

2 The interview

2.1 Introduction

It seems almost inconceivable that any form of selection task and decision is not informed by one, indeed many, job interviews. These have been used in selection for over two centuries (for example, the Royal Navy used job interviews as early as 1800). Whether it comes at the beginning or the end of the selection process, whether there are one or many interviewers at a time and whether it lasts a few minutes or several hours, the selection interview is thought as a *crucial and central* part of the process whereby the employer and employee can get a good sense of one another. People use the words 'chemistry', 'fit' and 'feel', all of which speak primarily to the intuitive nature of the process. Candidates expect interviews.

An interview candidate may have to sit before large panels of people eager to have a 'good look' at him or her or else go through a large number of sequential 'one-to-ones' from the often many stakeholders in the job. Interviews differ on many dimensions: how long they last, how many interviewers there are; how much they are pre-planned; what the real purpose of the interview is.

The very popularity and ubiquity of interviews has spawned a huge industry in interview training. It has also spawned a number of books for both interviewers and interviewees. Interviewers are 'taught' how to ask 'killer questions' that get 'to the heart of the interviewee'. Equally, interviewees are taught how to give diplomatic (somewhat evasive) answers to those really 'tough' questions. Interviews are therefore presented as a minefield of dishonesty; a game of intellectual charades, where both parties are essentially out to 'trick' and 'out manoeuvre' one another. This is, of course, far from the truth but has no doubt served to influence how both parties see selection interviews.

As a result, some organisations have argued that the data showing the extremely poor reliability and validity of (mostly unstructured) interviews effectively means that they often hinder rather than help effective decision making. Interview data and ratings have been accused of being invalid, unreliable and biased. Further, considerable time and travel costs are often involved for both parties. Hence, in UK it is still common for universities *not* to interview prospective undergraduate students, believing that the school exam results, letters of recommendation and other application form data provide sufficient information for them to make the 'optimal' decision. Some universities do interview for highly selective courses

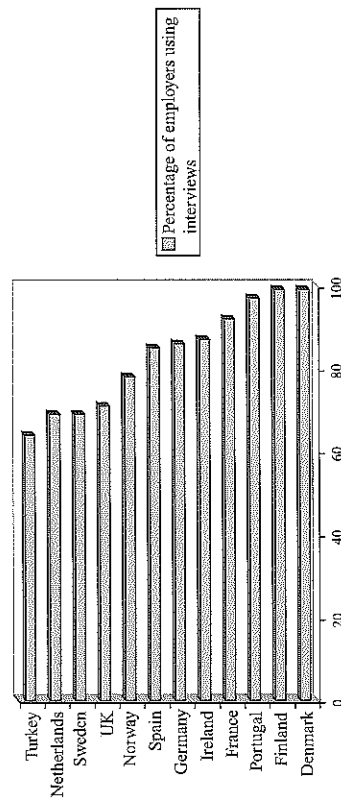


Figure 2.1 Percentage of employers using interviews (based on Dany & Torchy, 1994)

because they are interested in *weeding out* unsuitable candidates (as judged by personality, motivation or values) rather than selecting desirable candidates.

Yet interviews are perhaps part of nearly all selection decision, data-gathering methods because they are rated as the most acceptable (fair, reasonable, important) method. They are used to collect information, make inferences about suitability and determine an individual's communication skills. It is estimated that 90 per cent of employment selection decisions involve interviews (Cook, 2004). Figure 2.1 (from a Price Waterhouse Cranfield survey of Western European countries) shows the large percentage of employers in each country using the interview. Although accurate US estimates are harder to come by, US figures can be expected to be at least as high as UK ones and it has been pointed out that the employment interview is the most widely used method of assessment in the US (Judge, Higgins & Cable, 2000). Both parties seem to expect and want them.

This chapter attempts both to review the salient literature on the reliability and validity of information obtained by interview but also to look at the research-based advice to those interested in better interview practice. The literature on this topic is scattered between various academic and applied disciplines from Human Resource Management to Differential Psychology. Some researchers appear to be less disinterested than others in their attempt to demonstrate the validity of particular types of interview techniques or styles. However, there remains considerable consensus on the validity of structured and non-structured interview data. We will start with what is currently considered to be evidence-based good advice for doing interviews.

2.2 Basic guidelines for a good selection interview

The central question for those interested in the selection interview is the old but crucial psychometric issues of reliability and validity. In short, they refer to the question of whether interviewers' ratings of the candidates agree

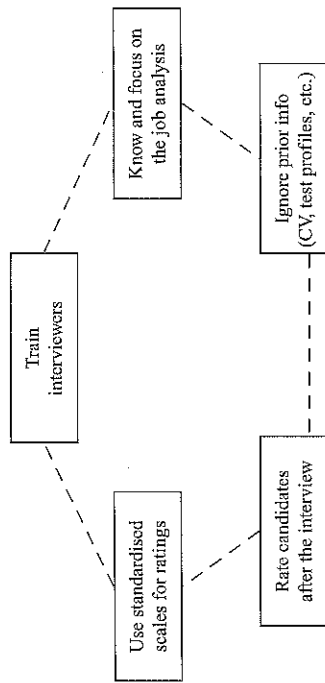


Figure 2.2 Five common guidelines for improving the interview

(sufficiently) with one another. Do candidates leave the same impression about their skills, aptitudes, dispositions and attitudes with *all* those that interview them? Second, and always more salient, do the interview ratings predict future job performance? The answer to this simple question is far from simple. The reliability and validity of the interview is dependent on all sorts of things from the skill and training of the interviewers to the types of ratings made and the length of the interview, and rather than asking 'whether' interviews predict performance the question is 'to what extent' they do.

As a consequence of a great deal of research and excellent recent meta-analyses it is possible to list some rules of thumb that have been shown to increase the reliability and validity of the interview: train interviewers; ask standardised questions; do a good job analysis; ignore salient prior information; do the ratings before and after the interviews; make specific ratings (see Figure 2.2).

