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Best Interviewing Practices

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For Managers and Supervisors

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Agenda

During this webcast, the following topics will be discussed:

- Structured vs. Unstructured Interviews
- Steps in Developing a Structured Interview
- Reference Checks
- Interviewing Behavior & Common Mistakes
- Interviewing People with Disabilities
- Prohibited Personnel Practices

Reference Material

Included with this webcast are the following reference material:

- Office of Personnel Management's guide "Structured Interviews: *A Practical Guide*" and "Assessment Decision Guide"
- Merit System Review Board guide "The Federal Selection Interview: *Unrealized Potential*"
- Uniform Guidelines on Employee Selection Procedures (29 CFR Part 1607)

Attachments

Included with this webcast are the following attachments:

- Structured Interview Development Checklist
- Structured Interview Implementation Checklist
- Sample Structured Interview Individual Rating Form
- Sample Structured Interview Group Rating Form
- "*Prohibited Personnel Practices*" flyer from the Office of Special Council

Structured vs. Unstructured Interviews

Structured Interviews ensure candidates have equal opportunities to provide information and are assessed accurately and consistently:

- All candidates are asked the same questions in the same order
- All candidates are evaluated using a common rating scale
- Interviewers are in agreement on acceptable answers
- High degree of reliability

Structured vs. Unstructured Interviews

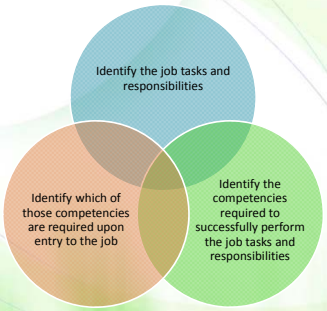
Unstructured Interviews :

- Candidates may be asked different questions
- A standardized rating scale is not required
- Interviewers do not need to agree on acceptable answers
- Have little value in predicting job performance
- Lack of standardization makes the unstructured interview susceptible to legal challenges

8 Steps to Developing a Structured Interview:

1. ***Conduct a Job Analysis***
2. ***Determine the Competencies to be Assessed by the interviewer***
3. ***Choose the Interview Format & Develop Questions***
4. ***Develop Rating Scales to Evaluate Candidates***
5. ***Create Interview Probes***
6. ***Pilot-Test the Interview Questions***
7. ***Create the Interviewer's Guide***
8. ***Document the Development Process***

Conduct a Job Analysis



Determine the Competencies to be Assessed by the interview

After identifying the critical competencies, determine which will be assessed in the selection process and how each competency will be measured

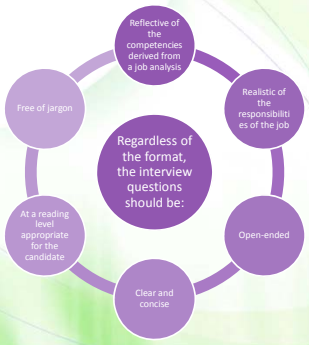
- OPM's interactive Assessment Decision Tool provides suggested methods for assessing a range of competencies and also provides evaluation criteria for each assessment method

http://apps.opm.gov/ADT/ADTClientMain.aspx

Choose the Interview Format and Develop Questions

- Behavioral Interview – based on questions regarding past behavior
- Situational Interview – based on questions about hypothetical behavior
- Combination of Behavior & Situational Interviews

Interview Questions



Behavioral Interview Format & Questions:

The primary purpose of the Behavior Interview is to gather information from the job candidate about their *actual* behavior during *past* experiences which demonstrates competencies required for the job

The underlying premise is the best predictor of future behavior on the job is past behavior under similar circumstances

Competency Example

For example, consider the competency *Interpersonal Skills*:

As defined, "shows understanding, friendliness, courtesy, tact, empathy, concern, and politeness to others…may include effectively dealing with individuals who are difficult, hostile, or distressed…"

Describe a situation in which you dealt with individuals who were difficult, hostile, or distressed. Who was involved? What specific actions did you take and what was the result?

Writing Behavioral Interview Questions

Writing Behavioral Interview Questions – ideally, have a group of 6-7 Subject Matter Experts (SME's) who can assist by:

- Familiarizing themselves with the competencies (and their definitions) to be measured by the interview
- Working together to write interview questions
  - Each question should measure at least one of the specified competencies
  - Each question should be written to elicit *specific details* about a situation, task, or context, the actions the person took or did not take, and the impact of these actions
- Use superlative adjectives in the questions (e.g., most, last, worst, least) to help the candidate focus on specific incidents
- Develop more questions than are actually needed to allow for subsequent discarding of questions during review and tryout

Situational Interview Questions

Situational Interview Format & Questions:

- In contrast to Behavior Interview, the questions in a situational interview are based on future-oriented behavior
- Questions should give the candidate realistic job scenarios or dilemmas and ask how he/she *would* respond
- The underlying premise is a person's intentions are closely tied to his/her actual behavior

Competency Example

Again, consider the competency *Interpersonal Skills:*

As defined, "shows understanding, friendliness, courtesy, tact, empathy, concern, and politeness to others…may include effectively dealing with individuals who are difficult, hostile, or distressed…"

A very angry client walks up to your desk. She says she was told your office sent her an overdue check five days ago. She claims she has not received the check. She says she has bills to pay, and no one will help her. How would you handle this situation?

