

Exploring Interview Dynamics in Hiring Process: Structure, Response Bias, and Interviewee Experience

Yian Wang^{1,a,*}

¹*College of Liberal Arts and Science, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Champaign, 61820, The United States of America*

a. yianw3@illinois.edu

**corresponding author*

Abstract: Interviews plays a crucial role in the hiring process, influencing decisions that can significantly organizations and individuals. This literature review comprehensively examines the role of interviews in the hiring process, focusing on three dimensions: structure, response bias, and interviewee experience. It begins by defining each interview structure and discussing the shortcomings of unstructured interviews in terms of reliability and validity, the flexibility of semi-structured interviews, and the high validity of structured interviews. In addition, this paper addresses the issues of response bias and interviewee experience that frequently arise in interviews. Potential solutions to these issues are explored, leveraging the distinctive features of the three structures. And the finding suggests that structured interviews are more effective in mitigating bias, while semi-structured interviews prioritize the interviewee's experience. The strong replicability of structured interviews makes them suitable for extensive study and future improvement. Therefore, this paper proposes that enhancing interviewee experience in structured interviews should be a key area of future research.

Keywords: Structured Interview, Semi-structured Interview, Unstructured Interview, Response Bias, Interviewee Experience

1. Introduction

Interviews, in the current society, have been an essential part of almost all recruitment processes. Almost all interviewers set up multiple interview sessions at the recruitment stage to better test whether the interviewee is capable of performing well in the future work environment. According to Makachoska, on average, employers conduct 2 to 3 interview rounds before choosing a candidate [1]. Also, it is not just recruiters who need interviews to screen qualified applicants, but applicants are interviewed to perceive if they and the organization are a good fit. Maurer mentioned that about 68% of respondents acknowledged that a company's hiring process can positively or negatively impact their decision to accept a job offer [2]. Effective communication at various stages of the hiring process, including post-interview feedback, can give applicants a far-reaching impression of the company during the job search period. Finally, the overall organization also needs to use interviews to reduce salary overhead. Three-fourths of candidates are willing to accept a salary that is 5% lower than their expected offer if the employer creates a great impression through the hiring process [2]. The interview has become one of the most common and critical steps in the hiring process. Human Resource

Management and Organizational Behavior academics have also been treating interviews as one of the most focused research topics. It is not only the main way of assessing candidates' qualifications but also a key component in shaping the company culture and determining the future of the organization. However, with globalization and the rapid development of technology, the form and content of interviews are undergoing profound changes. This paper reviews a wide range of academic literature and empirical studies to provide a comprehensive perspective on understanding and optimizing interviewing practices in the hiring process and providing valuable insights for companies and organizations, bringing new research ideas on the process of interviewing in recruitment to the digital age where social and organizational patterns are changing rapidly. Therefore, this literature review aims to comprehensively summarize and analyze interview-related research through three dimensions: structure, response bias, and interviewee experience. By analyzing the interview structure and issues related to response bias and interviewee experience, this paper provides solutions to these issues while combining the structure and interview elements (bias, interview experience) through the lens of the characteristics of the different structures of the interview.

2. Three Different Types of Interview Structures

The interview structure can be categorized into three types which are unstructured interviews, semi-structured interviews and structured interviews. Huffcutt and Arthur concluded that when an interview is more structured, its validity would increase accordingly [3]. Overall, more structured interviews are effective in testing whether an applicant has the competencies needed for the job. However, due to the common use of interviews, even unstructured interviews are being used many times a day. Therefore, this paper explores the three different levels of structured interviews and describes their characteristics to help interviewers identify and consider the form of interview to be used.

2.1. Unstructured Interview

The first is the unstructured interview, which means there are no formal limits on the questions asked or the evaluation of responses. Zhang & Wildemuth defines unstructured interviews are characterized by the absence of preset questions or response categories, instead focusing on the social interaction between the researcher and the informant [4]. In unstructured interviews, interviews are often in the form of small talk from start to finish. It does not have strict control over the interview questions and does not take a scientific approach to evaluating the applicant's answers. Typical unstructured interview questions may consist of inquiries such as "Provide an overview of yourself," "Elaborate on your ideal job" and "Identify your most significant achievement." In general, these questions are rather broad and necessitate the candidate to discover their own unique perspective in their response. Simultaneously, these inquiries frequently assess a certain overarching idea, such as the candidate's interests and preferences. Simultaneously, these questions lack systematic design, meaning they frequently lack strong relevance to one another.

