Blue Orca

Whether new to interviewing or a seasoned professional this document provides helpful tips and advice on how to get the most from the interview process.

Introduction

Interviews are still one of the most popular methods of selection:

- 99% of companies use interviews
- They can be cost effective if done well
- They fulfil a psychological need to meet and see a person who might one day join the organisation
- When conducted effectively, interviews can accurately predict job performance

However, there are key pitfalls to be avoided. An interview delivered without structure and planning rapidly loses its ability to predict good performers.

There are different types of interview, each providing quite specific types of information:

- Biographical interview
- Competency or behavioural interview
- Situational Interview
- Technical interview

Biographical interview

This type of interview explores a candidate's past experience in a chronological way.

Two sample questions:

- *"Why did you move from job x to job y?"*
- *"What were you doing between ……..and……….?"*

Good for:

- Exploring the reasons why a candidate's career has progressed in the way it has and why they have made important career moves or choices

- Clarifying a candidate’s work experience, knowledge and qualifications

Technical Interview

This interview explores a candidate’s technical knowledge, qualifications, experience and skills.

Two sample questions:

- *“What project management techniques have you used?”*
- *“What would you use component/system x for?”*

Good for:

- Exploring whether a candidate is capable of performing the job to the desired level or what training or support they might need if appointed.

Competency or Behavioural Interview

The competency based interview is used to explore a candidate’s particular behaviours or abilities.

The following question relates to the competency of team working.

- *“Tell me about a time you helped out some colleagues who were facing a difficult problem?”*

Depending on the candidate’s response, some useful follow-up (probing) questions are:

- “What part did you play specifically?”
- “What happened next?”
- “What was the final outcome?”

Good for:

- Exploring how a person's skills, gained from handling situations in the past, would transfer to your job.

Top Tip

Have a couple of opening questions prepared in order to fully explore a competency area

Situational Interview

In situational interviews, you ask hypothetical-based questions, exploring how someone might do a job if appointed.

This question could be used when recruiting a sales person:

- *"A customer has just rung in, very angrily complaining about the delivery they have just received. What actions would you take?"*

Good for:

- Exploring how a person might do a job: this can be when their experience is relatively "untried" in that particular area.
- Seeing how a candidate's existing knowledge or experience could be applied to handle future issues or problems.

There is a danger with these sort of questions that a candidate may answer in a theoretical way – rather than what they would really do. If in doubt, use competency/behavioural interview questions alongside situational questions to explore how they **have** actually dealt with related in the past.

Sequence & Format

Give thought to the **best sequence** and **format** of interviews as well as the type of questions.

Top tips for the best interview sequence:

- Establish your candidate's abilities before concentrating upon the more complex process of assessing their competencies and fit within your organisation.
- Telephone-based or webcam-based interviews can be very effective in particular circumstances, for example when your candidates are widely spread geographically.

Top tips for the best interview format:

- Individual (one on one) interviews allow for greater rapport with a candidate but allow for greater interview bias.
- Panel (multiple interviewer) interviews can be fairer but can be harder to manage and can be very formal and intimidating to candidates.
- Telephone-based interviews can avoid travel challenges for candidates and interviewers alike, but is harder to build rapport.
- Whichever sequence or format you use, it is important to be consistent. Do not, for example, start with face to face interviews for some, and then switch to telephone interviews halfway through the process.

Key Interviewing Skills

“N, O, P, Q, R, S, T, U”

N – Note Taking	**Take notes** or you will forget information and not have a record to support your decisions.
O – Objectives	**Know what you are looking for** from the candidate (experience, knowledge, skills, and competencies).
P - Preparation	**Prepare** – analyse the job, plan your interview, book the room, and review your paperwork.
Q – Questions	**Ask good questions** – open (to open up an area), probing (to explore an area further), closed (to confirm facts), targeted, (tailored to key areas).
R – Rapport	**Establish rapport** so you can get the best out of each candidate and get an accurate insight into how they typically behave.
S – Structure	**Follow a structure** that ensures you cover the areas you need to, and that gives the candidate a chance to ask questions.
T – Time Management	**Make effective use of time** – and stick to your allocated time.
U – Unbiased	**Be aware of your biases** – your pet likes and pet hates. Make a clear and conscious effort to stop them influencing your decision making.

