

# **THEORY AND TECHNIQUES OF THE INTERVIEW**

## **10. STRATEGIES, BEHAVIORS AND LEGAL ISSUES**

### **10.1. Nonverbal Behaviors**

It may not only be what you say in an interview that matters, but also how you say it (e.g., how fast you speak) and how you behave during the interview (e.g., hand gestures, eye contact). In other words, although applicant responses to interview questions influence interview ratings, their nonverbal behaviors may also affect interviewer judgments. Nonverbal behaviors can be divided into two main categories: vocal cues (e.g., articulation, pitch, fluency, frequency of pauses, speed, etc.) and visual cues (e.g., smiling, eye contact, body orientation and lean, hand movement, posture, etc.). Oftentimes physical attractiveness is included as part of nonverbal behavior as well. There is some debate about how large a role nonverbal behaviors may play in the interview. Some researchers maintain that nonverbal behaviors affect interview ratings a great deal, while others have found that they have a relatively small impact on interview outcomes, especially when considered with applicant qualifications presented in résumés. The relationship between nonverbal behavior and interview outcomes is also stronger in structured interviews than unstructured, and stronger when interviewee answers are of high quality.

Applicants' nonverbal behaviors may influence interview ratings through the inferences interviewers make about the applicant based on their behavior. For instance, applicants who engage in positive nonverbal behaviors such as smiling and leaning forward are perceived as more likable, trustworthy, credible, warmer, successful, qualified, motivated, competent, and socially skilled. These applicants are also predicted to be better accepted and more satisfied with the organization if hired. Applicants' verbal responses and their nonverbal behavior may convey some of the same information about the applicant. However, despite any shared information between content and nonverbal behavior, it is clear that nonverbal behaviors do predict interview ratings to an extent beyond the content of what was said, and thus it is essential that applicants and interviewers alike are aware of their impact. You may want to be careful of what you may be communicating through the nonverbal behaviors you display.

## 10.2. Physical Attractiveness

To hire the best applicants for the job, interviewers form judgments, sometimes using applicants' physical attractiveness. That is, physical attractiveness is usually not necessarily related to how well one can do the job, yet has been found to influence interviewer evaluations and judgments about how suitable an applicant is for the job. Once individuals are categorized as attractive or unattractive, interviewers may have expectations about physically attractive and physically unattractive individuals and then judge applicants based on how well they fit those expectations. As a result, it typically turns out that interviewers will judge attractive individuals more favorably on job related factors than they judge unattractive individuals. People generally agree on who is and who is not attractive and attractive individuals are judged and treated more positively than unattractive individuals. For example, people who think another is physically attractive tend to have positive initial impressions of that person (even before formally meeting them), perceive the person to be smart, socially competent, and have good social skills and general mental health.

Within the business domain, physically attractive individuals have been shown to have an advantage over unattractive individuals in numerous ways that include, but are not limited to, perceived job qualifications, hiring recommendations, predicted job success, and compensation levels. As noted by several researchers, attractiveness may not be the most influential determinant of personnel decisions, but may be a deciding factor when applicants possess similar levels of qualifications. In addition, attractiveness does not provide an advantage if the applicants in the pool are of high quality, but it does provide an advantage in increased hiring rates and more positive job related outcomes for attractive individuals when applicant quality is low and average.

Just as physical attractiveness is a visual cue, vocal attractiveness is an auditory cue and can lead to differing interviewer evaluations in the interview as well. Vocal attractiveness, defined as an appealing mix of speech rate, loudness, pitch, and variability, has been found to be favorably related to interview ratings and job performance. In addition, the personality traits of agreeableness and conscientiousness predict performance more strongly for people with more attractive voices compared to those with less attractive voices. As important as it is to understand how physical attractiveness can influence the judgments, behaviors, and final decisions of interviewers, it is equally important to find ways to decrease potential bias in the job interview. Conducting an interview with elements of structure is one possible way to decrease bias.

### **10.3. Coaching**

An abundance of information is available to instruct interviewees on strategies for improving their performance in a job interview. Information used by interviewees comes from a variety of sources ranging from popular how to books to formal coaching programs, sometimes even provided by the hiring organization. Within the more formal coaching programs, there are two general types of coaching. One type of coaching is designed to teach interviewees how to perform better in the interview by focusing on how to behave and present oneself. This type of coaching is focused on improving aspects of the interview that are not necessarily related to the specific elements of performing the job tasks. This type of coaching could include how to dress, how to display nonverbal behaviors (head nods, smiling, eye contact), verbal cues (how fast to speak, speech volume, articulation, pitch), and impression management tactics. Another type of coaching is designed to focus interviewees on the content specifically relevant to describing one's qualifications for the job, in order to help improve their answers to interview questions. This coaching, therefore, focuses on improving the interviewee's understanding of the skills, abilities, and traits the interviewer is attempting to assess, and responding with relevant experience that demonstrates these skills. An example coaching program might include several sections focusing on various aspects of the interview. It could include a section designed to introduce interviewees to the interview process, and explain how this process works (e.g., administration of interview, interview day logistics, different types of interviews, advantages of structured interviews). It could also include a section designed to provide feedback to help the interviewee to improve their performance in the interview, as well as a section involving practice answering example interview questions. An additional section providing general interview tips about how to behave and present oneself could also be included.

