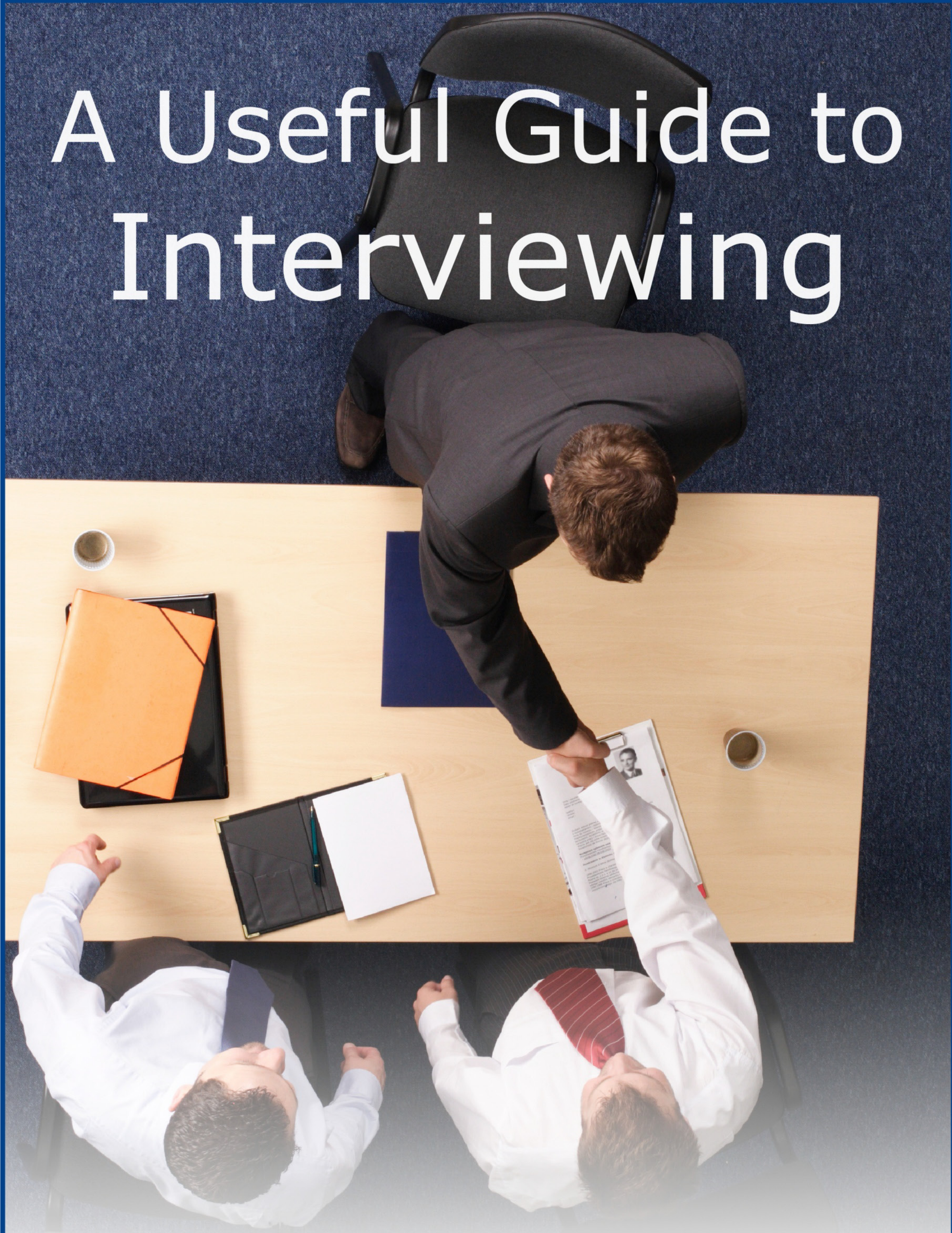
A Useful Guide to Interviewing



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A Useful Guide to Interviewing

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Introduction

Effective recruitment is critical to an organisation's success. If there is any truth in that well worn cliché that 'people are an organisation's greatest asset', then it would seem obvious that close attention should be paid to ensuring that ...

- Recruitment processes are robust
- Job descriptions and person specifications are clear and up to date
- Selection criteria are clearly defined and understood
- Panel members are trained in the knowledge and skills required to sift applications and interview candidates effectively

As I said above, it would seem obvious... but research into recruitment tells a different story.

The human resources consultancy Morlan Gil conducted research into a specialist vehicle company, who were losing skilled engineers after a comparatively short period of time. They concluded that the root of the problem lay in ineffective recruitment processes. They estimated the cost to the company to be £40,000, plus the impact of lost production.