Interviewers need training in how they present themselves: how to pose questions and how to interpret often subtle non-verbal cues as well as certain answers. This is mainly about social skills and emotional intelligence (see Sections 7.19 to 7.23). More importantly they need to know what salient questions to ask that relate to the very specific nature of the job that they are selecting for. A careful job analysis should reveal the full range of skills, aptitudes and dispositions required. Hence this should drive the interview structure. Interviewers need not only to know *what* questions to ask and *why* but also *how* to interpret the answers. In addition, interviewers need to make judgements on only the salient features of the candidates and to ignore various impression-management techniques (techniques used to portray a desired and planned image to others) that candidates may employ either on the CV or face-to-face.

Next, interviewers need training on how to accurately distinguish between the different criteria assessed. Just as wine and tea tasters have to be taught to make reliable and accurate ratings, so interviewers have to be taught – through both practice and special training – how they and other raters see the same candidate and to ensure that they provide consistent or at least compatible evaluations. Finally, it is important that the rating scales used by interviewers are clear and comprehensive, allowing a wide range of ratings, including an index of uncertainty.

2.3 Description, types and functions of the interview

Research on the interview addresses a number of quite specific issues. First, it is important to distinguish between different types of interview given both their purpose and methodology. Second, there is a long literature on the cognitive psychology of interviews that looks at how people obtain, evaluate and combine information to derive a final judgement. Third, by far the greatest research effort has gone into looking at the psychometrics (reliability and validity) of the interview, as well as how to improve it. Fourth, there is a growing literature on candidate evaluation of the interview. Fifth, there is a small literature on legal aspects of the interview.

It is difficult to characterise the typical selection interview. Certainly it is probably true to say most are unstructured and semi-structured at best; few interviewers are properly trained; the easiest aspects to assess (i.e., self-confidence, presentation) are frequently relatively unimportant job criteria; the interview is usually done by the person (alone or with others) who will 'manage' the candidate; the only preparation the interviewer has done is a perfunctory reading of the completed application form and the candidate's CV. Despite the wide range of interviews, most tend to ask a relatively invariant number of questions, such as 'What persuaded you to work for us?', 'What are your greatest strengths and weaknesses?' and the cliché finale of 'Have you got any questions for us?' (see Table 2.1, based on www.advancedqanda.com/interview; retrieved 21 Feb 2008).

There are many different types of interview: the appraisal, disciplinary, motivational and selection interviews, though there is probably most research on the selection interview. Certainly people have a clear expectation of interviews, though they vary a great deal in form and content. They usually expect an interview to be thorough, lasting anything from 30 to 120 minutes. They expect the interviewer to be in some sense prepared, to ask most of the questions and to take notes. They expect that they must be smartly dressed (where 'smart' means better dressed than they would normally be in that job!), that they will answer questions honestly and that they will be allowed themselves to ask various questions at some point. Thus there are four phases to the interview: welcome, information gathering, supplying information and the conclusion. The first phase is usually thought of as welcome or courtesy. It lasts a few minutes and is designed to put the candidate at his/her ease. The second phase – gathering data – may constitute as much as 80–90 per cent of the total interview. The third, relatively short phase near the end occurs when the interviewer/s invite/s the candidate to pose any questions he/she might have. Some of these questions are genuine and others often impression-management questions designed to impress the interviewer. The final phase usually involves the interviewers explaining to the candidate the decision-making process and how and when they will be informed as to the outcome.

There are many courses that attempt to teach managers interview skills, especially how to plan and run an interview, as well as how to ask perceptive questions.

Table 2.1 Typical questions asked in an employment interview

What information have you got about our company?
What persuaded you to get a job in this company?
Tell us about yourself and your background. How would you/co-workers describe you/yourself?
Why should we hire you? What makes you the right person for this job?
Give us an example of situations in which you displayed attributes that are relevant to this job?
What aspects of your previous experience do you think will be most helpful to you in this role?
What are your greatest strengths and weaknesses?
How do you deal with failure? Please provide an example where you dealt with failure in the past.
How do you feel about working with others/in a team? Please provide examples from the past.
How do you feel about working under pressure/tight deadlines?
How do you react to criticism?
What is your greatest achievement to date?
Why are you thinking of leaving your current job?
Where do you see yourself in five/ten years time?
What other jobs are you applying for?
What kind of salary are you expecting?
When would you be able to start?
Have you any questions for us?

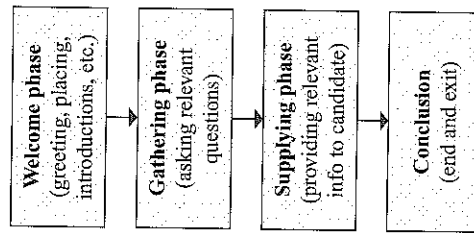


Figure 2.3 Phases of the interview

To some extent the issue is how to obtain sufficient valid data upon which to make a good rating.

This, in turn, is different from a target-setting interview, an appraisal and a disciplinary interview. They have various skill requirements in common. Thus one of the major issues for the target-setting interview is agreeing clear,

Promoting work performance	Periodic appraisal based on law
Assigning work more efficiently	Promotion based on merit
Meeting employees' need for growth	Rewards for past performance
Assisting employees in their goal setting	Review of probationary periods
Identifying potential for management	Warning about unacceptable acts
Ensuring employees know their duties	Career or training development needs
Improving job placement	Lateral reassignment
Identifying training needs	
Validating selection and training methods	
Fostering good relationship with bosses	
Fostering good relationship with teams	

Figure 2.4 Functions of the appraisal interview (for organisation and employees, and personnel actions)

measurable targets. These can or should have highly defined criteria measurable usually by one of five factors: time, money, quality, quantity or customer feedback.

All interviews should have an agenda that demonstrates that at least the interviewer has planned the process. Also it should end with a clear summary statement from both parties regarding what they got from the interview.

Appraisal interviews have very specific functions: to improve utilisation of staff resources by promoting work performance, assigning work more efficiently, meeting employee's need for growth, etc. (see Figure 2.4).

Often training programmes concerning interviews spend a great deal of effort on looking at formulating, asking and interpreting the answers to questions. Appraisal interviews, often considered much more problematic, look at how best to give (both positive and negative) feedback. Thus clear recommendations are made such as:

- Begin with a clear brief about the context and purpose of the feedback.
- Start with the positive feedback.
- Be specific in both positive and negative comments.
- Refer always to behaviour that can be changed.
- Offer alternative suggestions to how things can be done differently.
- Always be descriptive rather than evaluative in feedback.
- Attempt to get the person to acknowledge the feedback.
- Check on whether there are any hidden agendas in how, when and why you are giving the feedback.
- Leave the person with choice in how they accept and respond to the feedback.
- Consider what the feedback says about you.

