

FEEDBACK REPORT FOR PARTICIPANTS

Interview Design

SMU REB # 18-185

Research Project conducted by:

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INTRODUCTION & GOALS OF THE PROJECT

Employment interviews are some of the most popular and commonly used methods of selection by organizations. Research suggests that interviews, when conducted correctly (McDaniel, et al., 1994) are considered a valid tool among human capital professionals. However, this is predicated on the assumption that the information that interviewees give are honest and accurate. And, unfortunately, much research suggests that applicants frequently use influence tactics (impression management or faking) to sway the opinion of the interviewers in their favor (e.g., Bourdage et al., 2018; Levashina & Campion, 2007; Roulin et al., 2015). Deceptive tactics can be particularly problematic as they can decrease the validity of the interview and can lead to suboptimal hiring decisions, something that organizations should be concerned about. In addition, research has shown that interviewers are typically poor judges of when someone is lying to them (Roulin et al., 2014; 2015).

Our study was an exploratory investigation to test the viability of using different types of interview questions to detect when candidates are indeed faking or to deter such behaviors.

The interviews were designed using a combination of four different types of questions:

- Knowledge-orientation questions (i.e., questions about experience with job-relevant concepts, tools, techniques, etc.)
- “Honeypot” questions (i.e., similarly formatted questions, but including made-up concepts, tools, etc. – which should be endorsed only by individuals attempting to fake)
- Past-behavior questions (e.g., “tell me about a time when you...”)
- Past-behavior faking-resistant questions (i.e., similarly formatted questions, but requiring applicants to provide supporting information such as specific facts or numbers with their responses)

PARTICIPANTS, DATA COLLECTION, & ANALYSES

Participants were 77 (21 men, 55 women, and 1 unspecified) students at a university in Atlantic Canada who completed the interview and survey questionnaires in exchange for gift cards at local restaurants. Participant's median age was 28 years old and they described themselves as White/Caucasian (49.4%), Black/African-Canadian (22.1%), Asian/ Pacific Islander (16.9%), other (6.5%) and Multiracial (2.6%). Participation in this study was on a voluntary basis. Compensation in the form of a \$10 gift card was provided to participants.

Participants could choose to “apply” to one of four jobs, for which they received a job description: assistant brand manager, bookstore social media intern, clothing store retail sales associate and laboratory assistant. Participants were then randomly assigned into either an honest or faking condition. Those in the honest condition were asked to interview like they would in an actual interview and encouraged to shed a positive light on their skills and work achievements, but to remain completely honest. Those in the faking condition were also encouraged to shed a positive light on their skills and work achievements, but to do whatever it took to make the interviewer think they were perfectly qualified and the ideal person for the job (e.g., use exaggerations, embellishments, transformations, and inventions).

Participants took the role of job candidates interviewing with a hiring manager for 30-60 minutes. Unique interview protocols were developed for each job description. All interviews included 12 questions (four for each type). For instance, past-behavior questions (“Can you describe a time when you had to collaborate with others to achieve your objective?”), past-behavior faking-resistant questions (“How often do you publish your own social media content on a monthly basis; What kind of content do you publish?”) knowledge-oriented questions (“Are you familiar with the cost-per-lead metric?”), and honey-pot questions (“Can you run a Goodings Analysis; How does it work?”). Participants fill out a short questionnaire after responding to each question. For instance, they were asked to what extent their responses were truthful (vs. exaggerated/invented) in terms of the knowledge about a concept or a reported work experience (i.e., about the situation they were involved in, the task they faced, the action they took, or the results).

MAIN FINDINGS

The results of this study (summarized in the table below) highlight two main things:

1. Our attempt to design “faking-resistant” interview questions was largely unsuccessful. Indeed, although participants did fake more when instructed to use exaggerations or embellishments, they faked to the same extent on traditional past-behavior questions and “faking-resistant” past-behavior questions.
2. The “honeypot” question demonstrated some potential. Indeed, participants instructed to make a good impression but remain honest did not pretend to know the made-up concepts, technologies, or tools. In contrast, those instructed to use exaggerations or embellishments did pretend to be largely familiar with those concepts. And they faked to the same extent as with actual knowledge questions. This suggests that they were either unable to identify the “honeypots” from the actual knowledge questions and/or chose to fake anyway.

	Honeypot		Knowledge Oriented		Past Behavior Faking-resistant		Past behavior	
	Honest	Faking	Honest	Faking	Honest	Faking	Honest	Faking
	<i>M(SD)</i>	<i>M(SD)</i>	<i>M(SD)</i>	<i>M(SD)</i>	<i>M(SD)</i>	<i>M(SD)</i>	<i>M(SD)</i>	<i>M(SD)</i>
	Extent of faking (in %) for...							
Situation	-	-	-	-	8.0 (16.2)	57.6 (30.3)**	8.9 (17.7)	52.0 (31.3)**
Task	-	-	-	-	11.0 (22.5)	50.2 (30.9)**	12.4 (22.3)	52.0 (32.0)**
Action	-	-	-	-	10.7 (22.0)	52.3 (29.9)**	11.3 (21.6)	51.7 (31.2)**
Results	-	-	-	-	11.6 (24.7)	57.7 (31.7)**	12.8 (22.9)	55.4 (30.6)**
Knowledge	5.6 (16.9)	66.2 (32.3)**	4.9 (16.5)	61.6 (30.4)**	-	-	-	-

If you have any question about this research or our findings, please contact nicolas.roulin@smu.ca.