

A Systematic Approach of Conducting Employee Selection Interview

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Abstract

The challenge of today's HR managers is to create and nurture a pool of good employees in the organization. It starts from selection process of the employees. 'Interview' has been used as an important selection method by HR managers for long time. The cost of rehiring and retraining solidifies the importance of hiring the right person for right position first. It requires a reliable and valid interview process. This study attempts to develop a systematic approach of employee selection interview. The proposed three-steps (3D) interview process does not guarantee 100 percent success in hiring the best employees into the organization, but the proper application of this approach, at least, will improve the chances of hiring the best person for the job and the organization.

Keywords: 3D, HR Manager, Selection Interview, Interviewer, Employee

1. Introduction

Globalization has made the business world very competitive. Firms are now fighting beyond the national boundaries which pose a challenge to them to survive. The success of today's business firms ultimately calls for utilizing the resources effectively. Griffin (2006) stated that management is the process of managing the resources of the organization. He mentioned, in his book 'Management', four kinds of resources: financial resources, physical resources, information resources, and human resources. Undoubtedly the utilization of other resources depends on the calibre of human resources. Therefore, the firms are now fighting for skilled human resources.

HRM has got prime importance in today's business organizations. There is an adequate supply of labor in the labor market, but question arises in terms of 'skilled labor'. Hence, the importance is given to the selection of right employees for the right positions. Firms are now realizing the value of good employees because they make a difference through their job performance (Camp, Vielhaber & Simonetti, 2001). The adoption of a good selection method is extremely important for Multinational Corporations (MNCs). Hill (2005) emphasizes the selection of good employees for MNCs who not only have the skills required to perform particular jobs but also 'fit' the prevailing culture of the firm. Various selection methods are now being used to identify the right candidate. 'Interview' has emerged as a very useful tool in this regard. It is a very common selection method and has a high predictive validity for job performance (Robertson & Smith, 2001).

The main purpose of the interview is to select the right candidate for the right job. The importance of conducting an effective interview is also rising. No consensus was found among the HR experts regarding the effective interview techniques. There are a number of existing literatures regarding the techniques of an effective interview, but very few literatures exist regarding a systematic approach of conducting an effective interview. This study attempts to develop a systematic approach of conducting an effective interview.

2. Justification of the study

Since the importance of an effective interview is undoubtedly high, there are a good number of literatures exist regarding the importance and effective interview techniques. But a very few literatures exist regarding a complete interview process that shows a clear path to the employers for selecting right employees. A lot of techniques are available, but the problem arises regarding the use of these techniques in a concrete manner. A systematic approach of interview will facilitate the tasks of HR managers in selecting the right person for the right position. This study attempts to develop a systematic approach of conducting an effective interview. Attempts have been made to arrange all the relevant issues regarding an affective interview in a systematic manner. The whole process of the interview has been described in terms of '3D'- Development, Discussion and Decision. This study is particularly important for three reasons. First, it will help the HR managers to think about the employee selection interview in a concrete manner. Second, it will help them to use a number of interview

techniques in an effective way that will ultimately increase the chance of hiring the right person for the right position. Third, it will enrich the existing literature of selection interview.

3. Objective of the study

The primary objective of this study is to develop a systematic approach of conducting an effective interview. The approach consists of three steps which are titled as '3D' – Development, Discussion and Decision. Again, a number of techniques have been provided under each step in order to make the interview more effective.

4. Methodology of the study

This is a qualitative research which is based on secondary data analysis. Secondary sources of information included review of research reports, relevant published documents including books, journals, and seminar papers. Again internet has been used as another important source of information.

5. Literature Review

All employers are searching for the very best employees available, but very few know exactly how to increase their odds of finding just the right person (Mills, 2007). Human resources are critical for effective organizational functioning (Griffin, 2006). Its importance stems from increased legal complexities, the recognition that human resources are valuable means for improving productivity, and the awareness today of the costs associated with poor human resource management (Wright and McMahan, 1992). Indeed, managers now realize that the effectiveness of their HR function was a substantial impact on the bottom lines performance of the firms. With very low unemployment levels, competition for the best employees is extremely keen (Berkson, Ferris & Harris, 2003).

The growing importance of good employees poses a challenge to the HR managers. The selection process of today's HR managers is becoming complex and challenging. Undoubtedly the overall aim of the selection process is to identify the candidates who are suitable for the vacancy or wider requirements of the HR plan. 'Interview' has been used as a 'critical selection method' by HR managers. The interview is the most valid method in determining an applicant's organizational fit, level of motivation, and inter-personal skills (Stevens, 1997).

An interview is a specialized form of conversation conducted for a specific task-related purpose (Whetton & Cameron, 2002). The primary objective of interview is to predict whether a candidate will meet the performance expectation on the job (Camp et al, 2001).