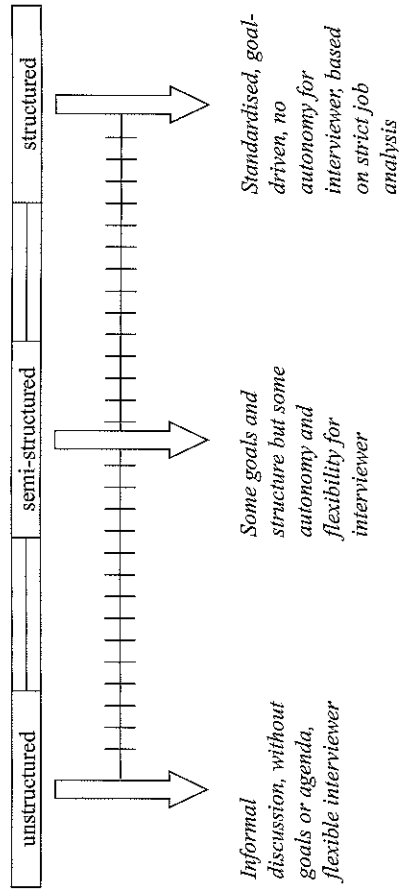


Figure 2.5 Dimensional structure of interviews

Equally, it may be advisable to train people in how to receive feedback in interviews. So they are usually advised to listen to, and to consider carefully, precisely what is being said before rejecting it or arguing with the giver. It is important to understand and be clear about what is being said. Receivers of feedback should be encouraged to ask for feedback that they wanted but did not get. They may also be encouraged to check it out with other senior people who know them rather than rely on only one source. Further, they will need to decide on precisely what they intend to do with the feedback.

2.4 Structured vs unstructured interviews

It has long been common practice to differentiate between what have been called structured and unstructured interviews, though strictly speaking they are really on a continuum from completely unstructured (and possibly unplanned) to rigidly and inflexibly structured. The ultimately unstructured interview is a little like an informal discussion where interviewers ask whatever questions come to mind and follow up answers in an intuitive and whimsical way. Crucially, questions are open-minded and attempt to avoid 'leading' the interviewee's answers in any specific direction. The structured interview on the other hand is pre-planned to ensure every candidate receives exactly the same questions in the same order at the same pace. Structured interviews also employ rating scales, checklists for judgement; allow for few or no follow-up questions (to limit interviewees' response time and standardise it); take into account previous job analyses; and leave little autonomy for the interviewer. In that sense, totally structured interviews resemble standardised psychometric tests (see Chapter 7). The question is how much structure vs flexibility should be built in to maximise the point of the whole exercise.

A structured interview is essentially a planned interview. In fact it often requires interviewers to make pre- and post-interview decisions. The idea is that a job

Table 2.2 Potential qualities assessed by a structured job interview

Energy and drive	General level of work output, ability to stay with a problem, persistence, enthusiasm, motivation
Work discipline	General efficiency, ability to plan, control and monitor work and time, ability to set objectives and standards
Decision making	Quality of judgement on personnel and technical matters, willingness and ability to make decisions
Intellectual effectiveness	Analytical ability, speed of thinking, creativity
Relationships	Sociability, ability to work individually and in teams, extent of guidance and support needed from boss, ability to delegate
Flexibility	Ability to adapt to new and different people, technology and environments, responsiveness to change
Emotional stability	Ability to work under pressure, response to setback and failures

analysis leads one to decide on a limited number of essential qualities or competencies that one is looking for. These are often a mixture of abilities and personality traits. Consider the potential qualities and areas listed in Tables 2.2 and 2.3.

A structured interview then follows a rigorously planned sequence of question areas in an attempt to get all the salient information upon which to make an accurate rating. This might result in either ratings on each of the dimensions specified in Tables 2.2 and 2.3 or a written report such as the one shown in Box 2.1.

The importance of structured interviews to ensure validity cannot be overrated, as we shall see. As a result, textbook writers often offer hints or tips to those embarking on the process. For example, Figure 2.6 summarises main areas of attention for improving structured interviews (based on Arnold, 2005, p. 182).

2.5 The cognitive basis of interviews

The result of an interview is usually a decision. Ideally this process involves collecting, evaluating and integrating specific salient information into a logical algorithm that has shown to be predictive.

However, there is an academic literature on impression formation that has examined experimentally how precisely people select particular pieces of information. Studies looking at the process in selection interviews have shown all too often how interviewers may make their minds up *before* the interview even occurs (based on the application form or CV of the candidate), or that they make up their minds too quickly based on first impression (superficial data) or their own personal implicit theories of personality. Equally, they overweight or overemphasise negative information or bias information not in line with the algorithm they use. Earlier research (Harris, 1989) was conducted on whether information was added or weighted, that is, how people combined positive and negative 'pieces

Table 2.3 Potential areas assessed by a structured job interview

Upbringing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Base point against which person makes decisions ● Info needed – where born, siblings (ages, academic and work achievements), childhood events <p><i>Evaluate: economic and social stability, degree of supportiveness</i></p>
Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Focus is on intellect ● Info needed – schools, university, exam results, other interests and achievements (cultural, social, technical) <p><i>Evaluate: choice of subjects, performance, causes and results of failures</i></p>
Work history	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Look at most recent experience first ● Info needed – job titles, main tasks, relationships, objectives/results, part of job liked/done well and vice versa, reasons for changing <p><i>Evaluate: significance of job within the organisation, standing of the firm in the industry, competence of candidate against demands of job</i></p>
Aspirations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Reality check ● Info needed – what candidate wants to do in short/long term, what plans for achieving ambitions <p><i>Evaluate: how realistic aspirations are when set against academic and work achievements to date plus personal attributes</i></p>
Circumstances	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Establish pressures on career ● Info needed – willingness to move, marital status, social family constraints, financial liabilities, driving licence <p><i>Evaluate: any constraints which may affect work effectiveness by exploring marital and financial stability</i></p>
Interests	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Ask what they enjoy about their interests to find out motivations ● Info needed – main interests, with what intensity and for how long <p><i>Evaluate: to what extent proposed job gives an outlet for these interests, and to what extent it is a barrier</i></p>

Box 2.1 Aspects of the candidate assessed in an interview**Energy and drive**

The candidate is a very ambitious, focused, task-oriented individual. There is a strong sense of someone who is strongly driven to prove his worth and to achieve specific goals. He has been in HR since the beginning of his career and has a clear vision of where he wants to be. Further, he has the capacity, stamina and drive to achieve those ends.

