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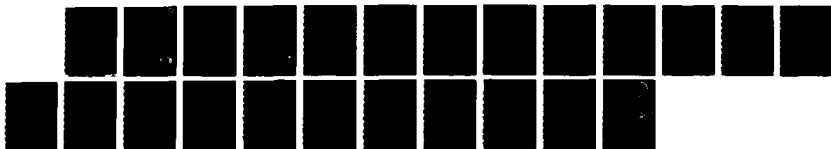
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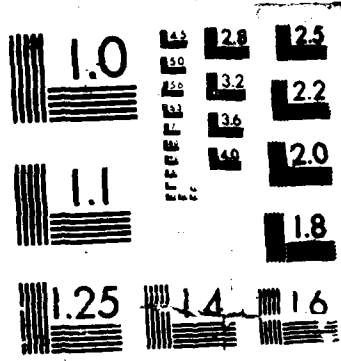
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The Employment Interview: Guideposts for Research and Development

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**The Employment Interview: Guideposts for
Research and Development**

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Director, Personnel Systems Department

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Navy Personnel Research and Development Center
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From: Commanding Officer, Navy Personnel Research and Development Center

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1. The research reported herein was funded by the Naval Sea Systems Command (NAVSEA) as part of an effort to improve the interviewing procedures used in placing job applicants. This report details a number of guideposts (i.e., research-supported conclusions) that will serve as parameters to guide future research on the employment interview.

2. This research is expected to benefit NAVSEA and the various naval shipyards. In view of the general nature of the results reported here, they may be expected to make a contribution to the psychological literature and to benefit the research community.

John J. Pass
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SUMMARY

Problem

The personal interview is integral to almost all military and civilian recruiting and personnel placement by government agencies. The many criticisms directed at the nature and usefulness of the interview notwithstanding, continuous efforts are made to refine and enhance interview procedures and techniques. However, there has been no compilation of what is actually known about this methodology to guide research.

Objective

The specific objectives of this effort were to review the psychological literature on the employment interview and (1) summarize what is known about the interview process and (2) suggest ways to improve that process through the generation of research-supported conclusions (or guideposts).

Approach

A computerized and manual search of the psychological literature relating to interviewing in general and employment interviews in particular was conducted. Based on the review, a number of factors to be used in planning and conducting future research were generated.

Results

The key findings about the current status of the interview and the interviewing process were extracted from the psychological literature and are summarized as "guideposts," that is, tentative conclusions about interviews and interviewing that can be used to guide future research. The structured interview appears to be superior to the unstructured interview in terms of validity and reliability.

Conclusion

More research is needed to refine the structured interview process and clarify individual differences in the ways that interviewers interpret the data gained during the process. Research on the personal interview, particularly in specific, applied settings, will benefit by being planned and conducted in accordance with one or more of the guideposts generated in this review.

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INTRODUCTION

Problem

The personal interview is integral to most military and civilian recruiting and to personnel placement by government agencies. The many criticisms directed at the nature and usefulness of the interview notwithstanding, continuous efforts are made to refine and enhance interview procedures and techniques. However, there has been no compilation of what is actually known about this methodology to guide research. As in many areas, what is needed is a better linkage between the theoretical and the applied.

Objective

The global objective of this effort was to help bridge the gap between research and practice. The specific objectives were to review the psychological literature on the employment interview and (1) summarize what is known about the interview process and (2) contribute to the improvement of that process through the generation of guideposts that will be useful in planning and conducting research and development.

Background

Most managers acknowledge the importance of the personal interview in selection and classification. A 1957 survey found that 99 percent of organizations questioned (N = 852) reported interviewing applicants before hiring (Ulrich & Trumbo, 1965). The use of the interview was still as strong in 1969 (Wright, 1969). Later writings reported the continued popularity of the selection interview. Landy (1976), for example, noted that "virtually every large police department in the country uses the interview as a major component for entry-level police officer selection" (p. 193). Criscuolo (1977) exhorted educators that in screening prospective teachers, "emphasis should be on the personal interview even though teaching credentials and college records receive attention" (p. 27). With increasing legal challenges to paper-and-pencil selection tests, the interview may be becoming even more popular (Arvey, 1979; Dipboye, Arvey, & Terpstra, 1976).