It is because of the high randomness of the unstructured interview and the lack of control over the questions that its reliability and validity are relatively the lowest. The mean observational validity of the unstructured interview was 0.21, 0.27 after correcting for measurement error, and 0.38 after further correcting for range restriction [5]. Compared to more structured interviews, unstructured interviews are not a more effective means of interviewing, either in terms of mean validity or corrected validity. Also, Dipboye et al. found a weak level of validity for unstructured panel interviews in predicting job performance and training success [6]. Unstructured interviews can be more detrimental than simply being invalid; they can actively diminish accuracy. This is because unstructured interviews expose interviewers to numerous informal observations of the interviewee,

which may have limited or unknown diagnostic value. As a result, interviewers get more information than they can effectively utilize, necessitating the need to disregard some signs [7]. In terms of reliability, unstructured interviews also do not show any advantages. Latham & Finnegan mentioned that unstructured interviews usually lack both reliability and validity. Because the questions asked by each interviewer are so open-ended, the answers the interviewers receive can vary widely. This leads to a significantly low reliability of unstructured interviews [8].

2.2. Semi-Structured Interview

In semi-structured interviews, there is a broad structure of subjects to be examined, but the questions are not arranged in a certain sequence or wording. This facilitates the introduction of novel concepts throughout the interview. Interviewers in this category usually have some work experience, so they know how to design questions to encourage the interviewee to express themselves more within the constraints of a scheme. By integrating the benefits of organized and unstructured interviews, these semi-structured interviews offer the ability to get comparable and dependable data while also allowing for the freedom to pose additional inquiries [9]. Some example questions of semi-structured interviews may include “What does your normal day look like,” “Can you tell me your difficulties in your last job,” and “What do you think causes your problems?” While the questions are not predetermined, they typically revolve around a certain characteristic of the candidate, and following questions generally relate to the first ones. These questions assist the candidate in precisely focusing on the specific aspects that the interviewer wants to evaluate through a free response.

Semi-structure has high validity but some risks of lower reliability. Ahlin mentioned that semi-structured interviews are highlighted for their strong validity since they enable the collection of comprehensive, firsthand narratives and facilitate interactive engagement [10]. Nevertheless, there is a potential drawback in terms of reduced dependability, as the data could exhibit inconsistency across different questions measuring the same concept. However, there are many ways to improve validity while further improving reliability. Campion et al. mentioned fifteen ways to enhance reliability and validity by adjusting interview structure, some of which could be applied to semi-structured interviews and keep encouraging richer response [11]. Since semi-structured interviews do not design the content of interview questions in advance, these fifteen strategies that emphasize the uniformity and fixity of interview questions are not considered to apply to semi-structured interviews (e.g., using the same question for the same concepts). First, longer interviews might encourage a larger amount of information. Although this may lead to the same problem of too much information being taken out of focus that exists in unstructured interviews, the semi-structured interview itself effectively limits the scope of what can be answered and can be effective in avoiding questions that take the interviewee off-center. Also, using detailed anchored rating scales would enhance the reliability. Doing so will help interviewers score more consistently, something that is especially important for semi-structured interviews where answers are relatively free-form. Finally, provide extensive interview coaching. Since semi-structured interviews are very demanding and require interviewers to have at least some work experience, providing them with effective interview training can help interviewers who lack some of that experience get a chance to improve.

2.3. Structured Interview

Structured interviews are a systematic and methodical strategy employed in the context of job interviews. This approach entails the consistent posing of a planned set of questions to each candidate, following a pre-established order. The purpose of this format is to establish a framework that promotes equity and impartiality while facilitating a more precise evaluation of applicants through comparative analysis. Structured interviews are characterized by questions that are specifically linked

to the job's prerequisites and are formulated to extract information on the candidate's pertinent skills, knowledge, and capabilities. Responses are frequently evaluated with a standardized scoring mechanism, so mitigating the potential impact of interviewer bias. This method differs from unstructured interviews, which exhibit a broad variation in the questions posed to applicants and are generally characterized by a more conversational tone. An example of structured interviews might look like "Can you describe a situation where you had to meet a tight deadline? How did you handle it?" Such questions are usually strictly limited to measuring only one concept and are carefully designed to prevent applicants from spreading their responses too far.