The candidate is very articulate and honest, and shows particularly high levels of self-insight. He admits to being a driven individual but that of late he is less so, because he has begun to achieve his goals and get recognition for them. This is not to say that his energy has diminished but rather that he is probably more relaxed. He is energetic and enthusiastic – more a

socialised extravert than a pure strong extravert. But he is enthusiastic and possibly at times rather too much so.

Work style and values

The candidate is a hard worker. He freely admits that at school and university he had to work hard to 'compensate' for his lack of ability relative to his peer group. He is clearly a 'mover and shaker' preferring to 'get on with it' rather than sit about discussing strategy. His claims he is 'tough on performance' and no doubt drives others as much as he drives himself. Where necessary he says he can be controlling and very directive. He prefers to delegate but only if he believes his people are up to the challenge. Asked what other bosses/appraisers have said about him, he pointed out that they said he always delivered, but there was a hint of 'achievement at what cost? I do not, however, get the impression that his is ever unfair or unreasonable with his staff, but rather that he wants them, like him, to work at their maximum capacity.

He seems to like a 'work hard, play hard' culture where you get on with the job but have a lot of fun while doing it. He sees the 'glass half full' and likes to work with people like himself.

Decision making and judgement

Three things characterise his decision-making style. The first is honesty/integrity. He admits that he does not like 'confronting others', but where he feels various ethical, moral and decency barriers are passed he speaks out. Second, he is not risk-averse, which means that he can and does accept failures when they occur. Third, he does not like procrastination and ambiguity. This means that he demands clarity and provides it for those around him. He is clearly a man of both 'heart and head' who can and does balance decisions where necessary. He appears to read situations well.

Flexibility and adaptability

The candidate is fit, curious and ambitious. He has, can and will adapt to situations well. But more than that, he has no problem in trying to adapt and change others and their way of working to achieve certain goals. His self-insight and self-confidence and abilities mean that he can easily rise to challenges requiring adaptation.

Emotional stability and maturity

The candidate comes from a very stable background with an articulate and affectionate mother. He is quite able to cope with stress and very unlikely to buckle under pressure. His coping strategy is primarily cognitive: withdraw,

attempt to analyse the situation, get things in proportion . . . and then get on with it.

Intellectual capacity and effectiveness

The candidate performed well on the tests but not quite as well as one might expect from his academic record. There is no doubt that he is more than capable intellectually of doing the job and learning new things. Further, he has a history of believing that if things are not easily understood and learnt, with effort they can be. He will certainly put effort into doing that. There is no fear of someone whose academic strength and curiosity leads to a situation of 'analysis paralysis'.

Relationships

Asked about relationships, the candidate made some astute and interesting observations. Asked about how he works with others, he made it clear that much depends on the task and the ability of the team. His preference is to be 'first among equals' in a bright and active team. He believes his reports find him energetic, focused, enthusiastic . . . and, he added, possibly egotistical. He likes to understand the problem, set goals and then delegate. He claims not to enjoy but to be able, when necessary, to confront poor performance. His agreeableness in that sense should not then prove to be a handicap.

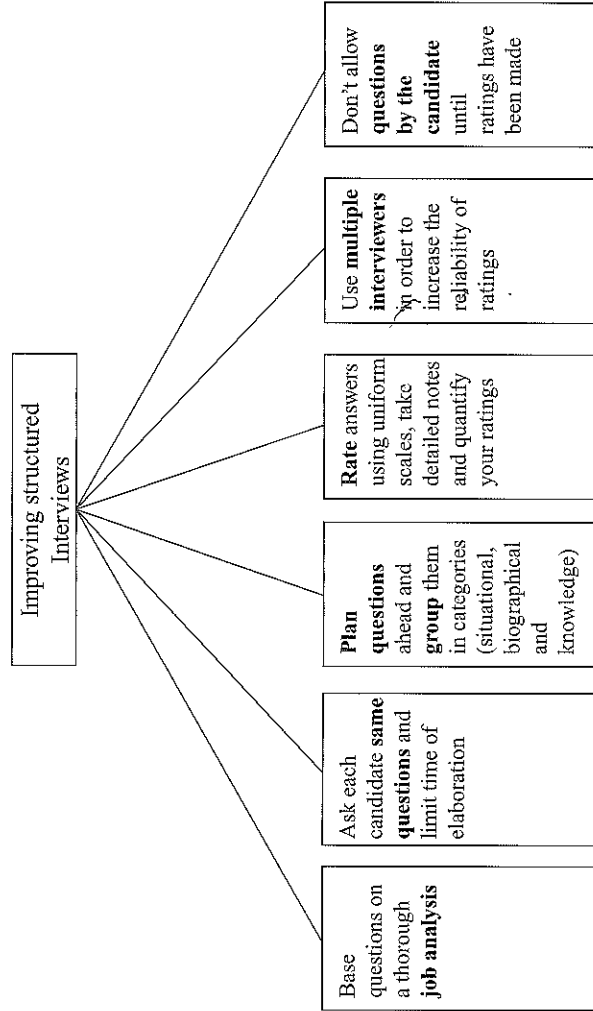


Figure 2.6 How to improve the validity of structured interviews

of information' about an individual to come up with some overall rating. Thus researchers in the area of interpersonal perception examined the way interviews looked for 'favourite cues' or facts they believed particularly diagnostic. Some wondered whether people did 'linear regressions' in their head in the sense that they assigned different importance to certain predictors of a given outcome. The question is how interviewers make *configural judgements*: what causes them to have multiple cut-off points (e.g., are candidates qualified enough, young enough, friendly enough, etc.) or, instead, single disqualifying factors, such as evidence of going to a mental hospital or having taken drugs? Clearly, more research is needed to answer these questions.