Writing Situational Interview Questions

The following are suggested methods for developing situational interview questions:

- Assemble a group of subject matter experts, or SMEs, who have extensive knowledge about the job
- Review the competencies and their definitions to be measured by the interview and the job tasks linked to the competencies
- Write examples of effective and ineffective behaviors which reflect the competencies associated skills
- Arrange for a separate group of SMEs to read each critical incidents and identify the competency they believe best illustrates it
  - This will confirm whether the behavior is linked to the competency
- Develop more questions than are needed to allow for future elimination

Develop Rating Scales to Evaluate Candidates

The use of a common rating scale for all candidates is a key component of the Structured Interview procedure

A standardized rating scale can be developed for either behavioral or situational interview questions

Let's look at an example of a 5-level proficiency rating scale developed by the Office of Personnel Management (OPM)

Rating Scale for Behavior Questions

Proficiency Level	General Competencies	Technical Competencies
Level 5 - Expert	• Applies the competency in exceptionally difficult situations • Serves as a key resource and advises others	• Applies the competency in exceptionally difficult situations • Serves as a key resource and advises others • Demonstrates comprehensive, expert understanding of concepts and processes
Level 4 – Advanced	• Applies the competency in considerably difficult situations • Generally requires little or no guidance	• Applies the competency in considerably difficult situations • Generally requires little or no guidance • Demonstrates broad understanding of concepts and processes
Level 3 – Intermediate	• Applies the competency in difficult situations • Requires occasional guidance	• Applies the competency in difficult situations • Requires occasional guidance • Demonstrates understanding of concepts and processes
Level 2 – Basic	• Applies the competency in somewhat difficult situations • Requires frequent guidance	• Applies the competency in somewhat difficult situations • Requires frequent guidance • Demonstrates familiarity with concepts and processes
Level 1 - Awareness	• Applies the competency in the simplest situations • Requires close and extensive guidance	• Applies the competency in the simplest situation • Requires close and extensive guidance • Demonstrates awareness of concepts and processes

Competency: Interpersonal Skills

Question: Describe a situation in which you had to deal with individuals who were difficult, hostile, or distressed. Who was involved? What specific actions did you take and what was the result?

Proficiency Level	Definition	Question-Specific Behavioral Examples
Level 5 – Expert	Applies the competency in exceptionally difficult situations	Presents shortcomings of a newly installed automation system in a tactful manner to irate senior management officials
Level 4 – Advanced	Applies the competency in considerable difficult situations	Identifies and alleviates sources of stress among a team developing a new automated system
Level 3 – Intermediate	Applies the competency in difficult situations	Restores a working relationship between angry co-workers who have opposing views
Level 2 – Basic	Applies the competency in somewhat difficult situations	Works with other staff on a cross-functional team to improve coordination of activities
Level 1 – Awareness	Applies the competency in simplest situations	Refers employees to the appropriate staff member to resolve their issues

Rating Scale & Behavioral Responses for a Situational Interview

Rating Scale & Behavioral Responses for a Situational Interview

Example of a Situational Interview Question and Rating Scale

Job Task	Competency	Interview Question	Proficiency Level & Representative Response
Performs investigative work to obtain information, gather evidence, or verify facts	*Integrity/Honest:* Contributes to maintaining the integrity of the organization; displays high standards of ethical conduct and understands the impact violating these standards would have; is trustworthy	You are investigating a group of auto dealership managers suspected of money-laundering activities. During the course of an interview with one suspect, the suspect offers to help you buy a car at a price well below market value. What would you do?	*Unsatisfactory:* Accept the offer *Satisfactory:* Say no and continue investigation; document the incident in your report *Superior:* Probe the dealership managers to determine how they are able to offer a car at such a reduced price; attempt to get contact information of others involved; say no to the offer; and document details of the incident

Create Interview Probes

- A probe is a question asked to help clarify a candidates response or ensure the candidate has provided enough information
- Interviewers should use very similar probes for all candidates to ensure that each is given the same opportunity to excel
- While probes may need to be tailored to address each candidates specific response, the general meaning of the probes should not change
- Prior to the interview, establish the desired range of probing, for example, no probes, a limited number or unlimited number of probes.