A 2007 report by CALX Europe considers the cost of bad recruitment in more detail. It identifies obvious costs, such as recruitment fees, salary and NI contributions; but also 'hidden' costs, such as the impact that hiring a poor performer may have on relationships with clients, or the performance of their team. The report highlights that ...

> '...recruitment and achieving goals are inextricably linked.'

A study of graduate recruitment conducted by Reed Consulting in 2006 identified further costs of poor recruitment. Their survey of 2500 graduates revealed that 22% had turned down a job offer because of an organisation's behaviour during the recruitment process. Complaints included misleading information about the job or role, lack of feedback following interview and long delays before attending interviews or assessment centres. 66% reported experiences of organisations not replying to them at all. One in three of the respondents stated that they had stopped buying products as a direct result of their negative experience of applying for a job with that brand.

So poor recruitment is costly, both in terms of the costs of running a recruitment campaign and its far-reaching impact on business performance.

This Useful Guide aims to promote good practice in recruitment, by providing practical guidance for the people who are directly involved in the process. It begins with the theory of effective interviewing, followed by the skills required to put the theory into practice. We then follow the recruitment process from laying the foundations, by making sure that job descriptions, person specifications and application forms are fit for purpose, through the stages of sifting applications and shortlisting for interview, conducting interviews and selecting the right candidate.

At the end of the Useful Guide there is a chapter covering your responsibilities in relation to the law, and a brief introduction to other selection methods you may wish to use alongside interviewing.

Throughout the Useful Guide you will find practical exercises, providing an opportunity for you to develop your skills before you take part in the recruitment process for real. Practice may not quite make perfect, but it will help you to maximise your effectiveness and minimise the risk of costly and damaging errors.

Some of the exercises, such as the sifting exercise in chapter 4, include links to the Pansophix website where you can find my views. Notice that I refer to 'my views' rather than 'the right answers' – recruitment is about individual judgments and your judgments may differ from mine. That's why throughout this Useful Guide I recommend three-person panels, where panel members can bring different perspectives to the process and constructively question and challenge each other's views. This process increases your chances of selecting the right candidate.

Chapter 6, Conducting the Interview, includes links to some video clips where you can see aspects of interviewing being conducted in practice. I have used these clips to highlight some of the pitfalls which can arise when interviewing, and to provide an opportunity for you to consider how you would handle these situations.

The Useful Guide also includes 15 forms and letters for use throughout the recruitment process. These can be downloaded from here, and other links throughout the Useful Guide, and adapted for your own use. A brief health warning - if you work in a large organisation please check with your HR Department before using these forms and letters – you may well find that your organisation already has standard documents that you are required to use.

Finally a note on the terminology used. After much agonising I have settled on describing the person chairing a panel as 'the chairperson'. While this is a bit longwinded I feel it is better than the alternatives of 'chairman' or 'chairwoman' – either of which may be inaccurate; or 'chair', which is definitely inaccurate.

There are several exercises in the Useful Guide. You can either print out the relevant page and write on the printout or, if you prefer, you can download the MS Word toolkit from here and do the exercises on your computer.

Chapter 1 –Effective Interviewing – The Theory

"The best predictor of future performance is past performance in similar circumstances"

Tom Janz

Purpose of this chapter:

To provide you with a basic understanding of the theory of effective interviewing, how it has developed and how you can apply it in practice.

Introduction

In order to conduct an effective recruitment interview it is helpful to have some understanding of the theory which underpins it. In this chapter we will look at three theories of interviewing...

- Behaviour Description Interviewing
- Model Answer Based Interviewing
- Conversation Management

A skilled interviewer will develop the flexibility to use these three approaches together in order to gain a full picture of the applicant's suitability for the job.

Behaviour Description Interviewing

Behaviour Description Interviewing is based on the principle that the best guide to how people will behave in the future is how they have behaved in the past. It is also sometimes known as

Evidence-based interviewing – because it involves obtaining evidence of what people have done

Or

Competency-based Interviewing – because it is used to test the applicant's competence to do the job, often by asking questions derived from the organisation's competency framework

The concept of Behaviour Description Interviewing has been developing since 1919, when Alfred Binet asked three teachers to interview five children in order to assess their intelligence. Each teacher was confident in their findings, but there was no consistency between them.

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In 1922 H. L. Hollingsworth studied the rankings given to candidates applying for positions in the army. Several officers interviewed the same applicants, but Hollingsworth's study revealed wide variations in their assessments.

In response to the work of Binet and Hollingsworth subsequent researchers began adding more structure to interviews. Questions were drawn up in advance, so that each interviewer would ask the same set of questions to each interviewee. The results of this were greater consistency of approach and improved accuracy of results.

This more structured approach began to be applied to recruitment. Job descriptions started to be used to clarify what successful applicants for a post would be required to do. One study revealed that managers assessing candidates against job descriptions were less likely to be influenced by irrelevant detail than managers assessing candidates in a less structured way.