Schneider and Schmitt (1986) reflected that most interviewers believe strongly in the usefulness and validity of the interview as a selection tool and they especially believe in their own skills as interviewers. It might be added that many job applicants are equally enthusiastic about the interview, believing that if they "can just get an interview," they can impress the interviewer in a way that the application or resume can not.

It is a function of research to provide plausible parameters for testing in applied settings. A compilation of knowledge about the interview, framed as guideposts, will provide a valuable framework for further research on the personal interview and its use in selection, classification, and placement.

APPROACH

This research consisted of a literature search, a review of the relevant materials, and the generation of guideposts.

The information reviewed and the studies cited below are drawn from many and diverse sources. The research results presented include some studies that used managers as interviewers, some that used professional personnel recruiters, and some that used students as interviewers. Some of the studies were true field studies and others took

place in a laboratory setting; some studied real employment interviews and some were simulations. Some involved real applicants, some involved well-prepared "actors," and still others asked interviewers to evaluate a "candidate" that was nothing more than a composite designed by the researcher. Similarly, some studies involved videotaped interviews and candidates, while others took place "live." In short, as with most organizational research, there is much to argue against over-generalization from the available research.

Yet, as we continue to struggle with the limitations of our research, the interview continues to be used in the selection process. This led Mayfield, Brown, and Hamstra (1980) to state

It appears to be high time that we stop bemoaning the need for more research and that the findings are conflicting before we try to apply the results to the real world. Rather, we should take what current research indicates is needed to improve the validity of the selection interview, apply these findings to the real world, and then assess the results so further improvements can be made. (p. 739)

In short, there is a great deal yet to learn about the interview--a great deal of research yet to be done. And at the same time, a great deal is known about the interview that can guide the interventions of both scientists and practitioners. To summarize the findings of the research on interviewing as "propositions" was felt too definitive--as though all or most of the conditions for comparability and generalizability of results had been met. To summarize the findings only as "hypotheses" was felt too tentative. The term "guideposts" is meant to convey a degree of certainty that will allow the practitioner to proceed with implementing believable, high-probability interventions in organizations, and at the same time convey an appropriate tentativeness to the good scientist who continues to test his or her actions.

Here, then, are the practical and legal parameters within which personal interviews can more sensitively detect variance in applicant quality. They are not sacrosanct; they are and should be open to testing and questioning, as well as to augmentation. In a sense, these guideposts reflect the state of the art of the personal interview.

RESULTS

The key findings of this review are summarized as "guideposts" (GPs), that is, conclusions about interviews and interviewing that are supported by research findings. For some, there exists a preponderance of evidence; for others, there is less weighty corroboration. However, all enjoy some support in the research literature.

Generally, interviews may be characterized by their position on a continuum, ranging from unstructured to structured. Each of these polar opposites has its own characteristics and will be dealt with separately below.

The Unstructured Employment Interview

The typical unstructured employment interview involves two people who engage in a conversation to allow the interviewer to make a judgment (or rating) about the candidate's suitability for the position under consideration. In some cases the interview may also allow the applicant to find out more about the job and the firm.

A key point about the way a typical employment interview is done is that the interviewer is free to decide which topics to discuss, which questions to ask, how long the interview should be, and even where to conduct the interview. The interviewer also determines how to interpret the candidate's responses and how to weight and combine the responses into a final rating or decision. In short, the usual unstructured interview is one in which the interviewer is personally responsible for the design and flow of the interview. The very unstructured nature of the interview affects the consistency and usefulness of the decisions that interviewers make based on the interview. Parenthetically, it may be noted that the lack of structure easily plays into the hands of those interviewees bent on obfuscating or diverting attention from their qualifications, and so forth.

Reliability of the Unstructured Interview

As applied to the interview, reliability refers to the reproducibility of results--namely, interrater agreement. In other words, if several interviewers interview and rate the same person, to what extent will they agree with each other about the applicant's suitability and chances for success in the job? Information about the reliability of the interview began to be collected in the earliest days of interest in improving selection and placement.