Example of Probes

Competency: Interpersonal Skills	
Behavioral Interview Question: Describe a situation in which you had to deal with individuals who were difficult, hostile, or distressed. Who was involved? What specific actions did you take and what was the result?	**Behavioral Interview Probes:** *Situation* • What factors led up to the situation? • Could you or anyone else have done something to prevent the situation? • What did you determine as the most critical issue to address? *Action* • How did you respond? • What was the most important factor for you? • What is the first thing you did? *Outcome* • What was the outcome? • Is there anything you would have said and/or done differently? • Were there any benefits from the situation?

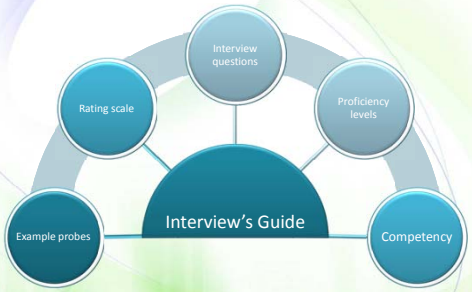
Example of Probes

Competency: Interpersonal Skills	
Situational Question: A very angry client walks up to your desk. She says she was told your office sent her an overdue check five days ago. She claims she has not received the check. She says she has bills to pay, and no one will help her. How would you handle this situation?	**Situational Interview Probes:** *Situation* • Why do you believe this situation occurred? • What do you consider the most critical issue in this situation? • What other issues are of concern? *Action* • What would you say? • What is the first thing that you would do? • What factors would affect your course of action? • What other actions could you take? *Outcome* • How do you think your action would be received? • What would you do if your action was not received well? • What do you consider as benefits of your action?

Pilot Test the Interview Questions & Evaluate the Interview Process

- **Prior to using newly developed questions, give them to a colleague for a trial run**
- **Make sure the questions are clearly worded and draw an appropriate range of responses**
- **The pilot test should mirror the actual structured interview**

Create the Interviewer's Guide



Document the Development Process

Maintain records of the entire interview process, in accordance with the Delegated Examining Operations Handbook; the documentation should include:

- Descriptions of all participants, including SME's and those in the pilot study (name, job title, race, national origin, sex, level of expertise)
- Interview development material (e.g., reference materials, previous manuals)
- A description of the development of the interview, including the job analysis, the question and rating scale development process, and the pilot test

Administering a Structured Interview

- In Federal Agencies, interviews are typically conducted by one person, namely the selecting official
- A structured interview may also be administered by a *panel* of interviewers
- A typical panel consists of two or more persons who have extensive knowledge of the job

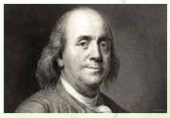
Note-Taking

Taking regular and detailed notes of observable behaviors and verbal responses during each interview is *crucial.* Notes should:

- Summarize the content and delivery of respondent's answers
- Document the candidate's grammar, body language, and other non-verbal factors
- Help interviewers focus on pertinent information during the interview
- Be of sufficient quality and quantity to document the interviewer's reasoning for each rating on each competency
- Serve as documentation to support the employment decision

Interviewer's Non-Verbal Behavior

Body language can communicate disinterest



Interpersonal Bias and Rating Errors

Most common types of errors	
Rater Bias	Allowing prejudices to interfere with being able to fairly evaluate a candidates performance
Halo effect	Allowing ratings of performance in one competency to influence ratings for other competencies
Central Tendency	A tendency to rate all competencies in the middle of the rating scale
Leniency	A tendency to give high ratings to all candidates, irrespective of their actual performance
Strictness	A tendency to give low ratings to all candidates, irrespective of the actual performance
Similar to Me	Giving higher than deserved ratings to candidates who appear similar to you

The Interview Setting

The interview should take place in a comfortable environment

- Interviews should be held in a quiet, non-threatening and private place
- Seating arrangements should be the same for all candidates
- The interview room and facilities must be accessible to candidates with disabilities
- There should be a separate area for those waiting to be interviewed
- Individuals who have been interviewed should not be allowed to communicate with those waiting to be interviewed
- Interviews should be scheduled far enough in advance to provide adequate preparation time for the interviewer
- All candidates should be allotted the same amount of interview time

Supplemental Materials

Candidates may be permitted to bring supplement documents to the interview, e.g., references, transcripts, resume, etc.

