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Unstructured Interviews

A large percentage of selection interviews are unstructured interviews. The

interviewer, often the hiring manager, will have a general idea of what a suc-

cessful applicant should know and be able to do. The interviewer will ask the

candidate job-related questions, but without a defined format and without asking

the same questions of all applicants. Some managers claim that they are good at

judging character and that they need just a few minutes with an applicant in an

interview to make a good decision. The reality is that many managers are not as

good as they think they are at selecting employees. A more structured process will

lead to a better hiring decision. A more structured process is also more defensible

should an applicant file a charge of discrimination because of the outcome of the

selection process.

unstructured interview

a type of interview in

which questions are

asked without a defined

format and the same

type of information is

not collected from all

interviewee

Structured Interviews

The “Working at Starbucks” website includes a section to prepare applicants

for a job interview at Starbucks. In addition to advising applicants to be very

familiar with the company, it also tells them to be prepared to answer something

called behavioral-based interview questions. These questions focus on key com-

petencies of the position of interest.

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 Starbucks incorporates these questions

into a process called a structured interview to ensure greater job-relatedness

of the interview. This type of interview also provides a more accurate means

for comparing responses across applicants since the same type of information

is collected from all interviewees. In the following paragraphs, we discuss two

types of structured interviews—situational and behavioral. Properly designed

situational and behavioral interviews include a rating scale and lead to better

selection decisions.

In addition to the ability assessments we have already noted, Barclays uses

 situational interviews as part of its selection process. In this type of interview, an

interviewer poses hypothetical situations to the interviewee and gauges the person’s

responses relative to how the individual would be expected to respond in a similar

situation on the job. At Barclays, applicants are expected to use their past experi-

ences to respond to the questions.

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 Situational interviews have proven to be valid

in numerous research studies, and they have been shown to be accurate in predict-

ing performance as much as 54% of the time.

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A situational interview for a trader on Wall Street might go something like this:

What would you do if a client asked you to provide confidential information to her?

The applicant would then describe how he would typically handle this situation.

His answer would be compared to the rating scale and a score determined for the

interview. The problem with situational interviews is that applicants may tell you

what they think you want to hear rather than what they would actually do. Behav-

ioral interviews provide a way to address this issue.

The premise of the behavioral interview is that past behavior is the best predic-

tor of future behavior. Rather than simply asking a candidate how she would handle

a situation, the interviewer asks the candidate how she has handled the situation in

the past. For example, “Tell me about a time when you had to deal with an intoxi-

cated passenger” would be a good question to ask an applicant for a flight atten-

dant position. If the applicant has limited airline work experience, the interviewer

could instead ask, “Tell me about a time when you had to deal with an extremely

obnoxious person. Describe what led up to the event, your involvement in the situ-

ation, and how the incident was resolved.” Follow-up questions provide additional

information for the interviewer about how an applicant has actually behaved in

situations as opposed to how the applicant thinks he or she would behave in them.

Starbucks, P&G, and many other companies use behavioral-based interviewin

Interviews are the most frequently used selection method. Following our coverage

of the main types of selection interviews, we discuss some of the most significant

research regarding the use of interviews. Keep in mind that each type of interview

can be used by individual interviewers or by a panel. Companies sometimes use

panel interviews—several people interviewing the applicant at the same time—as

a way to increase the reliability of the interview proc

structured interview

a type of interview that

uses a set of predeter-

mined questions related

to the job and usually

includes a scoring system

to track and compare

applicant response

Panel Interviews

type of interview process

in which several people

interview the applicant at

the same time.

Situational Interviews

a type of interview in

which an interviewer

poses hypothetical situ-

ations to the interviewee

and gauges the person’s

responses relative to how

the individual would be

expected to respond in a

similar situation on the job

Behavioral Interview

a type of interview based

on the premise that past

behavior is the best

 predictor of future behav-

ior and involves asking

job candidates to respond

to questions about how

they have handled specific

 job-related types of

 situations in the past