In 1980 Latham, Saari, Pursell and Campion developed the approach which became known as critical incident or situational interviewing. This involved describing a scenario to a candidate, then asking them questions to identify how they would respond. Interviewers were also given instructions on how to rate the candidates' answers. Once again this development improved the consistency and accuracy (measured against subsequent job performance) of results.

In 1982 Tom Janz took elements of this approach and developed Behaviour Description Interviewing. Whereas Situational Interviewing asked candidates what they **would do** in a specific situation, Behaviour Description Interviewing asks candidates to describe what they **actually did** in a specific situation. This meant that the answers given would describe actual behaviour, instead of being purely hypothetical. As with previous developments, Janz found that using this approach increased both consistency and accuracy of interviews in identifying suitable candidates.

Subsequent studies suggest that Behaviour Description Interviewing is 66-70% successful in identifying candidates who will go on to succeed in the job. Unstructured approaches only achieve around a 46% success rate. The chances of maximising the success of Behaviour Description Interviewing are increased if it is used intelligently alongside the two further approaches we will look at next.

Model Answer Interviewing

One of the criticisms of Behaviour Description Interviewing is that, due to its emphasis on past performance, it may not be effective in identifying candidates who have the potential to be successful, but have not yet had sufficient opportunities to demonstrate this in practice. By operating Behaviour Description Interviewing in a simplistic way we run the risk of treating young or inexperienced candidates unfairly, and possibly missing out on selecting the best candidate for the job.

One way of overcoming this is by using Model Answer Interviewing alongside the Behavioural approach. If there are gaps in a candidate's experience it is therefore possible still to assess them, and to rate their answers against those given by more experienced candidates.

Model Answer Interviewing involves asking hypothetical questions about situations that the candidate may have to deal with if appointed. The interviewer begins by describing the context and relating the situation to the job, then asks the candidate to describe what they would do. For example ...

> *As you are aware, one of the key aspects of this job is managing the office budget. What would you do first if the Managing Director called you into her office and told you that you have to make immediate savings of 20%?*

> *As you are aware, one of the key aspects of this job is managing a team. What would you do if you came in one morning and found two team members having a stand-up row in the office?*

Of course, when using this technique it is important to have a clear idea of the answer you are looking for, and to have follow-up questions in mind for probing the candidate's answer in detail. The 'model answer' should usually meet the 'STAR' criteria ...

> ***Situation*** *– the candidate should demonstrate their understanding of the situation, e.g. by recapping the key points, or by asking clarifying questions*

> ***Task*** *– this involves analysing the situation and identifying what needs to be done*

> ***Actions*** *– what specific actions would be required to resolve the situation?*

> ***Results*** *– clear identification of the outcome required in order to resolve the initial problem*

Please note that Model Answer Interviewing should only be used when the candidate is unable to draw upon real-life examples. As the research has shown, real life examples will always give you the best indication of the candidate's abilities.

Conversation Management

Unlike the previous two techniques Conversation Management is not about **what** you ask, but **how** you ask it. It is about managing the interview in such a way that the candidate will feel sufficiently at ease to answer your questions openly and honestly.

Conversation Management was developed as a technique by the police service in the early 1980s. Its aim is to consciously manage conversation with the interviewee in order to develop a productive working relationship, defined by Eric Shepherd as ...

> 'A working relationship is one in which both parties have a shared understanding of the aims, the goals, and their respective tasks, and participants develop a positive bond'

Of course there are major differences between a recruitment interview and an interview being carried out as part of a police investigation, but there are also similarities. Recruitment candidates often feel high levels of stress and anxiety, particularly if they really want the job. Using techniques to build rapport and 'develop a positive bond' will help to overcome this. At the same time some candidates may also have information that they do not wish to reveal, perhaps some shortcomings in some of the areas they know will be tested. By using Conversation Management techniques you are more likely to conduct an interview where these are revealed.

Conversation Management has three core elements ...

- Reciprocity
- RESPONSE – which is an acronym for the behaviours involved in relationship building
- Management of conversation sequence

We will look at each of these in turn, and how they apply in a recruitment interview.

1. **Reciprocity**
   Reciprocity is the basis of all human social exchanges. Put simply, if we receive something from another person we are likely to reciprocate by giving something back. This is particularly the case if there is an alignment between what we say and an indication of the emotion that goes with it. So if you say "Good morning" and smile at someone, they are likely to reciprocate with a similar response and smile back.

In an interview this is the first stage of building rapport with the interviewee. This is then continued by applying the RESPONSE acronym.

2. RESPONSE

The behaviours represented by the RESPONSE acronym are as follows ...

2.1 Respect

This is the fundamental behaviour from which all other RESPONSE behaviours emerge. If someone has demonstrated sufficient desire to work in your organisation to reach the interview stage, then you will probably feel that they deserve your respect. This can be demonstrated by your behaviour towards them, which should be courteous, warm, sincere and attentive.