It is useful to consider coaching in the context of the competing goals of the interviewer and interviewee. The interviewee's goal is typically to perform well (i.e. obtain high interview ratings), in order to get hired. On the other hand, the interviewer's goal is to obtain job relevant information, in order to determine whether the applicant has the skills, abilities, and traits believed by the organization to be indicators of successful job performance. Research has shown that how well an applicant does in the interview can be enhanced with coaching. The effectiveness of coaching is due, in part, to increasing the interviewee's knowledge, which in turn results in better interview performance. Interviewee knowledge refers to knowledge about the interview, such as the types of questions that will be asked, and the content that the interviewer is attempting to assess.

Research has also shown that coaching can increase the likelihood that interviewers using a structured interview will accurately choose those individuals who will ultimately be most successful on the job (i.e., increase reliability and validity of the structured interview). Additionally, research has shown that interviewees tend to have positive reactions to coaching, which is often an underlying goal of an interview. - Based on research thus far, the effects of coaching tend to be positive for both interviewees and interviewers.

#### **10.4. Faking It**

Interviewers should be aware that applicants can intentionally distort their responses or fake during the interview and such applicant faking has the potential to influence interview outcomes if present. Two concepts that relate to faking include social desirability (the tendency for people to present themselves in a favorable light) and impression management (conscious or unconscious attempts to influence one's image during interactions). Faking in the employment interview, then can be defined as "deceptive impression management or the conscious distortion of answers to the interview questions in order to obtain a better score on the interview and/or otherwise create favorable perceptions". Thus, faking in the employment interview is intentional, deceptive, and aimed at improving perceptions of performance.

Faking in the employment interview can be broken down into four elements. The first involves the interviewee portraying him or herself as an ideal job candidate by exaggerating true skills, tailoring answers to better fit the job, and/or creating the impression that personal beliefs, values, and attitudes are similar to those of the organization. The second aspect of faking is inventing or completely fabricating one's image by piecing distinct work experiences together to create better answers, inventing untrue experiences or skills, and portraying others' experiences or accomplishments as ones' own. Thirdly, faking might also be aimed at protecting the applicant's image. This can be accomplished through omitting certain negative experiences, concealing negatively perceived aspects of the applicant's background, and by separating oneself from negative experiences. The fourth and final component of faking involves ingratiating oneself to the interviewer by conforming personal opinions to align with those of the organization, as well as insincerely praising or complimenting the interviewer or organization. Of all of the various faking behaviors listed, ingratiation tactics were found to be the most prevalent in the employment interview, while flat out making up answers or claiming others' experiences as one's own is the least common. However,

fabricating true skills appears to be at least somewhat prevalent in employment interviews. One study found that over 80% of participants lied about job related skills in the interview, presumably to compensate for a lack of job required skills/traits and further their chances for employment.

Most importantly, faking behaviors have been shown to affect outcomes of employment interviews. For example, the probability of getting another interview or job offer increases when interviewees make up answers. Different interview characteristics also seem to impact the likelihood of faking. Faking behavior is less prevalent, for instance, in past behavioral interviews than in situational interviews, although follow up questions increased faking behaviors in both types of interviews. Therefore, if practitioners are interested in decreasing faking behaviors among job candidates in employment interview settings, they should utilize structured, past behavioral interviews and avoid the use of probes or follow up questions.

## **10.5. Legal Issues**

In many countries laws are put into place to prevent organizations from engaging in discriminatory practices against protected classes when selecting individuals for jobs. In the United States, it is unlawful for private employers with 15 or more employees along with state and local government employers to discriminate against applicants based on the following: race, color, sex (including pregnancy), national origin, age (40 or over), disability, or genetic information (note: additional classes may be protected depending on state or local law). More specifically, an employer cannot legally "fail or refuse to hire or to discharge any individual, or otherwise discriminate against any individual with respect to his compensation, terms, conditions, or privilege of employment" or "to limit, segregate, or classify his employees or applicants for employment in any way which would deprive or tend to deprive any individual of employment opportunities or otherwise adversely affect his status as an employee."

**The Civil Rights Act of 1964 and 1991 (Title VII)** were passed into law to prevent the discrimination of individuals due to race, color, religion, sex, or national origin. The Pregnancy Discrimination Act was added as an amendment and protects women if they are pregnant or have a pregnancy related condition.

**The Age Discrimination in Employment Act of 1967** prohibits discriminatory practice directed against individuals who are 40 years of age and older. Although

some states (e.g. New York) do have laws preventing the discrimination of individuals younger than 40, no federal law exists.