Conduct the Interview Professionally

- Start on time and welcome the candidate
- Introduce yourself and explain the interview and recruitment process
- Provide an overview of the organisation and the role
- Keep a written reminder of the questions you have prepared, and stick to them
- Avoid sitting behind a desk and adopting a confrontational body language – the best interviews are conducted professionally but informally
- Listen politely and show interest in the candidate's responses but avoid showing specific approval or disapproval of what they say
- Summarise to check your understanding of key points
- Ask good questions and take good notes – see below
- Manage the time to ensure you cover all the questions you need
- Ask the candidates if they have any questions – remember it is a two way process
- Conclude by thanking the candidate for their time and interest in your role and advise them when they will hear about the outcome

Asking Good Questions

This is all about:

- Knowing what you are looking for
- Planning and writing down your questions in advance
- Asking the right type of questions to get you there

In the interview itself, think about **TOFFEE:**

- Take the Time that the interview needs
- Be organised so as to reach your Objectives
- Find out the Facts
- Offer Encouragement for Examples

Useful questions to include:

Open – Starts an area for the interview to explore and encourages the candidate to provide further information:

- 'Tell me about…….',
- 'Give me an example of…..',
- 'Who?', 'What?', 'Where?', 'When?' and 'Why?

Be careful with 'Why?' questions as this can put candidates in to a defensive position where they become less likely to open up.

Probing – Use to 'dig' under the candidate's responses and explore an area:

'What happened next?', 'How did you deal with…?'

Closed – Can be used selectively to clarify specific information and control the interview. They can often lead to a simple 'yes' or 'no' response:

'Did you….?', 'Have you ever….?', 'Who did you report to?'

Avoid:

- ⃠ Too many closed questions
- ⃠ Leading questions suggesting that your mind is made up – 'Surely that was not a sensible decision'
- ⃠ Forced multiple choice questions – 'So was the problem caused by x,y, or z?'
- ⃠ 'Marathon runner' questions – questions that go on and on…….

Taking Good Notes

- ✓ Record as much factual evidence as possible by jotting down notes – do not use electronic recording devices as this can be intimidating and would be unethical if used without the candidate's permission.

- ✓ Record non-verbal behaviour in your notes – but do so objectively.
- ✓ Concentrate on asking the right questions and recording the responses **during** the interview – then assess the responses **after** the interview is finished.

Taking notes during the interview is essential to ensure that the recruitment decision is as fair and objective as possible; it will provide a record in case your decision is challenged.

Evaluating the Results

When?

- After the interview is finished and the candidate has left the room, while the interview is still fresh in your mind

How?

- Start from the beginning of your interview notes, and go through each piece of evidence that you recorded. This evidence could be what was described **by** the candidate or what was observed **by** you **about** the candidate.
- Relate the evidence to the job and person profile criteria by using ticks and crosses.
- Remember that some of the evidence you noted may relate to more than one criterion or competency.
- Omission of behaviour could also be important (negative) evidence, such as not responding to a question.

Guard against your own biases, pet likes or dislikes, or subjective opinions when evaluating interview performance.

Weigh up both quality and the quantity of evidence you have gathered in each of the areas of interest, based upon the pattern and volume of ticks and crosses you have given.

To help you with this, use rating scale as shown below:

Rating	Description
5 Exceptional	Meets all or virtually all of the competency description – no significant omissions
4 Good	Meets most of the competency description; many indicators observed in full and others partially; any omissions or negative areas were not critical to the overall performance in this area.
3 Acceptable	Meets more than half of the competency description – is capable of performing at the top level required; some negative evidence observed.
2 Some weaknesses	Meets less than half the competency description; some critical positive indicators omitted; more negative areas/evidence observed.
1 Poor	Meets almost none of the competency description; very little positive evidence observed; outweighed by negative indicators.
0 No Evidence	No evidence shown when given an opportunity to demonstrate the competency.

Second Interviews

- Use your objective assessment of the candidates' first interview ratings to decide whom to invite back for second interview or further assessment.
- Second interviews should use exactly the same techniques as already outlined above, but should be used for focussing upon specific areas

outstanding from the selection process so far, or upon concerns raised during the first interview which require clarification.
- Do not just repeat the questions covered in the first interview – think of alternative questions designed to explore more fully the areas that you need to cover.

Summary

- Plan the sequence and format of the interviews to best suit your recruitment requirement and available resources – the time between first and second interviews should be kept as short as is practically possible; thus keeping the candidate’s interest high and your memory of each candidate fresh.
- Decide what you want to cover in each interview, linked to the job and person profile.
- Generate beforehand the interview questions that will get you that information.
- Ask good questions and take notes.
- Evaluate the candidates’ responses fairly and objectively, as soon as possible after the interview has concluded.
- Don’t rely on ‘Gut Feel’ alone.