The increasing competition for skilled and talented workers calls for effective interview. But what actually makes an interview effective? An interview is regarded as effective when it can serve its purpose, i.e. selecting the right candidate for the right job.

Whetton and Cameron (2002) cite a six-step process of conducting an interview, what they named as PEOPLE-oriented selection interview process. Here the word 'PEOPLE' clearly explains the interview process: P = prepare, E = Establish rapport, O = Obtain information, P = Provide information, L = lead to close, and E = evaluate. Several contradictions arise among the scholars regarding effective interview techniques such as what type of questions will be asked? What kind of interview will be applied i.e. individual or panel? Will it be the traditional or behavioral interviewing? and so on.

Having several managers sit around a table with the candidate avoid having to spend time asking the same question over and over (Mill, 2007). Behavioral interview is more effective than 'trait interview' in a sense that the trait approach, permits stereotyping candidates based on first impression rather than predicating a candidate's future behavior based on his /her life history experiences (Green, 1991). Research indicates that behavioral interviews are nearly eight times more effective for predicting successful job performance (Merritt, 2003). Stress interviews are becoming more common place in today's business (Poundstone, 2003). In this case interviewers observe how a candidate will react under pressure as well as his or her values and ethics in stressful conditions.

Koen (2004) suggested to avoid 'closed questions' that require a 'yes' or 'no' answer. Again, a challenge for the interviewers is to keep bias out of the interview (Hackney and Kleiner, 1994). Foster & Godkin (1998) think that the interviewer often holds a stereotype of what represents a 'good' applicant. They often tend to favor applicants who share his or her own attitudes.

Interviews should always be planned properly, meaning that interviewers must prepare for the interview (Dickel, 2008). Undoubtedly interview is a two-way process. It is an interviewer's best interest to find good prospects, hire them, and have them stay in the organization. Therefore, the interviewee should be provided sufficient information about the job and organization. Buda (2003) suggested realistic job preview (RJP) to achieve this

goal. It allows job candidates to know favorable as well as unfavorable information about the job (Ganzach, Pazy & Brainin, 2002).

The task of HR managers does not complete just after the interview session. The post-interview activities are vital for them. Atleast they should verify the background investigation of the potential employee before finally offering the job. Background investigations, or reference checks, are intended to verify that information on the application form is correct and accurate and application. Organizations need to be aware of negligent hiring liability. It occurs when an employer has failed to properly investigate an employee's background and that employee is later involved in wrongful conduct (Le & Kleiner, 2000).

There are an adequate number of literatures exist regarding the importance and techniques of interview. But very few literatures exist regarding the systematic interview process. Given the importance of an effective interview, this study attempts to develop a systematic approach of conducting an effective interview

6. The systematic approach of conducting an effective interview

The importance of good employees is felt immensely among the HR managers in today's organizations. The selection of the right candidate(s) is of vital importance. 'Interview' has emerged as a popular method of employee selection. The primary objective of interview is to find out the right candidate for right position. It requires a well-structured interview that produces more reliable and valid information for selection than an unstructured interview.

A well- structured interview can be best described in terms of '3D': Development, Discussion, and Decision. A systematic approach of conducting an interview should consist of these '3D' that will increase the reliability and validity of the interview.

Insert Figure 1 here.

The above figure specifies the interrelationship among '3D'- Development, Discussion and Decision. An adequate preparation made in development stage for an interview facilitates both the discussion and decision stages. Similarly, shortcomings identified in the discussion and decision stages should be addressed in development stage for future interview.

Development

The 'development' stage consists of necessary activities before the interview. A good preparation for the interview facilitates the effective interview process. Preparing to interview should begin long before the first question is ever asked.

HR professionals know that interviewing is a serious business that recalls for a proper development of pre-interview activities/procedures. At this stage, HR professionals should follow the following techniques with due diligence.

I. State the purpose of the interview. HR managers should concretely state the type of information that is hoped to get by the end of the interview.

II. Analyze the résumés. HR managers should review the application forms, résumé, test scores (if any) and any correspondence that would be useful in understanding the applicant's background. The résumé is a tool only to be used as an attention- getter and a means for allowing to get his /her foot into the door. It can be considered as a reflection of the candidate's true person, but the interview should be the real test.

Hackney and Kleiner (1994) provided the following list of factors to consider when analyzing a résumé or application.

- Be aware of 'functional' résumé - very general, no duties of employment (Hackney and Kleiner, 1994).
- Notice sloppiness – misspelled words, a copy of the résumé (not an original) (Half, 1987).
- Be careful with an employee that distributes an overly long resume (Davison, 1985).
- Look for a willingness to work hard (Half, 1987).
- Review the reason for leaving the last job (Black, 1982).
- Weigh candidate's educational backgrounds (Black, 1982).
- Do not pass final judgment in advance (Black, 1982).

