviewing skills and technique?

- 57% Yes
- 41% No

9) On average, how much influence does HR in your company have on the decision-making process?

- 9% No influence
- 7% Not much influence
- 38% Some influence
- 43% Strong influence

10) The interview process provides me with enough information about a candidate to be confident in my hiring decision.

- 4% Strongly Disagree
- 5% Disagree
- 43% Somewhat Agree
- 47% Strongly Agree