Traditionally, a reliability coefficient or a validity coefficient should be high enough to be statistically significant at some acceptable level (generally .01 or .05). That is, we should be reasonably certain, before drawing conclusions about the reliability or validity of a test, that the obtained correlation coefficients could not have occurred by chance if the true correlation is zero (Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology, Inc., 1987). And yet, there are practical aspects to be considered. Clearly, an important factor is how the predictor will be used. Osburn and Manese (1971) felt that the reliability of the interview in terms of interrater agreement should be at least .60; reliability coefficients below .60 are considered cause for concern.

GP #1: The reliability coefficients reported for the typical unstructured selection interviews are generally below those considered acceptable for making decisions about people.

Some of the earliest studies reported in the literature set the tone for later research. Scott (1915), for example, had 6 personnel managers independently interviewing 36 sales job candidates and rank the applicants in the order of their suitability for the sales job. Results indicated that agreement on the rankings was very poor; a sales candidate ranked number 1 by one interviewer was ranked number 32 by another interviewer. In fact, there was little agreement among the managers about which applicants belonged in the upper and lower halves of the distribution. Hollingsworth (1922) similarly found little agreement among Army classification officers interviewing applicants for postings in the military. He reports a case in which one interviewer ranked an applicant number 1, while another interviewer ranked the same interviewee number 57.

Wagner (1949), in the first major review of the literature on interviews, summarized the approximately 25 empirical studies that had been done up to that time and reported reliabilities ranging from .23 to .97 for ratings of specific traits and -.20 to .85 when interviews called for ratings of overall suitability. Each of the major reviews of the research since Wagner's (Arvey & Campion, 1982; Hakel, 1982; Mayfield, 1964; Schmitt, 1976; Ulrich & Trumbo, 1965; Wright, 1969) have come to the same conclusion--namely that while there are some exceptions, overall, reliability coefficients reported for the unstructured interview are below those normally considered acceptable for making decisions about people.

Validity of the Unstructured Interview

As applied to the interview, validity refers to its usefulness for predicting job performance. It is difficult to specify an acceptable level of validity. Clearly, a predictor is only useful to the extent that it correlates with a criterion, and the higher the correlation the better. As was noted above for the reliability coefficient, the validity coefficient, too, should be high enough to be statistically significant. Similarly, just as for reliability, the determination of what constitutes a useful level of validity will depend in part on how the predictor will be used. In some situations, even low levels of predictor/criterion correlation may result in substantial savings in selection and placement. For Anastasi (1982), "even validities as low as .20 or .30 may justify inclusion of (a) test in a selection program" (p. 160). Nunnally (1978) similarly argued that validity coefficients of .30 between a predictor and criterion can be useful for selection purposes.

Based on the data summarized above about reliability, it would appear that the unstructured interview is not very likely to be valid. In fact, the research data on the typical interview support that expectation.

GP #2: With few exceptions, the validity coefficients reported for the typical unstructured interview are below those normally considered useful for predicting actual job performance.

Again, in one of the earliest studies about the usefulness of the interview for predicting actual job performance, Scott (1916) compared supervisory ratings of the sales ability of 12 salesmen to the ratings the salesmen had received in their respective employment interviews. On the average, the match between the performance ratings and the interview ratings was slightly better than chance. After reviewing the research comparing hiring decisions made on the basis of valid selection tests only with decisions made on both interview and test data, Mayfield (1964) concluded that the decisions made on the test scores alone were as good as (and sometimes better than) the selection decisions made on the basis of both test scores and interview data. In short, the typical interview contributes nothing more to predictive validity than can be gained from valid test scores alone.

As noted for reliability, the major review articles covering studies on the validity of the interview conclude that while there may be some rare exceptions, the validities obtained for the typical interview are usually of the low magnitude. Hunter and Hunter (1984), in a meta-analysis of previous research on predictors of job performance using supervisor ratings as the criterion, estimated the validity of the interview at .14 for predicting job performance. The authors estimated that the validity was even lower for other uses such as predicting promotability, training success, or job tenure. Reilly and Chao (1982) reviewed the results of 12 previously unreviewed studies on the effectiveness of the interview and estimated the average validity of the interview as .19, with supervisory ratings as the criterion.