Social psychologists have also been interested in *implicit personality theories*, which are concerned with how individual, idiosyncratic, lay theories of personality influence a person's judgement in the interview (Cook, 2004). They have also worked for years on *attribution theories*, which are concerned with how people attribute social causation, notably whether they explain success and failure in terms of personal or situational factors. In the interview it is common to ask candidates why certain events occurred, i.e., to try to assess their attribution style, but the interviewer also infers causation. Thus a candidate may be asked why their school results were so different from their university results, or why they seem to change jobs so regularly.

Certainly understanding how people collect and integrate information in the interview must be central to the whole enterprise.

2.6 The psychometrics of interviews

The two strong pillars of psychometrics are *reliability* and *validity*, both of which come in many forms (see Figure 2.7). Further, they are interdependent: interviews cannot be valid if they are not reliable.

For interviews, it is crucial to have inter-interviewer (judge, observer, rater) reliability. This means that two people doing or watching interviews with the same person must have the same ratings. Low reliability, particularly in unstructured interviews, is no doubt mainly due to interviewer variability. Interviewers ask different questions, record and weight answers differently and may have radically different understandings of the whole purpose of the interview. Most reviewers have seen that the single simplest way to improve reliability is to introduce a consistency and structure to the interview. Thus it is almost tautological to suggest that consistency leads to reliability as they are in essence the same thing. Studies also show that it is possible to increase interviewer reliability by different but important steps, including: doing a job analysis; training interviewers; having structured interviews; having behaviourally based and anchored rating scales.

Many studies have examined the issue of reliability with a useful meta-analysis by Conway, Jako and Goodman (1995), who reviewed 160 empirical studies. They

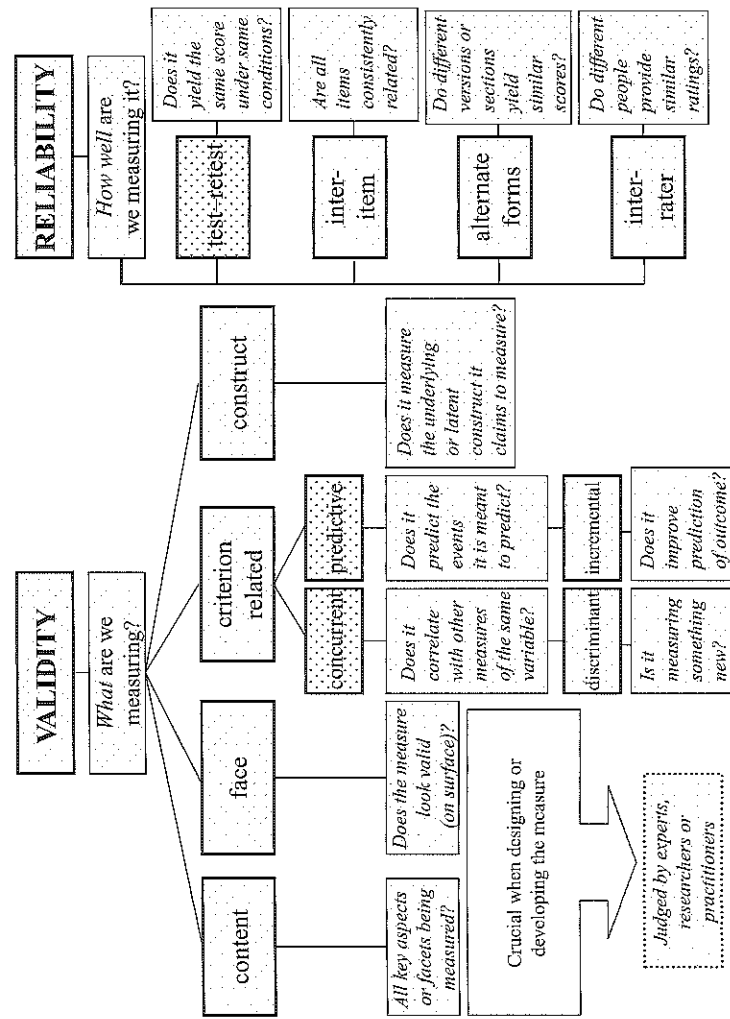


Figure 2.7 Validity and reliability

found reliabilities of 0.77 when observers watched the same interview, but that this dropped to 0.53 if they watched different interviews of the same candidate. Given that candidates react to different questions by different interviewees often quite differently, some would argue that 0.53 is surprisingly good.

Research in this area has gone on for fifty years at least. Over the years small, relatively unsophisticated studies have been replaced by ever more useful and important meta-analyses. There are now a sufficient number of meta-analyses that some have done helpful summaries of them. Thus Cook (2004) reviewed Hunter and Hunter (1984) (30 studies); Wiesner and Cronshaw (1988) (160 studies); Huffcutt and Arthur (1994) (114 studies) and McDaniel, Whetzel, Schmidt and Maurer (1994) (245 studies). These meta-analyses covered many different studies done in different countries over different jobs and different time periods, but the results were surprisingly consistent. Results were clear: the validity coefficient for unstructured interviews as predictors of job performance is around $r = .15$ (range .11 – .18), while that for structured interviews is around $r = .28$ (range .24 – .34). Cook (2004) calculates the overall validity of all interviews over three recent meta-analyses – taking job performance as the common denominator of all criteria examined – to be around $r = .23$.

There may be rather different reactions to this validity coefficient. An optimist might point out that given the many differences in interview technique – some are

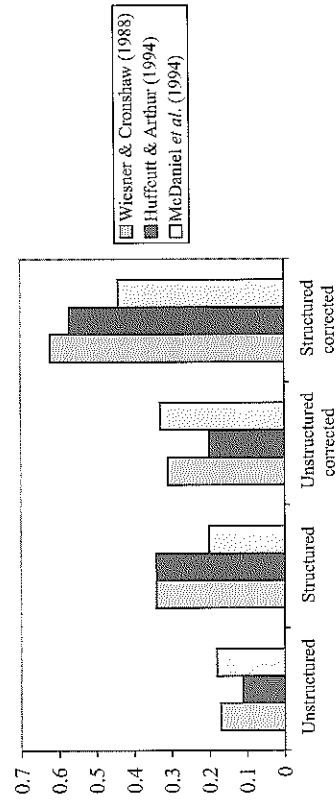


Figure 2.8 Predictive validity of interviews

psychological, some situational, some job related – and the fact that they were attempting to assess very different issues from creativity to conscientiousness, the validity is impressively high. Indeed, compared to various other job selection methods, this result is rather impressive (see Figure 2.8).