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Supplemental material is for reference only, and should not be looked at during the interview

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Allowing interviewer's to view supplemental material may bias the perception of the candidate – candidates with strong resumes might be rated higher

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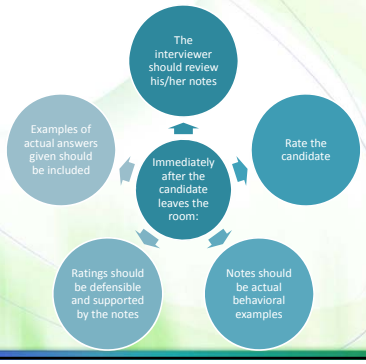
When interviewers look at supplemental information during the interview and this information is not provided by all candidates, then candidates may be evaluated inconsistently

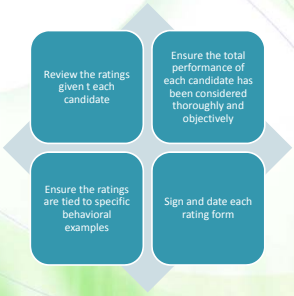
Arrival of the Candidate

- Welcome the candidate in a warm and friendly manner
- Thank the candidate for his/her interest in the position and for coming to the interview
- Briefly describe the job & relevant organizational characteristics
- Explain the interview process in a standardized way
- Inform the candidate that notes will be taken throughout the interview
- Ask the candidate if he/she has any questions before beginning

Rating Each Candidate



After All the Candidates Have Been Rated the interviewer should



Document the Interview Process

In addition to documentation mentioned previously, the following information should be recorded and retained:

- Date, time, place, and length of interview
- Name, job title, race, national origin, and sex of the interviewer
- Interview questions, scores, and notes for each candidate
- Training provided to the interviewer
- Interview guides, rating scales, and other materials used

Reference Checks

Step 1
- Decide who will conduct the reference check – e.g., hiring official, or HR Specialist
- Develop Questions for References

Step 2
- Inform candidates you'll be checking their references & request permission if not already obtained
- Contact References
- Briefly describe the position & duties the candidate will perform

Step 3
- Contact additional references, as applicable
- Clarify with the candidate any conflicting information received by references

Step 4
- Ensure materials are stored and retained according to agency policy

Same Reference Check Questions

In what capacity did you work with the candidate, e.g., peer, colleague, supervisor?

Could you give me a brief description of the duties the candidate performed?

What were the candidate's strengths? What were the candidates weaknesses or areas where the candidate could improve?

Would you recommend him/her for this position? Why or why not?

How well did the candidate know the work?

Same Reference Check Questions

- How well did the candidate perform the job?
- How well did the candidate manage the workload?
- Is there anything else you can tell me about the candidate's ability to perform his/her job?
- What kind of work-related training, certificates, education, or other qualifications does the candidate have?
- Is the candidate eligible for re-hire in you organization?

Common Interviewing Mistakes

Relying on First Impressions	Interviewers tend to make rapid decisions about the qualifications of a candidate within the first few minutes of the interview based on minimal information
Negative Emphasis	Unfavorable information tends to be more influential and memorable than favorable – avoid focusing on negative information to the exclusion of positive information
Not Knowing the Job	Interviewers who do not have a comprehensive understanding of the skills needed for the job often form their own opinion about what constitutes the best candidate
Pressure to Hire	When interviewers believe they need to make a decision quickly, they tend to make decisions based on a limited sample of information, or on a small number of candidate interviews
Contrast Effects	The order in which the candidate are interviewed can affect the ratings given to candidates
Nonverbal Behavior	Interviewers should base their evaluation of the candidate on the candidate's past performance and current behavior as it relates to the competencies being evaluated not just on how the candidate acts during the interview

Interviewing People with Disabilities

Interviewing people with disabilities is generally the same as interviewing people without disabilities

- The focus of the interview should be on the applicants' qualifications and on how they can perform the essential functions of the job
- Applicants should state any accommodations needed for the interview when the interview is scheduled
- An interviewer is prohibited from asking applicants questions about their disabilities that are not relevant to the applicants functioning on the job

Prohibited Personnel Practices (PPP)

There are 12 PPP's, including reprisal for whistleblowing, which are defined by law (5 U.S.C 2302)

By law, Federal employees may not:

Discriminate	Engage in nepotism
Solicit or consider employment recommendations based on factors other than personal knowledge or records of job related abilities or characteristics	Take or threaten to take a personnel action because of the exercise of a lawful appeal
Coerce the political activity of any person	Discriminate based on personal conduct which does not adversely affect the performance of the employee or other employees
Deceive or willfully obstruct any person from competing for employment	Knowingly take or fail to take a personnel action in the violation of Veteran's Preference laws
Influence any person to withdraw from job competition	Take or threaten to take a personnel action because of whistleblowing
Give an unauthorized preference or advantage to improve or injure the prospects of any particular person for employment	Violate any law, rule or regulation implementing or directly concerning merit system principles

This Concludes the Webcast

This webcast "Best Interview Practices" was brought to you by the Division of Diversity and Civil Rights

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