In the 1960s, as the early psychometric findings about the poor reliability and validity of the interview were confirmed again and again, England and Paterson (1960, p. 57) called for

a moratorium on books, articles, and other writings about "how to interview," "do's and don't's" about interviewing, and the like, until there is sufficient research evidence about the reliability and validity of the interview as an assessment device to warrant its use in such work.

Dunnette and Bass (1963, p. 117) stated:

The personnel interview continues to be the most widely used method for selecting employees, despite the fact that it is a costly, inefficient, and usually invalid procedure.

Dunnette (1966) held out hope that the interview could at least serve as a public relations tool for organizations but finally concluded supervisors were not even doing a good job of public relations in the typical interview.

Decision Making and Fairness

As the gloomy reports of research findings on the outcome of interviews were being amassed, the classic work of Webster (1964) and his colleagues at McGill University on the decision making process in interviews stimulated a new, process-oriented research focus. The result was a shift in focus from outcome studies to a more microanalytic approach to the interviewing process itself--namely, how interviewers elicit, weight, and combine information to make decisions about applicants. Such process-oriented studies showed that the way the selection interview is usually conducted contributes to its unreliability and low validity. Virtually all of the major review articles cover decision making data and draw conclusions about the interview, which are summarized below.

GP #3: There is no standard content in the unstructured interview.

It was noted above that a key identifying feature of the typical interview is that the interviewer is free to choose what topics to cover and in what depth to cover each topic. One result is that different interviewers, since they may be interested in different aspects of the same applicant, cover different topics during the interview. This lack of consistent content leads to the unreliability of the interview (Mayfield, 1964).

A research study by Pashalian and Crissy (1953) is particularly relevant, since it involved Navy submariners. The authors noted the frequency with which certain information was elicited in over 109 interviews and found the following:

Determining high school or college attendance	86%
Determining marital status	75%
Reasons for leaving school (graduated, joined Navy)	64%
Kinds of duty held in Navy	55%
Place(s) of naval duty	50%

Clearly, different interviews covered different topics. Overall, interviewers covered factual and biographical data with the greatest consistency. Information about attitudes, for example, how the candidates felt about their previous jobs, was the least consistently covered content area.

GP #4: Interviewers develop a stereotype of a suitable candidate and then judge applicants in terms of how they fit the stereotype.

Material may be unevenly covered in the interview because different interviewers feel that different things are important in a candidate--even though the interviewers are considering the applicant for the same job. Mayfield and Carlson (1966), reporting on a

laboratory study of how managers select insurance salesmen, found that managers really had at least two stereotypes. Managers interviewing candidates for the same job have some images of a suitable candidate that they hold in common, and each manager also has idiosyncratic ideas about the ideal candidate. In other words, interviewers do use a common template, but each manager also applies his or her own set of standards to the applicant. It is not surprising, then, that interviewers solicit different information, because each one may be interested in different aspects of the same applicant.

GP #5: Even when they collect the same information from an applicant, different interviewers may interpret or weight the information differently in arriving at a final decision.

Managers also have opinions about what information speaks favorably for a candidate's job suitability and what information is unfavorable (Mayfield & Carlson, 1966). Not surprisingly, managers can consistently agree that certain information is favorable or unfavorable. The problem is that there was wide disagreement about the favorability or unfavorability of some types of information. Information that one manager views as disqualifying an applicant may be viewed as neutral or even positive by another interviewer.

GP #6: Interviewers tend to weight unfavorable information more heavily than favorable information.

Webster's (1964) report cites a study by Springbett (1958), in which he found that a single unfavorable item on a candidate would lead Army personnel interviewers to reject the candidate 90 percent of the time. Carlson and Mayfield (1967) extended their studies of how hiring decisions are made by having 600 managers label their descriptions of sales applicants as hire, reject, or undecided. In addition, the managers rated and ranked each candidate's overall job favorability. The eight "candidates" were, in reality, hypothetical composite constructions made up of information about applicants that had previously been rated by managers in terms of favorability. Only items on which there was high inter- and intrarater agreement about favorableness were used. Results indicated that the more that managers agreed about the favorability of the information about a candidate, the more likely they were to recommend hiring; unfavorable information about applicants carried more weight than favorable information. Similarly, there was significantly more agreement about unfavorable applicants than there was for favorable candidates.