The pessimist, however, may point out that a value of $r = .25$ means in effect an interview is accounting for a paltry 5 per cent in explaining the variance in later work behaviour. That is, it is not accounting for 95 per cent of the variance. However, given the unreliability of the criterion, the unaccounted variance may be as low as 70 per cent, and even seemingly small percentages of variance explained may have very important utility. If, for instance, 5 per cent of the variance in an outcome is explained, the categorical (yes or no) prediction of that outcome would improve from 50 per cent (the chance rate) to 55 per cent, and probably more (as the 5 per cent figure is 5/70 rather than 5/100). That said, given that interviews are used to infer information about candidates' abilities or personality traits (see Section 2.9 and Chapters 6 and 7), they provide very little unique information about a candidate and show little incremental validity over established psychometric tests (of ability and personality) in the prediction of future job performance (Schmidt & Hunter, 1998).

It is not difficult to list reasons for the relatively low reliability. Essentially, these have to do with three issues: factors associated with the interviewer; factors associated with the interviewee; factors associated with the process.

From an interviewee's perspective low validity may be attributable to individual difference in values, intelligence, perceptiveness, etc. of the various interviewees; the motives of interviewees in the selection process; the training they received; their understanding of the job itself. Whatever their training, interviewees differ in terms of their natural ability, perceptiveness and courage to make 'thorough but accurate' ratings. From an interviewer's perspective there are two major problems which come under the heading of dissimulation: notably impression management and self-deception. This means in effect not presenting themselves honestly either because of their desire to get the job or not having sufficient self-insight to tell

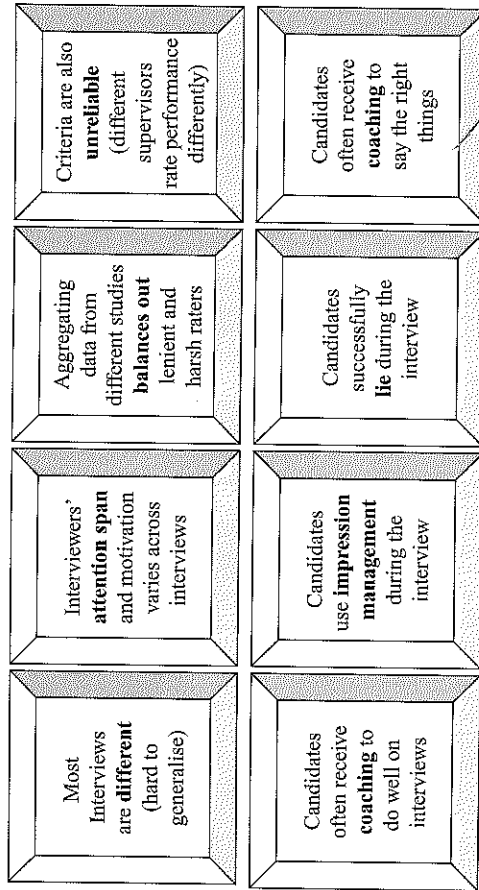


Figure 2.9 Reasons for low validity of job interview (based on Cook, 2004)

the truth. Thus the person who is presented at the interviews is not the same as the person at work on the job.

The third factor lies not in the two parties involved but in the *information provided*. What criterion/criteria is the interviewer trying to predict? Is there clear, reliable and valid evidence on the criteria? Is the rating scale such as not to lead to ceiling effects, restriction of range? In short, how easy is it for the interviewer to do a good job even if both parties are well briefed and honest?

Cook (2004) offers evidence-based recommendations for improving interview reliability and validity.

1. *Select interviewers with talent.* As in every aspect of life, some people appear to have the optimal mix of abilities, temperaments and traits to do good interviews. Many studies have demonstrated considerable interviewer variability. Though it can cause organisational problems, it is recommended that interviewers are selected for this task, which inevitably leads to some being rejected. This inevitably leads to the interesting question of how interviewers are selected. Is the best interviewer selected by interview?

2. *Train interviewers in the relevant skills* like asking open-ended questions, doing sufficient preparation, etc. It is possible to improve all skills through training, but only within the limits of the ability of the trainee.

3. *Be consistent using the same interviewers for all interviews.* This simply avoids unwanted variance. Though for practical and political reasons it may not always be possible to have the *same* (well-chosen and well-trained) interviewers for all interviews.

4. *Use dyad, board or panel interviewers* because they are more reliable. This point does not contradict the above point. Rather it suggests that a well-chosen, well-trained, perceptive group of interviewers will be more accurate and reliable.

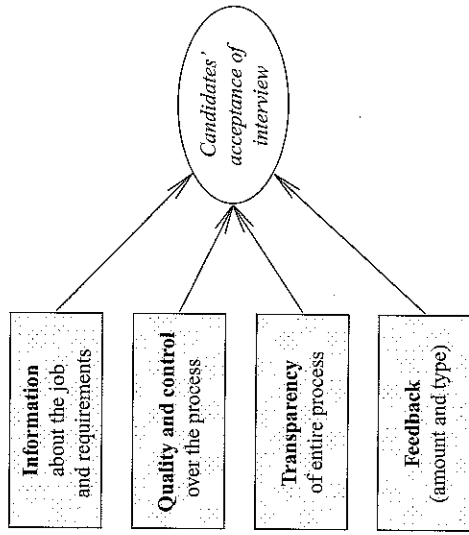


Figure 2.10 Factors influencing candidates' acceptance of interviews (based on Schuler, 1993)

5. *Have planned, structured interviews* with clarity about precisely what questions to ask. And when and why. It means taking notes, making systematic ratings and later checking interview reliability and validity.

2.7 The 'acceptability of interviews'

The interview is a two-way process of observation and rating. By and large, candidates approve of interviews and are surprised if they are not asked to them. Thus they have two types of validity: that from the organisational perspective (which has been the focus of academic validity studies on personnel selection techniques) and that from the candidate perspective.

Schuler (1993) described the latter as the social validity of the interview. He argued that people tend to base the social validity of interviews on four factors: how informative they are to the candidate in terms of the total information they get about the job; the quality, quantity and control they have over participation in the process (and its outcome); how transparent the whole approach is; and the amount and type of feedback provided (see Figure 2.10).