Structured interviews aim to enhance the reliability and validity of the recruiting process by implementing a standardized approach. Multiple studies have consistently demonstrated that structured interviews perform better than unstructured interviews in this context. According to available reports, structured interviews have been found to exhibit greater overall reliability compared to unstructured interviews when utilized in the context of a shared pool of candidates for emergency medicine residency program vacancies [12]. Also, Macan mentioned that implementing a systematic framework and strengthening the structure of the interview process can improve the reliability and validity of interviewer assessments [13]. Thus, the structured interview has the advantage in validity and reliability. Moreover, structured interviews are known for their efficiency, as they can be conducted relatively quickly, enabling a larger number of interviews to be conducted within a limited timeframe. This implies that the outcomes of the structured interview possess a sufficient level of representativeness, enabling their generalization to a sizable population. Due to the favorable reproducibility of their outcomes, structured interviews have also significantly expedited the advancement of interviews in the context of recruiting procedures and associated investigations.

3. Response Bias

Despite the fact that the reliability issue is resolved, structured interviews do not fully guarantee that other bias-prone issues will not arise during the interview. Boyd and Westfall argued that interviewer bias has emerged as a prominent problem within the realm of interview research due to its potential to substantially impact the precision and validity of the obtained findings [14]. This paper mainly discusses the expectancy effects, similarity bias, fakability, and several interview designs that could contribute to their solutions.

3.1. Common Types of Bias in Interviews

3.1.1. Expectancy Effects

The concept of expectancy effects, where what is expected appears to be true, can noticeably alter interviewee behavior [15]. The interviewer's expectations of the interviewee during the interview process can have a significant impact on the candidate's performance. This results in the interviewer's bias or stereotype of the interviewee being able to determine whether or not the interviewee performs well and whether or not the interviewee is accepted, even though both parties are unaware of the impact of this bias. Hartwell et al. found that using structured interviews has been found to strengthen the accuracy of job performance prediction and mitigate employee attrition, enhancing the interview process's overall efficacy and mitigating potential issues arising from interviewer bias [16]. Other studies focused on questions that adjusted the original structure in the hope that interviews would ask other questions that would avoid creating personal bias to improve overall interview reliability and validity. One of the suggested improved question types is behavior-based questions. Behavior-based questions are defined as behavioral descriptive questions that mitigate bias towards personal attributes and instead emphasize the evaluation of a candidate's ability to navigate job-specific situations. They are predicated upon certain actions or circumstances, necessitating the development of a scoring

rubric and comprehensive training for interviewers. Research has demonstrated that employing this particular method has proven to enhance consensus among raters and mitigate the influence of biases when compared to conventional interview techniques[17]. By applying these questions, the candidate's response reflects a possible prediction of the future and a precise demonstration of the knowledge, priorities, and values of the candidate.

3.1.2. Similarity Bias

Another major contributing factor to bias in the hiring process is similarity bias. Similarity bias is defined as a phenomenon when individuals tend to favor those with similar characteristics or attributes, which ultimately leads to perpetuating homogeneity and limiting diversity within organizations. During the interview process, this bias can very easily cause the interviewer to unconsciously favor a group that is similar to them, resulting in serious group bias. Scholars have observed that to solve the problem by implementing a more robust interview structure, the presence of similarity bias could also be effectively suppressed, while unstructured interviews are more likely to engage in similarity bias [18][19][20]. This is due to the high degree of validity of structured interviews, as well as the fact that strictly limiting the content of the interview reduces the influence that the interviewer brings to the interview. Sacco et al. used a quantitative method to prove that structured interviews can effectively solve the similarity bias brought by the mismatch between interviewer and interviewee [21]. Another effort to control bias is reflected in the post-interview assessment questionnaire. Bergelson asserted that the integration of structured interviews, along with continuous review and adaptation, can result in enhanced efficacy and equity within interview procedures [17]. Therefore, to suppress the negative impact brought by similarity bias, interviewers should apply a highly structured interview with a post-interview assessment.