Considered together, GP #5 and GP #6 shed more light on potential sources of the unreliability and low validity of the typical interview. The two hypotheses may be especially relevant at the shipyards, where for some trades--notably, the electrical and electronics trades--there are many candidates for few openings. When there are few candidates or there is pressure to fill openings, some negative information might be overlooked to "get a body." Carlson (1968) found that managers would make more decisions to hire from among the same pool of applicants if they were behind in their recruiting quotas than if they were ahead. We might expect that when the pool of applicants exceeds the number of openings, negative information will play an even larger role for "screening-out" candidates.

GP #7: In the usual unstructured interview, interviewers tend to make decisions to accept or reject early in the interview.

Springbett (1958) discovered that interviewers make a decision very early in the employment interview. His often-cited research finding was that in interviews averaging

about 15 minutes in length, eight experienced personnel interviewers from six different companies averaged just under 4 minutes in making their decision. The data reported by Tucker and Rowe (1977) confirm that initial impressions are formed quickly. In an open-ended interview, 28 experienced employment interviewers reported high levels of confidence in decisions that took an average of only 9 minutes to reach.

The finding that interviewers reach decisions relatively quickly takes on added significance in light of subsequent findings that early impressions have a key role in influencing the final outcome of the interview (Anderson, 1960; Springbett, 1958; Sydiaha, 1961).

Similarly, such early decision making actually affects the way the interview is conducted. Anderson (1960), for example, found that interviewers were friendlier during the early stages of interviews in which the ultimate decision about the applicant was favorable than during the early stages of interviews in which the subsequent decision was unfavorable. Overall, the observation that interviewers tend to talk more than the interviewees during a typical unstructured interview may be related to the fact that a decision has already been made. In the case of a "reject," interviewers have "time to kill"; while if the decision is to "accept," the interviewers may be "selling" the job, the organization, or themselves.

GP #8: The typical unstructured interview is highly vulnerable to the irrelevant personal biases, expectations, prejudices, and stereotypes of the interviewer.

Beyond the stereotype of the ideal candidate that interviewers bring to the interview and beyond the biases formed by the first impression of the candidate, interviewers also bring irrelevant personal biases and preferences to the interview. These biases (e.g., age, gender, race, physical manifestations, etc.) not only contribute to the unreliability and low validity of the interview but also have to do with its fairness. By fairness we mean the extent to which the outcome of an interview is based on irrelevant applicant characteristics rather than on factors that have been demonstrated to be related to success in the position.

A recent study by Forsythe, Drake, and Cox (1985), for example, studied the effects of clothing style on interviewers' decisions regarding female candidates' suitability for a management position. Seventy-seven personnel administrators viewed videotaped interviews of four candidates wearing different clothing. Results indicated that the masculinity of the female applicant's dress was significantly related to positive hiring recommendations.

Schmitt's (1976) review provides a comprehensive guide to the subjective factors that affect interviewers' judgments. But such awarenesses are not new. In 1964, Mayfield summarized the available research and concluded "a great deal of the (accept/reject) decision is likely to be based on manner, facial expression, and personal appearance rather than on information obtained during the interview" (p. 254). Thus, the very nature of the unstructured interview leaves it open to potential charges of unfair discrimination or adverse impact. As Hakel (1982) pointed out, if it were one's intention to unfairly discriminate against or in favor of some individual or group, the interview would be the place to do it. Arvey (1979), noting the popularity of the interview as a selection tool despite what we know about its statistical properties, predicted more court and legal challenges in the future.