Another perspective on the acceptability of interviews is that from social justice theory, which distinguishes between distributive and procedural justice. This allows for the derivation of theory-based, testable hypotheses to predict how fair a candidate finds an interview (Gillibrand, 1993).

Results in this field have led to a number of conclusions. First, when given a list of, or actually exposed to, different selection methods, candidates approve most of the more traditional methods (interview, application form, reference letters) and those clearly job relevant (work samples). By the same token they like

lie-detector, graphology or obscure personality tests the least. A recent review of selection methods and how they are perceived around the world reported that interviews are favourably perceived in Europe, the US, Asia and Africa (Lievens, 2007).

Second, although there are broad patterns of agreement in candidates' reactions, there are also cultural differences, not all of which are clearly explicable. Culture dictates what questions may be asked and the sort of answers that are given. Legal, anti-discriminatory changes in legislation mean that in some, predominantly western, countries people are not required to answer questions about their age, previous job history, family structure, etc. The formality of the interview, the probability of group interviews, as well as the length of the interview, are all influenced by corporate and national culture. This means that a person from one culture who is interviewed in another culture may feel unfairly dealt with or simply surprised by the questions that they are asked.

Third, because lay people are not always fully familiar with various methods – they may not be exactly sure what a cognitive ability test or biographical inventory is – their reactions are different depending on whether they rate methods in the abstract or they actually undergo the test (Marcus, 2003).

2.8 Fairness, bias and the law

Most developed countries have legislated against forms of discrimination in terms of age, gender, race and religion. Whilst there are no laws about lookism (discriminating by physical appearance), weightism (discriminating by body mass index), classism (discriminating by dress or accent), there are reasons why individuals and organisations try not to let appearance and social background influence their decision making.

There is plenty of evidence to suggest that interviews in the past have been, and no doubt will continue in the future to be, systematically biased against ethnic minority groups, older people and women (Cook, 2004). This tends to occur where raters are not trained or interviews are not structured. All sorts of extraneous factors like the perfume a person wears at interview have been shown to influence ratings.

The literature is essentially driven by two main areas of research: one well established, namely the social-psychological literature on discrimination, favouritism and prejudice; the other, more recent research on sociolegal features of selection. Studies on the legal and illegal aspects of selection have nearly all come out of the US, whose reputation for litigation is well known. Inevitably one has to acknowledge many national differences in legal procedures and the law itself, suggesting that studies are less likely to generalise.

Table 2.4 Applicant attributes that affect rating bias

Attributes	Examples of research findings
Gender bias	Influenced by type of job (role-congruent jobs) and competence. Female interviewers gave higher ratings than male interviewers.
First-impression effect	Early impressions were more important than factual information for interviewer judgements.
Contrast effect	Decisions to hire were related to the interviewer's causal interpretation (attribution) of an applicant's past outcomes.
	Interviewers' evaluations of job candidates were influenced by the quality and characteristics of the previous candidates.
Non-verbal communication	Applicants who looked straight ahead, as opposed to downwards, were rated as being more alert, assertive and dependable; they were also more likely to be hired.
	Applicants who demonstrated a greater amount of eye contact, head moving and smiling received higher evaluations.
Physical attractiveness	More attractive applicants received higher evaluations.

However, there do seem to be various principles that emerge from legal cases, all concerned with bias and unfairness in selection procedures. The three themes are:

1. It is believed structured interviews are less biased because all candidates are asked the same questions in the same way.
2. It is argued that if a job analysis is done so that rated criteria are exclusively related to the task itself and specified in objective behavioural terms, discrimination is less likely to occur.
3. It is suggested that interviewers do not use application form biographical data because it often leads them to make unwarranted references about the ability of individuals.

There are many sources of interview-rating bias. Bernardin and Russell (1993) drew up a useful list under three headings (see Tables 2.4, 2.5 and 2.6).

2.9 Interviewing skills

There is no shortage of books, chapters and papers on training people in interviewing skills. These range from describing and listing different skills for different types of interviews (i.e., counselling, disciplinary, survey) to describing the typical styles of interviewers.

Another approach has been to divide skills into different bands. Thus Bogels (1999), in examining the diagnostic interview in mental health care, distinguished

Table 2.5 Interviewer attributes that affect rating bias

Attributes	Examples of research findings
Similarity effect	<p>Interviewers gave more positive ratings to applicants perceived to be similar to themselves.</p> <p>Interviewers resisted using additional information to evaluate applicants once they perceived the applicants to be similar to themselves.</p>
'Likeability'	<p>Interviewers gave more positive ratings to candidates they liked.</p> <p>Interpersonal attraction was found to influence interviewers' perceptions of applicant qualifications.</p> <p>Interviewers judged applicants against their own stereotype of an 'ideal' job candidate.</p>
'Ideal stereotype'	<p>These stereotypes may be unique to each interviewer, or they may be a common stereotype shared by a group of raters.</p> <p>Interviewers weighted negative information more heavily than positive information.</p>
Information favourability	<p>Interviewers spent more time talking when they had already formed a favourable decision.</p>
Information utilisation	<p>Interviewers placed different importance (weights) on the information content of the interview, resulting in idiosyncratic information-weighting strategies.</p> <p>Discrepancies often arose between interviewers' intended (nominal) information weights and the actual information weights they used to arrive at a decision.</p>

Table 2.6 Situational attributes that affect rating bias

Attributes	Examples of research findings
Job information	<p>Interviewers who received more information about the job used it for evaluation decisions.</p> <p>Increased job information reduced the effect of irrelevant attributes and increased reliability between raters.</p>
Applicant information	<p>Interviewers' pre-interview impressions of applicant qualifications had a strong influence on post-interview impressions and recommendations to hire.</p> <p>Interviewers with favourable pre-interview impressions of applicants evaluated those applicants as having done a better job of answering the interview questions.</p>
Decision time	<p>Interviewers reached a final decision early in the interview process; some studies have indicated the decision is made after an average of 4 minutes.</p> <p>Decisions to hire were made sooner than decisions not to hire.</p>

