

Understanding the Personal Interview: A Study for Managers Involved in the Hiring Process

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Introduction

Personal interviewing continues to be the most widely used method for selecting employees and is often used in conjunction with other techniques such as reference checking, weighted application blanks, skill tests, and psychological testing. There are obviously good reasons for the popularity of the employment interview despite the controversy regarding its validity.

The following factors affect validity:

- ✦ Pre-interview Impressions
- ✦ Psychological Selective Perceptions
- ✦ Stereotypes
- ✦ Halo-effect
- ✦ Trait Configurations

Pre-interview Impression Effects

Pre-interview Impressions

A process model by Diboye, 1982, proposes three interview phases:

1. The Pre-interview Phase;
2. The Interview Phase-the face-to-face interview with the applicant;
3. The Post-Interview Phase-where impressions are formed of the applicant's qualifications and the decision is made to hire or not to hire.

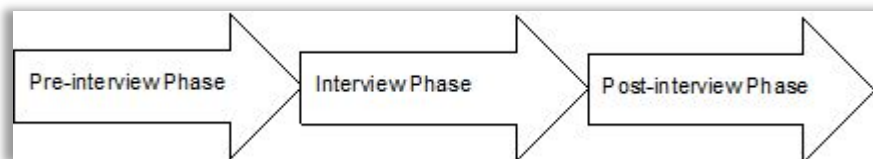


Figure 1: Diboye's Interview phases

Self-Fulfilling Prophecy

An interviewer forms a pre-interview opinion of the applicant and categorizes the applicant as “ideal, highly qualified” or “typical” or “unqualified,” and the interviewer's subsequent conception of the applicant then influences the subsequent gathering and processing of information. This “cognitive categorization,” means interviewers form expectancies of how applicants present themselves in an interview. Macan and Diboye confirmed this theory in a study they did and found that candidates with high qualifications were expected to give better answers and display traits of an ideal candidate.

Their findings also revealed that interviewers have more favorable attitudes to these higher qualified applicants and show more signs of approval in their verbal and nonverbal behavior than the less qualified applicants. This, in turn, influences the applicant's motivation to make a favorable self-presentation or stop the applicant from trying to make a good impression if he or she becomes discouraged. Also, the interviewer can lead to a behavioral confirmation by restricting the interviewee's responses or by only asking about negative aspects of their credentials.

Perception in the Interview

The Unfavorable Information Effect

There is evidence that the interviewer forms an accept/reject opinion very early on in the interview, often in the first five minutes. This could have a very adverse effect on the outcome of the interview, especially if the initial opinion is unfavorable.

A number of reasons for this have been proposed. First, decision-makers almost certainly receive negative feedback about an unqualified, unsuitable candidate that has been hired, but rarely receive positive feedback about a good hiring decision. Second, the error of rejecting a good candidate goes unpunished.

Kanouse and Hanson offer another possible reason—people are more motivated to avoid potential costs than look for potential rewards. In other words, a bad hiring decision is much more costly than the cost of not hiring a good applicant.