Many more hypotheses could be drawn from the research literature. Up to now we have been dealing mainly with negative conclusions. The point is that we do know a great deal about interviews and interviewing. In reviewing the reliability and validity of the interview, Hakel (1982) made the important point that it may not be useful to speak of the reliability and validity of the interview. In fact, reliability coefficients over .90 have been reported for some trait ratings. Similarly, some validity coefficients have been reported at acceptable levels, most notably, in predicting intelligence from interview data (Ulrich & Trumbo, 1965). Interviews are done under so many different conditions and the studies evaluating them vary so widely in sample size, type of interview, length, what is being evaluated, and who is doing the evaluation that it would be good to remember that some positive research findings about interviews do exist. The growing literature on the structured, or patterned, interview is a case in point.

The Structured Interview

A structured interview employs a standardized format, which is associated with increased reliability and validity.

Reliability of the Structured Interview

GP #9: The more structured an interview, the more reliable it is likely to be.

Schwab and Heneman (1969) asked 18 experienced employment interviewers to use one of three degrees of interview structure: (1) a structured interview involving a predetermined interview format; (2) a semi-structured interview, which used the predetermined format but allowed deviations; and (3) a typical unstructured format, in which the interviewers were free to ask whatever they wanted to ask. Each interviewer evaluated and ranked five "job applicants"--persons who had been coached to play the role of candidate for a clerk-stenographer job--in terms of suitability for the opening. Results indicated that the amount of agreement between interviewers increased as the degree of interview structured increased. Interrater agreement, as measured by the coefficient of concordance, was .79 among interviewers using the totally structured format, .43 among interviewers using the semi-structured format, and .36 among interviewers who used the traditional unstructured approach.

Schwab and Heneman (1969) reconfirmed experimentally what even the earliest literature reviews reported; namely, that a structured interview--one which uses a predetermined set of questions, sequence, and a structured rating form--is superior to the typical unstructured interview.

Latham, Saari, Pursell, and Campion (1980) reported an innovative design of the structured interview. Using the critical incident technique (Flanagan, 1954), they developed interview questions in which job applicants are asked to indicate how they would behave in given job situations. In this "situational interview," responses can be objectively scored by comparison to standards set by job experts. Results indicated that interrater reliability coefficients were high for ratings of both hourly workers (.76) and foremen (.79). A separate study, reported reliabilities of .87 and .82 for ratings of female and black hourly workers, respectively (Latham et al., 1980).

The structured interview removes some of the major drawbacks of the traditional interview; specifically, at the most basic level of difference, interviewers ask the same questions of all applicants and in the same sequence. In short, the employment interview follows a highly structured format.

Validity of the Structured Interview

GP #10: Structured interviews produce validity coefficients in the range normally considered useful for predicting actual job performance.

In an earlier section, it was noted that the average validity coefficients for the typical interview have been estimated at .14 and .19 (Hunter & Hunter, 1984; Reilly & Chao, 1982, respectively). As a benchmark, consider cognitive ability tests as valid predictors of successful performance for all jobs in all settings. A 1980 validity generalization study conducted by Hunter for the U.S. Employment Service reported validity coefficients for cognitive ability tests ranging from .56 for jobs requiring more complex abilities to .23 for jobs requiring the least complexity (study cited in Schmidt & Hunter, 1981).

In the applications of the situational interview (Latham et al., 1980), researchers have found concurrent validity coefficients of .46 for hourly workers and .30 for foremen. In a separate study (Latham et al., 1980), predictive validity coefficients based on a performance appraisal after 1 year on the job were .39 and .33, respectively, for female and black hourly workers. Janz, Hellervik, and Gilmore (1986) reported a 1983 concurrent validation study by Latham and Saari in which situational interview scores and supervisor ratings of performance correlated at .39, and interview scores and peer ratings at .42.

Latham and Saari (1984) found additional evidence for the concurrent validity of the structured interview when they compared interview ratings to supervisors' and peers' rating of the actual performance of clerical workers. Results indicated that correlations of interview results with supervisory and peer observations yielded validity coefficients of .47 and .50, respectively.

In another study conducted to assess the predictive validity of the situational interview, Latham and Saari (1984) compared interview ratings of new hires in a newsprint mill with a performance appraisal after 3 years on the job. The result was a very disappointing correlation coefficient of .14. The original interviewers had used the situational interview questions not to rate the applicants on the relevant dimensions but instead, to develop a global impression which they used as a global score. A random sample of the original group of hires was reinterviewed, and the results were correlated with the performance appraisal. Results indicated a concurrent validity of .40.