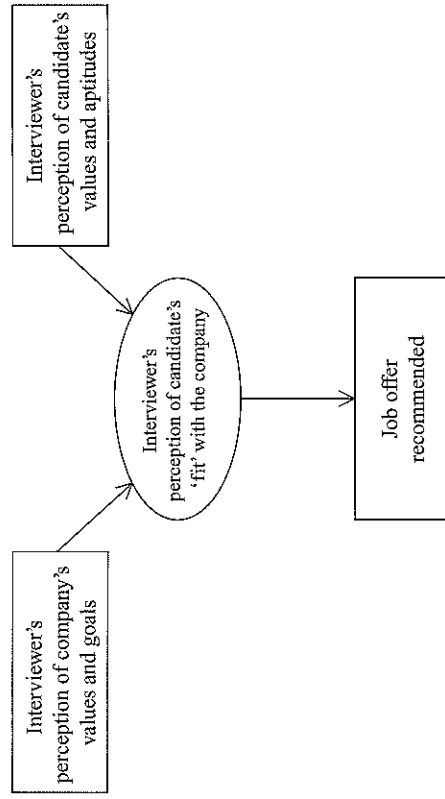


Figure 2.11 Perceived fit and employment interview (adapted from Judge et al., 2000)

between *content* skills (getting the required information/data), *process* skills (concerning all the techniques used) and *cognitive* skills (hypothesis formulation and testing and integrating information).

Margie and Tourish (1999) note that skilled interpersonal behaviour, like skilled motor behaviour, has identifiable components. Interpersonal skills manifest in interviewing can be characterised by:

- *Fluency*: smooth, controlled, unflustered progress.
- *Rapidity*: speedy responses to answers and issues.
- *Automaticity*: performing tasks without having to think.
- *Simultaneity*: the ability to mesh and coordinate multiple, verbal and non-verbal tasks at the same time.
- *Knowledge*: Knowing the what, how, when and why of the whole interview process.

Skills also involve understanding the real goal of the interview, being perceptive, understanding what is and what is not being said, and empathy.

Recent research in the past decade has argued that the key issue assessed by the employment interview is the person-organisational *fit* (see also Section 7.26). Thus Judge, Higgins and Cable (2000) argued that when interviewers perceive that the candidate's profile is congruent with (the interviewer's perception of) organisational values and goals, job offers are recommended (see Figure 2.11). Indeed, previous evidence suggested that different interviewers show acceptable levels of agreement in their ratings of 'fit' (Rynes & Gerhart, 1990), though interviewers are not very accurate at assessing the candidate's aptitudes and dispositions (Cable & Judge, 1997). That said, recent evidence suggests that interviewers rarely assess person-organisation fit, preferring to focus on the characteristics of the candidate (even though they are unable to assess these accurately!). In a

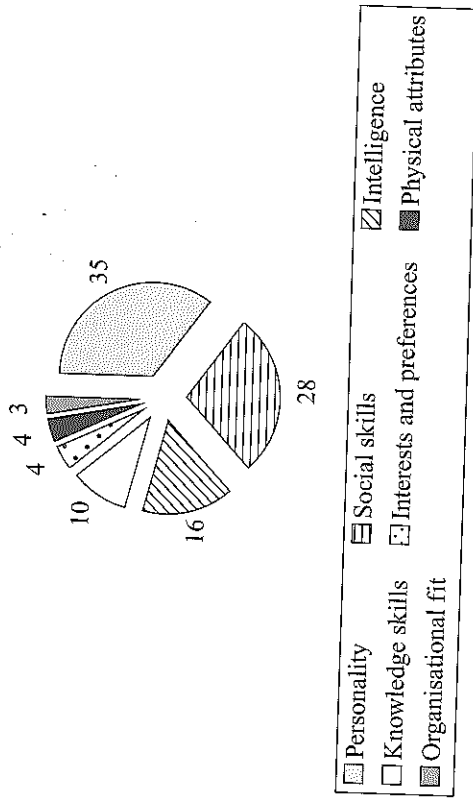


Figure 2.12 What do interviewers assess?

meta-analysis, Huffcutt Conway, Roth and Stone (2001) reported that most interviewers try to assess candidate's personality traits, followed closely by social or interpersonal skills, and not that closely by intelligence and knowledge. On a few occasions, interviewers focus on assessing interviewees' preferences or interests and physical attributes, and the variable of least interest appears to be fit (Huffcutt *et al.*, 2001; see Figure 2.12). It is noteworthy that all these variables can be assessed via reliable and valid psychometric tests (see notably Chapters 6 and 7), which begs the question of what if any unique information (that is reliable and valid) can be extracted from employment interviews.

2.10 Summary and conclusion

The interview is a central feature of business life. It seems inconceivable that one would make a selection decision without one or more interviews. Equally, managers are called upon to appraise their staff via interviews as well as occasionally discipline them. Interviews are nearly always face-to-face, though technology allows video conferencing and interviewing these days. Some organisations believe that the time and money cost of interviews, combined with their low validity, means they can and should be dispensed with and replaced by such things as assessment centres. However, candidates like and expect them precisely because they are an inter-view: both parties are able to make a judgement of the other.

Interviews can be designed to ensure they are seen to be fairer and to yield ratings, assessments and evaluations which are reliable and valid: the efforts necessary to do this are clearly worthwhile because of the very poor-quality data which are usually obtained in unstructured, unplanned and unprofessional interviews (appraisal, selection, etc.), which are, alas, all too common.

Quite clearly, validity studies indicate that unstructured interviews are associated with a number of problems and drawbacks that do not affect structured interviews. Thus employers should have a natural tendency to opt for the latter rather than the former. At the same time, structured interviews still do not remove the bias caused by subjective and unstandardised evaluations of the candidates. Moreover, given that interviewers tend to assess factors that can be assessed equally well (or even better) via other means, such as purpose-built and well-established and validated psychometric tests (see Chapters 6 and 7), interviews can be hard to justify at times, especially as they are less cost-effective than remote testing. That said, good interviews still provide important information, even when other methods are taken into account. Astute and perceptive interviewers, attentive to vocal and visual clues, can often assess the truthfulness of a specific answer. Furthermore, the way certain questions are answered means that specific issues can be further probed to reveal opinions and facts that otherwise may not be revealed. Indeed, it is often in conjunction with other methods that interviews work best, though employers tend to overrate the usefulness of interviews compared to other selection methods, like personality and ability tests.