3.1.3. Fakability

Fakability in interviews is defined as the extent to which interviewees can and will fake their answers in interviews to get a high score, which greatly decreases the validity of interviews. Melchers et al. concluded that faking is common when the economy is experiencing difficulties and when the applicant is not qualified enough [22]. Also, faking damages citizenship behaviors. Meanwhile, reducing fakability in interviews is difficult. Sackett and Lievens mentioned that common methods to avoid fakability including warning interviewees that fakers would be identified and penalized, response elaboration (i.e., asking the respondents to elaborate their answers), and forced choice-response are not effective or are very limited to a specific situation [23]. Although there are fewer solutions to the phenomenon of faking, some scholars have proposed viable solutions. A subset of scholars focus on the details of the study, hoping to weaken the effects of faking through training or strengthening structuring. Melchers et al. mentioned that using content-based interviewer training to detect faking is a workable choice [22]. Sackett and Lievens emphasized the importance of a more structured evaluation of interviews and the use of more contextualized interview questions [23]. Other creative scholars have chosen to include more diverse tests in addition to the face-to-face format of the interview to reduce fakability. For example, with the advent of the digital age, video games can also be used for interviews. Woods et al. stated that using a video game close to the job's reality for the interview can effectively minimize the impact of fakability, as the aspects that can be faked may be more difficult for the applicant to detect in a video game [24].

3.2. Effect of Different Interview Structures on Bias

Previous studies have examined how to improve the structurization of interviews or utilize a variety of interview formats to avoid possible bias in interviews, but the focus of this series of discussions

has centered around designing interview questions or formats in advance. Thus, unstructured interviews are hardly applicable to these approaches. Meanwhile, due to the naturally low reliability and validity of unstructured interviews, some scholars simply recommend not using them, considering existing biases in interviews [7]. These studies have also helped semi-structured interviews to design their question content. However, compared to rigorously designed structured interviews, semi-structured interviews still have many unavoidable bias. Since none of the interview questions in semi-structured interviews are designed in advance, the degree of bias in semi-structured interviews is largely dependent on the interviewer's experience and questioning ability. Effective interviewer training to improve interviewer qualities, such as awareness of various biases and how to avoid them, is very important. Powell et al. found that the interviewer's ability to ask open-ended questions can effectively minimize bias in the interview, further enhancing the validity and reliability of the interview [25].

4. Interviewee Experience

Research on active information related to interview structures has led to more effective recruitment for companies, but it is essential to study the passive information like the candidate's experience during the interview. Odeku stated that the ramifications of an inefficient recruitment procedure extend beyond the prospective employee, encompassing potential harm to the reputation of the firm and the possibility of legal repercussions [26]. In addition, the communication between the interviewer and the interviewee plays a crucial role. A candidate's experience can be significantly affected by these encounters, potentially exerting an influence on the result of the recruiting process. Academics have thus cited interviewee experience as one of the reasons why semi-structured interviews are superior to structured interviews. Even now, the superiority of semi-structured and structured interviews is still widely contested, but they are essentially different starting points, and each has its own advantages and disadvantages. Semi-structured interviews with higher flexibility can create a more understanding environment, which takes good care of the interviewee's emotions and experience, while structured interviews with rigid process design significantly reduce the occurrence of bias and have higher generalizability. Nevertheless, interviewee experience is clearly cited as one of the reasons why semi-structured interviews have their own advantages, validating the importance of semi-structured interviews. This paper discusses the ways to improve the interviewee's experience during the four processes of the interview, i.e., before starting the interview, when the parties first meet, when the interview is formally underway, and after the interview is over.

4.1. Before the Interview

First, before the interview, it is crucial for the interviewer to maintain a cheerful and professional manner while communicating clearly and concisely. This applies to all three different interview structures (unstructured, semi-structured, and structured). Professional communication approach facilitates accurate evaluation of a candidate's abilities, enhances the interview process, and positively represents the organization's communication culture [27]. There is a segment of companies that are tired of the traditional forms of professional communication and are also experimenting with novel communication content. However, such attempts do not bring good results. Zhang and McCord found that novel interview methods might be seen as creative, but they can still contaminate the company's image of being successful and negatively influence applicants' impression of the company [28].