**The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990** protects qualified individuals who currently have or in the past have had a physical or mental disability (current users of illegal drugs are not covered under this Act). A person may be disabled if he or she has a disability that substantially limits a major life activity, has a history of a disability, is regarded by others as being disabled, or has a physical or mental impairment that is not transitory (lasting or expected to last six months or less) and minor. In order to be covered under this Act, the individual must be qualified for the job. A qualified individual is "an individual with a disability who, with or without reasonable accommodation, can perform the essential functions of the employment position that such individual holds or desires." Unless the disability poses an "undue hardship," reasonable accommodations must be made by the organization. In general, an accommodation is any change in the work environment or in the way things are customarily done that enables an individual with a disability to enjoy equal employment opportunities. Examples of reasonable accommodations are changing the workspace of an individual in a wheelchair to make it more wheelchair accessible, modifying work schedules, and/or modifying equipment. Employees are responsible for asking for accommodations to be made by their employer.

**The Title II of the Genetic Information Nondiscrimination Act of 2008 is the most recent law to be passed.** In essence, this law prohibits the discrimination of employees or applicants due to an individual's genetic information and family medical history information.

## **10.6. Applicants with Disabilities**

Applicants with disabilities may be concerned with the effect that their disability has on both interview and employment outcomes. Research has concentrated on four key issues: how interviewers rate applicants with disabilities, the reactions of applicants with disabilities to the interview, the effects of disclosing a disability during the interview, and the perceptions different kinds of applicant disabilities may have on interviewer ratings.

The job interview is a tool used to measure constructs or overall characteristics that are relevant for the job. Oftentimes, applicants will receive a score based on their performance during the interview. Research has found different findings based on

interviewers' perceptions of the disability. For example, some research has found a leniency effect (i.e., applicants with disabilities receive higher ratings than equally qualified non-disabled applicants) in ratings of applicants with disabilities. Other research, however, has found there is a disconnect between the interview score and the hiring recommendation for applicants with disabilities. That is, even though applicants with disabilities may have received a high interview score, they are still not recommended for employment. The difference between ratings and hiring could be detrimental to a company because they may be missing an opportunity to hire a qualified applicant.

A second issue in interview research deals with the applicants' with disabilities reactions to the interview and applicant perceptions of the interviewers. Applicants with disabilities and able bodied applicants report similar feelings of anxiety towards an interview. Applicants with disabilities often report that interviewers react nervously and insecurely, which leads such applicants to experience anxiety and tension themselves. The interview is felt to be the part of the selection process where covert discrimination against applicants with disabilities can occur. Many applicants with disabilities feel they cannot disclose (i.e., inform potential employer of disability) or discuss their disability because they want to demonstrate their abilities. If the disability is visible, then disclosure will inevitably occur when the applicant meets the interviewer, so the applicant can decide if they want to discuss their disability. If an applicant has a nonvisible disability, however, then that applicant has more of a choice in disclosing and discussing. In addition, applicants who were aware that the recruiting employer already had employed people with disabilities felt they had a more positive interview experience. Applicants should consider if they are comfortable with talking about and answering questions about their disability before deciding how to approach the interview.

Research has also demonstrated that different types of disabilities have different effects on interview outcomes. Disabilities with a negative stigma and that are perceived as resulting from the actions of the person (e.g., HIV-Positive, substance abuse) result in lower interview scores than disabilities for which the causes are perceived to be out of the individual's control (e.g., physical birth defect). A physical disability often results in higher interviewer ratings than psychological (e.g., mental illness) or sensory conditions (e.g., Tourette Syndrome). In addition, there are differences between the effects of disclosing disabilities that are visible (e.g., wheelchair bound) and non-visible (e.g., Epilepsy) during the interview. When applicants had a nonvisible disability and disclosed their disability early in the interview they were not rated more negatively than applicants who did not

disclose. In fact, they were liked more than the applicants who did not disclose their disability and were presumed not disabled. Interviewers tend to be impressed by the honesty of the disclosure. Strong caution needs to be taken with applying results from studies about specific disabilities, as these results may not apply to other types of disabilities. Not all disabilities are the same and more research is needed to find whether these results are relevant for other types of disabilities.

Some practical implications for job interviews for applicants with disabilities include research findings that show there are no differences in interviewer responses to a brief, shorter discussion or a detailed, longer discussion about the disability during the interview. Applicants, however, should note that when a nonvisible disability is disclosed near the end of the interview, applicants were rated more negatively than early disclosing and non-disclosing applicants. Therefore it is possible that interviewers feel individuals who delay disclosure may do so out of shame or embarrassment. In addition, if the disability is disclosed after being hired, employers may feel deceived by the new hire and reactions could be less positive than would have been in the interview. If applicants want to disclose their disability during the interview, research shows that a disclosure and/or discussion earlier in the interview approach may afford them some positive interview effects. The positive effects, however, are preceded by the interviewer's perception of the applicants' psychological well-being. That is, when the interviewer perceives the applicant is psychologically well and/or comfortable with his or her disability, there can be positive interviewer effects. In contrast, if the interviewer perceives the applicant as uncomfortable or anxious discussing the disability, this may either fail to garner positive effect or result in more negative interview ratings for the candidate. Caution must again be taken when applying these research findings to other types of disabilities not investigated in the studies discussed above. There are many factors that can influence the interview of an applicant with a disability, such as whether the disability is physical or psychological, visible or nonvisible, or whether the applicant is perceived as responsible for the disability or not. Therefore applicants should make their own conclusions about how to proceed in the interview after comparing their situations with those examined in the research discussed here.