



Employment Interview Goals & Design

A Qualitative Research Study

Researchers

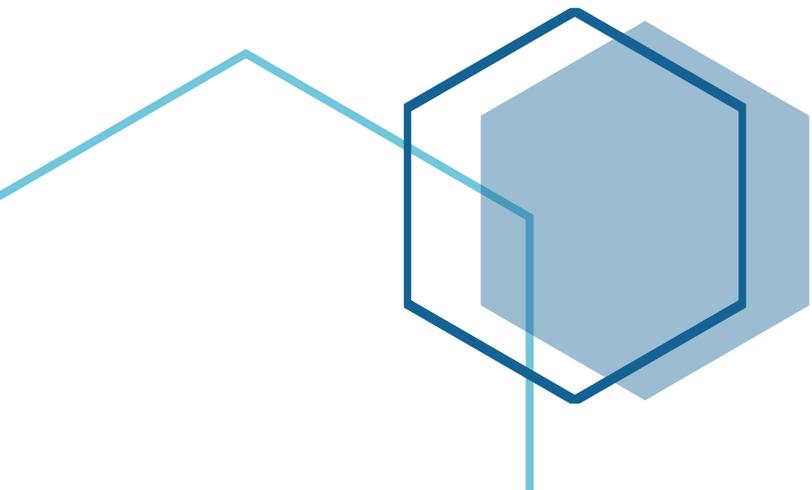
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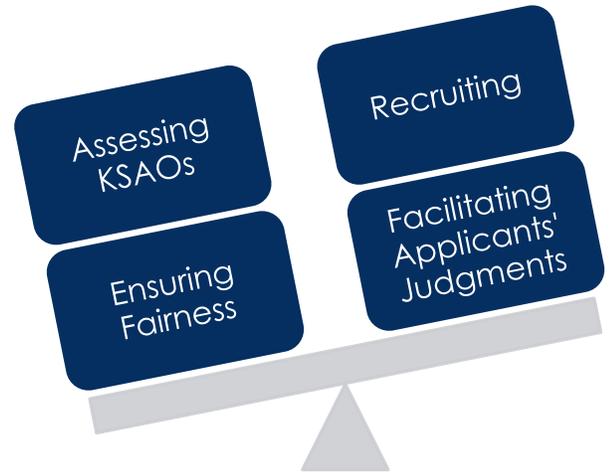
Executive Summary

A total of 29 experienced Human Resource (HR) professionals and hiring managers participated in interviews to share their perspectives on, and strategies for, employment interviewing. The goal of this study was to assess the intersections of the science and practice of employment interviews; in particular, the role(s) of the interview in the broader staffing system, and the interviewing strategies that are adopted to achieve these goals. Interviews with participants were recorded, transcribed, and thematically analyzed. Key insights and takeaways are summarized below.

Insight #1: Multiple Goals

The interview is commonly described as a tool for applicant **assessment**. However, participants balanced multiple goals for interviewing that extended beyond assessment:

- Assessing applicant knowledge, skills, abilities, and other work-related characteristics (KSAOs).
- Recruiting, making a positive impression on applicants, or otherwise positively representing one’s organization.
- Helping the applicant assess their own match with the job, work group, or organization.
- Ensuring a fair, transparent, and welcoming experience for all applicants.



“Often when recruiters bring individuals in, they weren’t necessarily looking for a position. And so suddenly, I then have to sell the position and organization to that individual, while also testing them.”

Measuring Success

Each of these goals implies distinct outcomes that can be used to gauge the success of an interview.

Goal	Example Criteria
Assessing KSAOs	→ Work performance
Recruiting	→ Applicant attraction
Facilitating applicants’ judgments	→ Work performance & satisfaction
Ensuring fairness	→ Avoid complaints & litigation

Implications for Design

Different interview designs help accomplish different goals. For instance, interviewers might engage in casual or unplanned conversation in order to **recruit applicants** or **help applicants gauge their own fit**, but this can threaten the **fairness** or accuracy of an **assessment**.

Key Takeaways

Interviews should be tailored to achieve the specific goals one is trying to achieve for the interview.

Avoid using strategies that contravene one’s goals. **Scripted vs unscripted conversation, information sharing**, and the makeup of an **interview panel** can serve some goals while undermining others.

When trying to accomplish multiple goals, it is best to engage in **multiple interviews**, and tailor each interview toward each goal.

Assess the success of an interview according to its corresponding criteria. For example, an interview aimed to **recruit** is successful to the degree that it **attracts the candidate** to the job or organization.



Insight #2: Assessing Fit to the Team & Organization

Participants challenged the assumption, common in interview research, that the interview should be solely focused on an applicant's *capacity to perform technical job tasks*.



Interviews are commonly used to assess not only an applicant's technical capabilities, but also their degree of match to members of a work team or to the organizational culture or strategy.



In these cases, interviews commonly focus on applicants' **personality, values, interests, and/or goals**, in addition to the technical knowledge, skills, and abilities to perform a specific job.

The success of these kinds of interviews does not depend on a hiree's individual task performance, but rather on alternative performance outcomes such as team cohesion, retention, and citizenship performance (e.g., helping a coworker).

“If you don't kind of have that same approach to ‘why do we do the work we do?’, and ‘what do we most value?’, it's not going to work”

“your credentials can be phenomenal, but if you can't work with the team it doesn't matter”

Key Takeaways

Interview questioning and evaluation strategies can be tailored to assess **task capability** or **group/organizational fit**.

An interview focused on technical performance should assess applicants' KSAs. The best way to assess other forms of performance, however, remains unclear.

Applicants' personality, values, goals, and/or interests might be more relevant to retention, citizenship, and/or teamwork performance. However, more research is needed to verify this claim.

Insight #3: Distrust of Mechanistic Judgments (vs Intuition-Based Judgments)

Correcting Misunderstandings

In a number of areas, interviewers' beliefs directly contradicted the science of evaluating applicants.

“I find it equals the same thing because ratings are pulled out of the air as well”

Ratings can be anchored with example criteria to specify, for example, what an applicant must express to achieve a score of “5”. This makes scoring more objective, accurate, and fair.

“hands down—without scoring, that same candidate probably would have come up on top anyway”

This may be true in some cases, but when intuition does not match the score, the score is most likely more accurate.

Although most participants numerically scored applicants' answers, few participants based hiring decisions on applicants' scores. Instead, most participants relied on “gut feelings” to make hiring decisions. This introduces bias into the interview, where different applicants are inadvertently judged according to different standards.

Basing hiring decisions on cumulative scores reduces bias and drastically increases the chances of hiring the best candidate. This is a well-established fact of interviewing (e.g., Kuncel et al., 2013, *Journal of Applied Psychology*).

Scoring applicants, and **basing hiring decisions on those scores, increases the accuracy, fairness, and legitimacy of interview assessments.**