Janz (1982), in an approach to the structured interview he calls "behavior description" (BD) interviewing, asked interviewees to describe in detail past work experiences that involved critical behaviors required by the job. Janz had business students interview teaching assistants (TAs) with the aim of predicting the rating the TAs would get from their students at the end of the term. Each TA was interviewed four times: twice by interviewers trained in the the BD technique and twice by interviewers trained in using the unstructured interview approach. Surprisingly, the unstructured interviewers reported higher levels of interrater agreement (.71) than did the BD interviewers (.46). Later analysis done on a case-by-case basis revealed that the unstructured interviewers agreed more with each other, but on the wrong things. Thus, the predictive validity coefficients (i.e., predictions compared to actual student ratings) were .54 for the structured approach and .07 for the unstructured interview.

Orpen (1985) extended Janz' findings in a field study designed to predict the dollar sales volume and supervisory ratings of new insurance salesmen after 1 year on the job. Again, Orpen compared interviewers trained in the use of an unstructured interview with

the interviewers trained to use the BD method in a structured interview. Predictive validity coefficients using supervisory ratings as the criterion were .48 and .08, respectively, for the structured format and the unstructured format. Using dollar sales as the criterion, the predictive validity coefficient was .61 for interviewers using the structured interview and only .05 for interviewers using the typical unstructured approach.

As it did for the discussion of reliability above, the conclusion that follows most directly from these data is that the selection interview should follow a highly structured format. It should be noted that a significant characteristic of the structured interviews tested by Latham and Saari (1984), Janz (1982), and Orpen (1985) is that they were solidly based on predicting relevant job behaviors.

Prescriptions for Improving the Interview Process

GP #11: A focus on critical job requirements reduces the impact of irrelevant information and increases the accuracy of hire/reject decisions.

Osburn, Timmreck, and Bigby (1981) used hypothetical information to create two "candidates" who were average in overall qualifications and about equal in overall favorability but whose qualifications were constructed to produce a match and a mismatch, respectively, between two jobs. Then, experienced employment interviewers watched videotaped interview simulations, with the goal of matching the most qualified applicant with the correct job. Half the interviewers rated the interviewees on specific, relevant job dimensions that were critical behaviors involved in the job; the other half rated the applicants on general work dimensions that were not necessarily specifically related to the jobs under consideration. Results indicated that interviewers who rated on the relevant job dimensions were able to correctly identify the qualified and unqualified applicants; interviewers who used the general job suitability dimensions could not differentiate accurately between the candidates.

The Osburn et al. (1981) data support similar findings that interviewing on the basis of job-specific information reduces the effects of irrelevant information on the final decision (Weiner & Schneiderman, 1974) and that interviewing on the basis of detailed job information increases interrater agreement (Langdale & Weitz, 1973).

GP #12: The process-oriented skills of the employment interviewer can directly affect the quality of information collected.

To this point there has been little discussion of the role of process-oriented factors in enhancing the interview. At the most basic level, interviewers need to learn how to build rapport with interviewees and put them at ease. Fowler (1967), noting the consistent tendency of less-educated respondents to give less accurate and complete answers than better-educated respondents in data-gathering interviews (not just selection interviews), researched factors that might account for the difference. The major finding of Fowler's study has direct implications for the employment interview; namely, the critical factor in the performance of less-educated interviewees is the quality of the initial rapport established--the effectiveness of the interviewer/interviewee relationship. Hakel's (1982) interview guide includes rapport building to put the applicant at ease and also to model openness for the applicant.

GP #13: The employment interview should include an opportunity for an exchange of information, a chance for the applicant to learn about the job and the organization and for the interviewer to learn about the interviewee.

