

# It's just a few questions ... isn't it?

Interview techniques

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by Sarah Hay

# Learning Objectives

- Look at interview purpose
- Identify what needs to be done prior to an interview
- Look at different interview types
- Identify key interviewing skills
- Identify key listening skills
- Practice!

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# Selection methods

- Application form/CV
- Interview
- References
- Tests (practical or psychometric)
- Assessment centre
- Role play
- Team exercises.....

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# Interview Purpose

- Find out if the candidate is suitable for the role
- Give the candidate information about the job and organisation for them to decide if they are suitable

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# Before the interview: (1)

- How many interviewers? 1,2,4,10?
  - ◆ Panel interview can be intimidating and thus ineffective
  - ◆ If you have to have a panel, it must be well chaired, planned and carried out by trained people with a common objective

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# Before the interview: (2)

- ◆ A panel could be split into pairs for shorter, focused interviews and then report back together
- ◆ Best to interview in pairs – less intimidating, can share note-taking and joint decision is fairer and accountable

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# Before the interview (3)

- Where to interview?
  - ◆ Accessibility
  - ◆ Privacy
  - ◆ Workplace preview
- Interview Room
  - ◆ Lighting
  - ◆ Seating
  - ◆ Other amenities

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# Before the interview (4)

- General administration
  - ◆ Reporting procedure
  - ◆ Interview length and interval
  - ◆ Travel expenses
- Employment Law
  - ◆ Sex Discrimination Act, Race Relations Act, Disability Discrimination Act, Employment Equality (Religion or Belief) and (Sexual Orientation) Regulations
- Diversity Awareness

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# Interview Strategy <sup>(1)</sup>

- Structured vs Unstructured
- Unstructured
  - ◆ Random, unprepared, chat
  - ◆ Forms an impression only
  - ◆ Predictive validity is around zero!

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# Interview Strategy (2)

- Structured
  - ◆ Designed to discover all relevant information and assess competencies against the person spec
  - ◆ Ensures consistency between candidates
  - ◆ Reduces risk of 'gut-feeling'

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# 3 Types of Structured Interview <sup>(1)</sup>

- Biographical interview
  - ◆ Uses the application form to check and examine key events
  - ◆ Can become unstructured
  - ◆ Can be unreliable and predictable

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# 3 Types of Structured Interview <sup>(2)</sup>

- Backward-looking (or Behavioural)
  - ◆ Best predictor of future behaviour is past performance
  - ◆ Provides specific behavioural evidence of the past which can identify behavioural patterns for the future
  - ◆ Easy to link to a competency framework

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# 3 Types of Structured Interview <sup>(3)</sup>

- Forward-looking (or situational)
  - ◆ Look forward to what a candidate might do
  - ◆ Easily linked to competency but resource-intensive (need model answers)
  - ◆ Does the answer relate to actual behaviour? Articulate candidates fair better

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# 3 Types of Structured Interview <sup>(4)</sup>

- Backward- and Forward- looking interviews are better and predicting job performance.
- Backward- looking are preferred unless you candidates are very experienced
- In practice, you may use a combination of the 3 types

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# Key Skills of Interviewing

- O Objectives
- P Preparation
- Q Questioning
- R Rapport
- S Structure
- T Taking Notes

(Kandola, Pg 108 Wood and Payne)

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# Key Skills (1)

- Objectives

- ◆ Be clear about what you need from the interview:
- ◆ Collect all the information (but don't evaluate it until after)
- ◆ Candidate knows what to expect
- ◆ Fair, courteous etc.

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# Key Skills (2)

## ■ Preparation

- ◆ Prepare candidate: introduce yourself; put them at ease; explain procedure and note-taking; check that they understand and are ready
- ◆ Prepare yourself: read the job description, person spec and application form(!); plan questions according to person spec and competencies you're looking for; be ready for candidate questions.

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# Key Skills (3)

- Questioning
  - ◆ There are several types of questions to use or avoid
- Open Questions
  - ◆ Invite the candidate to talk, providing facts, info and feelings
    - ★ E.g. what, how and why?
    - ★ “I’d like you to tell me about a time when...”

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# Key Skills (4)

- Probing Questions
  - ◆ Used as a follow-up to an open question to gain more info
    - ★ E.g. why, did you..?
- Closed Questions
  - ◆ Elicit a one-word answer
  - ◆ Useful for checking facts but not getting the candidate talking!
    - ★ E.g. did you enjoy your last job?

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# Key Skills (5)

- Question types to avoid:
- Leading Questions
  - ◆ The candidate gives the answer they know you want
    - ★ E.g. In this job you have to lick a lot of stamps. How do you feel about that?!!
- Multiple Questions
  - ◆ Candidates will forget part of the question if there are several parts or only answer the part they want to

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# Key Skills (6)

- Multiple-choice Questions
  - ◆ The question also provides a selection of answers. Just ask the question and see what the candidate answers
- Discriminatory Questions
  - ◆ Don't ask 'who will look after your children if they are ill?' or 'how do you feel about working for a woman?'
  - ◆ Leave complex health questions to a medical

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# Key Skills (7)

- Rapport
  - ◆ Make the candidate feel relaxed and strike a rapport
  - ◆ Find common ground, listen and provide verbal and non-verbal cues
- Structure
  - ◆ Plan, prepare and keep to a structure

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# Key Skills (8)

- Taking Notes
  - ◆ Tell the candidate. Don't write reams and don't write down adverse information until the conversation has moved on!
  - ◆ Notes may be used as evidence at an employment tribunal so ensure that they are clear and justify your decision

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# Listening Skills (1)

- ‘active listening’ – not just to words but the way it is said: tone etc.
- Verbal cues
  - ◆ Reflect back – show you are listening by relating a question to something already said
  - ◆ Links between sections
  - ◆ Summarise – summarise what the candidate has said once or twice during the interview

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# Listening Skills (2)

- Non-verbal cues
  - ◆ Body language – nodding, smiling, eye contact, ‘mmm’
  - ◆ Don’t – look at your watch, only look at the papers, frown critically, stare out of the window or jab a finger!

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# At the end of the interview

- Give candidate time to ask questions
- Tell them the next step in the process and how long before they will hear a decision
- Thank them for their time

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# Interview practice

- Groups of 3
  - ◆ 1 candidate, 1 interviewer and 1 observer
- Interview for a short-term team person
- Feedback after each has had a turn – how did it feel to be the interviewer and candidate, what did the observer see?

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