When the interview is about to begin, candidates generally feel nervous and cannot fully showcase their talents. At this stage, the interviewer should help the interviewee transition into the formal chat with some related casual talks prepared in advance. This applies especially to semi-structured interviews, as they usually start with some small talk. In the context of less structured interviews,

particularly those designed to assess a candidate's personality, empirical evidence suggests that engaging in casual conversation has demonstrated predictive value in determining an individual's personality traits. Since the way a person talks, pauses, or interrupts can provide clues about their personality [29]. Meanwhile, situational inquiries that are behaviorally or situationally focused are often regarded as the optimal approach for evaluating work performance. Interrogating candidates about instances wherein they encountered challenging customers and successfully resolved the issue might prove efficacious in assessing their capacity for autonomous reasoning and ability to draw broader conclusions within a limited timeframe [30]. Therefore, small talk plays an important role in guiding the applicant into the interview process.

4.2. During the Interview

During the interview, the interviewer should still maintain a friendly and communicative demeanor and use other means than words to calm the candidate's nerves. Slade proposed that the interviewer should use the utilization of humor, the posing of thoughtful inquiries, and the employment of nonverbal cues such as body language, eye contact, and vocal modulation to convey genuine interest in the interviewee can be advantageous in facilitating the interviewee's willingness to share their own perspectives and thoughts [31]. In order to better take care of the interviewee's experience during the interview process, some scholars have also made suggestions against structured interviews, focusing instead on the importance of semi-structured interviews. Chauhan underscored the significance of less structured interviews since they foster positive interviewee and interviewer relationships and better practicality in real organizational settings in the future [32]. However, creating a friendly atmosphere of communication does not mean the interviewer gets to ask strange or seemingly creative questions. Zhang used quantitative data to examine the effectiveness of odd interview questions [33]. They concluded that such odd questions might attract applicants with a high sense of humor but also dismiss those with a low sense of humor. This incurs reduced applicant pool quality and might limit the overall interview effectiveness. Consequently, interviewers must exercise caution while formulating their interview questions to ensure that applicants are not only motivated to articulate their opinions, but also do not experience any discomfort.

4.3. After the Interview

After the interview, high-quality feedback to interviewees can also help them continue to grow and build their personal capacity, which helps the organization to develop even better talent in the future. Hardavella et al. mentioned that feedback is an invaluable instrument that individuals may utilize to acquire knowledge, enhance their understanding of their own strengths and areas for growth, and ultimately facilitate the development of beneficial behaviors [34]. In spite of the prevalent utilization of interviews in prominent recruitment initiatives, interviewers frequently fail to adequately acknowledge or diminish the significance of providing feedback to the interviewee. Abi-Esber et al. argued that there exists a prevailing tendency among individuals to overlook the provision of constructive feedback to their peers, hence resulting in a decline in the overall performance of those individuals who are deprived of such input [35]. Therefore, interviewers need to be more attentive to the integrity of the interviewee's experience and should also provide constructive feedback after the interview.

5. Conclusion

This paper focuses on the three structures that exist in interviews, as well as the bias in interviews and the experience of the interviewee. And it seems that for bias, structured interviews can best address the effects it brings because structured interviews use the same set of pre-designed and tested

scenarios for each applicant, which greatly reduces the potential for bias in the interview. The trade-off between bias reduction and interviewee experience leads to future research on how to avoid the dilemma. In addition, as times change, there are more positions and new environments to recruit new employees. The interview, as the most important part of recruitment, needs to be updated in terms of its structure and focus. Future research could consider investigating what structural elements need to be added to telecommuting interviews in the digital age or what additional emphasis on the structure of interviews needs to be placed for remote positions.

This paper has two major limitations. The first is that this literature review has mainly examined how scholars have been able to enhance the effectiveness of interviews. However, it has not summarized interviewing methods that can avoid bias altogether. Since interviews are currently the most widely used recruitment tool, the possibility of bias cannot be ignored. Future research could consider other research perspectives to try to eliminate possible bias in interviews, such as interview language and interviewer team design. Meanwhile, this article does not extensively discuss how different cultures may influence the focus of an interview. This article considers the application environment's argument in that some scholars have found that collective societies may focus more on agreeableness. Thus, different cultures can also lead to different focus needs for the same position. Follow-up studies could investigate the effects of culture on the same job and consider these effects in designing the corresponding interviews.

Hence, to promote the widespread utilization of interviews, this study proposes an increased adoption of structured interview formats in future instances. However, it is recommended that these formats be tailored to suit diverse job environments while also incorporating a more professional and amicable interview language to attend effectively to the emotional well-being of interviewees. In conclusion, this study identifies potential avenues for future research, emphasizing the need for in-depth exploration of these concepts.

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