In 1971, Carlson and his colleagues at the Life Insurance Agency Management Association (LIAMA) summarized some of their early interview research (Carlson, Tnayer, Mayfield, & Peterson, 1971). The findings resulted in the construction of an Agent Selection Kit for use in field interviewing of sales applicants. One element of the Kit was a procedure by which applicants could learn about the job and the company. The authors concluded that in addition to learning about the applicant, the applicant should be able to make a decision to join a company based on realistic job expectations:

The company should know what the job recruit expects from his association with the company. . . . The job applicant should know what the company expects of him, how the company is going to help him accomplish these goals, and the difficulties and benefits he may encounter in undertaking the job. With such knowledge, the recruit can make more than a job decision. He can make a career decision. The creation of realistic expectations further implies that the employment decision be one of "mutual consent." (p. 274)

Given our knowledge today of the importance of the "psychological contract" (Baker, 1985), such a recommendation would lead to an intuitive acceptance of GP #13 even if Wanous' work (Premack & Wanous, 1985; Wanous, 1980) had not demonstrated the impact of realistic job knowledge on job satisfaction and tenure. Similarly based on Wanous' findings, Hakel (1982) also presented an abbreviated interview guide with a section for including casual or more formal realistic job preview.

GP #14: Taking notes during the interview improves recall of relevant information and reduces the effects of some rating errors.

In a study of interviewer recall reported by Carlson et al (1971), managers watched a 20-minute videotaped selection interview under instructions to behave as if they were conducting the interview. The "interviewers" were given a copy of the structured interview guide and paper and pencils. After watching the taped interview, the managers were given a 20-item test of recall of factual information from the interview. Results indicated that some managers correctly recalled all 20 items; some managers could correctly recall only 5 of the 20 items. The key finding was that managers who had followed the interview guide and who had taken notes most accurately recalled the information.

GP #15: Employment interviewers should know what they legally can and can not ask during an interview.

Arvey (1979) reviewed the limited, direct research and the legal cases regarding discriminatory aspects of interviewing. For the present project, the most relevant issues raised by the legal cases relate to rulings and concerns voiced by the courts about the content of the interview and the kinds of questions interviewers ask. Specifically, the courts have disallowed interview questions that suggest bias, or discriminatory attitude or intent. Inquiries into areas unrelated to the job, such as marital status, child care arrangements, and financial status, could imply prejudice, especially when such questions are not asked of all applicants or when the answers do not equally impact the hiring prospects of all candidates.

GP #16: Employment interviewers should be trained to avoid typical rating errors.

Carlson et al. (1971) studied interviewer recall and found that less accurate managers rated interviewees more highly and with less variability than did their more accurate peers. The implication was that the less accurate managers used a "halo strategy" in evaluating the applicants. Burgess, Calkins, and Richards (1972) studied interviewers of first- and third-year medical school applicants and found evidence of a similar tendency to base judgments on global impressions rather than on specific characteristics. Hakel (1971) confirmed the importance of the halo effect in producing low interrater reliability among nursing interviewers, showing that such errors can even subvert the usual advantages in reliability obtained from a structured interview.

Researchers have similarly found evidence of primacy and recency effects of favorable and unfavorable information (Farr & York, 1975; Peters & Terborg, 1975), of higher ratings due to perceived similarity to the interviewer (Peters & Terborg, 1975), and of contrast effects when interviewers use other applicants as a standard (Carlson, 1968, 1970). Most significantly, Latham, Wexley, and Pursell (1975) found that interviewer training successfully reduces the effects of some rating errors.

CONCLUSIONS

At this time, the evidence points to the conclusion that the structured interview is superior to the unstructured; that is, that under usual conditions, it is more reliable and valid as a selection and classification tool. The guideposts identified herein represent a compilation of knowledge to date; they portray what may be called the state of the art insofar as interview theory is concerned. Their implications should prove valuable in the planning of future research on the interview process in the development of instruments that will improve selection and placement of employees. Nevertheless, each of these guideposts remains open to question and refinement. Furthermore, the list requires expansion. Additional guideposts are needed in several areas, such as the application blank.

As research findings continue to accumulate and new guideposts are identified, the theoretical base of industrial/organizational psychology will be widened. Greater coverage of the variance in applicant quality through evaluation and refinement of interview methods and technology will make possible more precise, reliable interview decisions.

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