III. Develop a job Profile. HR manager should identify the exact job requirements for the job that will be needed, including needed skills, experience and expertise. This is more than a job description and should reflect actual

needs for the job (Humphrey, 2006). This profile should answer the question, 'What will this person really do in this position?'

IV. Consider the team mix. This is the critical task for HR managers. In deciding the team mix, consider the nature of the job. There is no hard and fast rule regarding the number of company personnel to be involved in applicant interviews (Hackney and Kleiner, 1994). Don't forget to keep the immediate supervisor of the potential employee in the interview session. HR professionals must answer the question, 'What sort of person will fit best with the existing team of employees?'

V. Train the interviewers. Once the interviewers are selected, the next step is to prepare them for the interview session. HR managers must ensure that the interviewers hold adequate skills for the interview. Whetton and Cameron (2002) identified the following key skills for interviewers.

- Ability to create effective questions with the aim of eliciting the information required.
- Ability to create an appropriate climate for information sharing.
- Ability to control the flow of interview session.
- Ability to use and interpret non-verbal cues (body language).
- Ability to probe and challenge when necessary.

VI. Develop job-related questions and answers. At this stage, HR professionals should determine what questions to ask during the interview. When developing the list of questions, it is better to go back and review the qualifications list. Questions should vary depending on the hiring position. It is better to avoid 'closed questions' that require 'yes' or 'no' answer. Open-ended questions are useful in getting adequate information about the applicant. Again it is also important to avoid the use of 'leading question' (Koen, 2004). This tempts the applicant to slant answers to suit the interviewers. After the list of interview questions are developed, it is a good idea to write under each question the response expected from the applicant.

VII. Develop an evaluation sheet to keep score of each applicant. There are numerous scoring systems which can be devised. The evaluation check list should be tied some how to the original qualifications sheet. Again the evaluation sheet should correlate with desired tangible and intangible qualities (Hackney and Kleiner, 1994).

VIII. Determine how to record information- audio tape or notes—and make sure that the appropriate equipment or materials are available before the interview.

IX. Prepare suitable physical arrangements. The interview process should be efficiently run to make a favorable impression on the candidates and to avoid unnecessary stress. The interview room should be free from distraction and interruption.

X. Develop a method for observing the pre-and-post behavior of the candidate. This will help the interviewers to rightly judge the personality and self-confidence of the candidate.

Discussion

The 'discussion' stage of the interview process consists of the activities during the interview session. If the HR managers have done the works properly listed in the 'development stage', the interview itself will much easier and the proper selection decision much more likely. When interviewing the applicants, the task of interviewers is to find a person whose skills and personality best match the firm's requirements (Dettore, 1992) and who will be the happiest in this job, at this company. HR managers should apply the following techniques effectively while conducting the interview session.

I. Establish the rapport. The interviewers' first role is that of host. It is important to create a favorable impression. Research has shown that rapport between the interviewers and the applicant contributes substantially to the effectiveness of the interview. Just as important as creating the atmosphere for the interview is 'breaking the ice' or making the applicant feels comfortable from the start. Asking a question like 'tell me about yourself' gives the candidate an opportunity to become relaxed. Again, this type of question from the start will reveal the applicant's ability to communicate, while the interviewers learn the basic abilities of this person (Hackney and Kleiner, 1994).

II. Describe the company, its philosophy and its corporate culture. It is important to explain the specific statement about the salary and benefits package. This is the chance to an interviewer to sell both the company and the position (Dettore, 1992).

III. Ask the questions to gather predicative information. The questions interviewers ask are the centerpiece of the interview.

The question should be structured in an effective way so that they can help the interviewers to determine whether a candidate is indeed the best person for the position. The list of questions prepared in the 'development stage' should be used in the proper order.

Dettore (1992) highlighted a number of organized questions as follows:

- Ask about the candidate's most recent job responsibilities.
- Continue with related questions about the current accomplishments that the candidate is most proud of.
- Ask a round of questions that will help you to determine what the candidate believes is most exciting and difficult about the offering position.
- Focus on the candidate's relationship with supervisor and co-workers.
- Try to judge whether the candidate will thrive or flounder in the company's corporate culture.

Mills (2007) stated the importance of situational questions that place candidates in hypothetical situations and ask them to explain how they would handle themselves in these situations. The answers of these questions give insight into the candidate's ethics and principles. Again, Green (1991) focused on the importance 'behavioral interviewing' to avoid stereo-typing the candidate.

IV. Answer the questions of the candidate. An interview is a two-way process. There are things that the applicant needs to know from the interviewers about the position and the organization.

Interviewers should provide sufficient facts, both favorable and unfavorable, about the position, management, and promotional opportunities in a straight forward manner so that the applicant can make an intelligent decision on the acceptability of the position (Koen, 2004).

V. Take the interview notes. Taking notes help the interviewers to avoid getting applicants' qualities mixed up after several interviews. Note taking helps retain accurate information and develop a clearer understanding of the applicant's fit by allowing follow-up questions (Middendorf & Macan, 2002). But the interviewers should refrain from writing too many notes which can break the flow of the interview and cause the candidate to 'freeze up' (Hackney and Kleiner, 1994). Interviewers should try to maintain eye contact while making notes (Koen, 2004). Care should be taken to ensure that no notes are made pertaining to any potentially illegal selection criteria (e.g. age, religion, gender, race, etc.).

VI. Control the flow of interview. The control of the interview is lost, for example, when candidate strays to another topic or takes so long time to answer a question. The keys to control the interview are careful listening, combined with good use of questions. Interviewers' comments and questions should control the interview (Koen, 2004).

VII. Conclude the interview. To conclude the interview, invite the candidate to ask questions about the company and the job at hand (Dettore, 1992). Again, the interviewers should ask any remaining questions that they have about the candidate's suitability for the job.

Simply thanking the applicant for his/ her time and outlining what will happen next is an honest and comfortable way to end the interview (Koen, 2004). Finally, it is better to give the applicant an approximate date by which the interviewers will be making the decisions about the successful candidate.

Decision

The 'decision phase' of the interview process consists of the post- interview activities. This is the critical phase of the interview process. HR managers should follow the following techniques to make this stage effective.

I. Evaluate the applicant's suitability for the employment. It is important to evaluate the pre-and-post interview behavior of the candidate that will help the interviewer to make a 'total judgment'. Black (1982) provides the following guidelines during evaluating the candidate's performance.

- Look at the whole man.
- Use checks and balances.
- Seek the successful combination.
- Pay attention to essentials.
- Analyze the significance of the information.

II. Check the references. It is a good idea to refrain from making a formal job offer until appropriate references have been checked. Since letters of recommendation often lack candid and specific assessments of work performance, it may be advantageous to talk directly with previous supervisors (Koen, 2004).

III. Be aware of the bias of interview. A challenge for the interviewer is to keep bias out of the interview. To avoid biased decisions, stick to the 'game plan' (qualification lists). The most common forms of bias are halo effect, contagious bias, logical error, and so on.

IV. Make the hiring decision based on the participation of the members of interview-board. It helps to take a complete hiring decision. In addition, it will make the members a part of hiring decision.

V. Conduct another interview, if necessary. Sometimes it may be difficult to judge a candidate's potentiality in a single interview session. In this case, the candidate may be called for another interview that will ultimately improve the validity of the selection process.

7. Conclusion

The importance of effective human resources can not be described in words. The selection interview plays an important role in bringing the best employees into the organization. The challenge of today's HR managers is to develop and maintain a valid and productive selection interview. There is no magic formula for hiring the best candidate for a job. The proposed three-step (3D) interview process doesn't guarantee hundred percent success in hiring the best employees, but it can, at least, provide a road map to the HR manager to think about the selection interview in a concrete manner.

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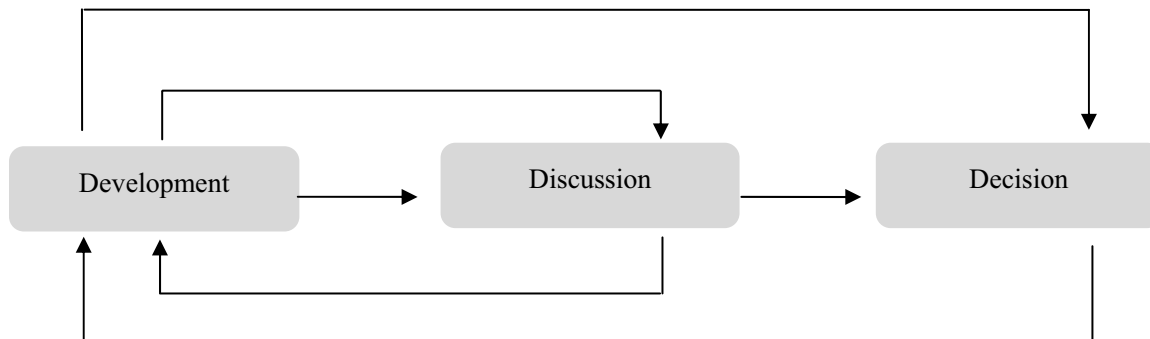


Figure 1. The '3D' interview process