2.2 Empathy

Empathy is the ability to see things from another person's point of view, sometimes described as 'stepping into their shoes'. Both the challenges and benefits of empathy are succinctly summed up by Eric Shepherd ...

> 'Empathy is surprisingly difficult to achieve. We all have a strong tendency to advise, tell, agree or disagree from our own point of view.
>
> Empathetic people foster more disclosure. That is why empathy is a professional requirement.'

The non-empathetic behaviours described by Shepherd – advising, telling, agreeing or disagreeing – are all ones we would probably try and guard against displaying in an interview. But we also need to be mindful of our internal dialogue, because if we have an ***inner*** voice that wants to 'advise, tell, agree or disagree' with an interviewee it will probably seep through, possibly in the form of non-verbal signals or tone of voice. To truly empathise with the interviewee it is necessary to suspend judgment about them until after the interview has finished.

2.3 Supportiveness

Supportive behaviours in an interview involve ...

- Encouraging the interviewee to do most of the talking – probably about 80% across the interview

- Taking the pressure off the interviewee; e.g. by reassuring them that it is okay to take time to think before answering a question

- Assisting recall; e.g. by prompting them with examples from the application form

However, it is also important to avoid being excessively supportive. Over-use of reassuring behaviours might give the candidate the impression that you are being patronising, while over-enthusiastic responses to their answers might give the misleading impression that they have got the job!

2.4 Positiveness

Once again, this aspect involves a fine balancing act. The interviewee will probably expect you to take a positive role in guiding them through the interview process. This may involve setting clear expectations at the start of the interview, e.g. by clarifying that the main purpose of the interview is to find out more about them and their suitability for the role, and for that reason they will be doing most of the talking. However, if their answers to your questions stray off track it is important for you to intervene and clarify what you are looking for. After all, it is not in the candidate's interests or yours for large segments of the interview to be taken up with material that is not relevant. It is therefore important for you take a positive role in **managing** the interview.

2.5 Openness

This can involve a number of aspects, such as …

- Being open and transparent about the qualities you are looking for in a successful candidate

- Being open about how the recruitment process will operate; e.g. by starting by talking the candidate through a 'route map' of how the interview will proceed, and letting them know what will happen after the interview has finished

- Being open and receptive to the candidate's answers to your questions

2.6 Non Judgmental

As noted in the section on Empathy, it is a challenge to remain genuinely non-judgmental. Even if you guard against making your judgments obvious to the candidate (e.g. 'Why on earth did you decide to do that?!') more subtle signals of your internal judgments may seep through.

It is important for you to remain objective, and to remember that the purpose of the interview is to gather as much evidence as you can about the candidate's ability to do the job. The place for making your judgments about the evidence they have presented is at the assessment stage following the interview.

2.7 Straightforward Talk

Mutual understanding between the interviewer and interviewee will be aided if what you say is as straightforward as possible. This involves ...

- Ensuring that your introduction to the interview and its 'route map' is clear and to the point

- Avoiding use of jargon or 'in-house' language – while it may be familiar to you and your fellow panel members it may mystify the candidate

- Keeping your questions short and simple – the longer the questions the more confusing they are likely to become to the interviewee. We will look at this in more detail in Chapter 2 – The Key Skills.

2.8 Equality

In a recruitment interview most of the power inevitably lies with the panel members. They decide what will be discussed, what questions will be asked, and which candidate will be offered the job.

However, a successful interviewer will wield this power lightly and recognise that this inequality of power stems purely from the situation. An interview has a greater chance of being successful if a more equal relationship can be established, through managing the conversation so that the interviewee has freedom to talk and also to ask for explanations – if, for example, the meaning of a particular question has not been made sufficiently clear.

It is also important to remember that all candidates should be treated equally, with the same degree of respect and rigour of assessment being applied to all.

3. **Management of Conversation Sequence**
This final aspect of Conversation Management highlights that, given our definition of an interview as 'a conversation with a purpose', it is important to manage that conversation so that it achieves its purpose. This involves steps such as …

- Preparing an interview plan before the interview
- Applying the plan during the interview
- Making interventions to refocus on the plan if the interview is digressing from its purpose

Summary of this chapter

In this chapter we have explored three main theories of interviewing …

- Behaviour Description Interviewing
- Model Answer Interviewing
- Conversation Management

Behaviour Description Interviewing and Model Answer Interviewing relate to **what** you will ask during the interview. Behaviour Description Interviewing is based on the principle that the best guide to future performance is past performance. It therefore involves asking questions based on the candidate's experiences, i.e. "What **did** you do…" or "Tell us about a time when you …"

Model Answer Interviewing recognises that not every candidate will have had experience of the range of situations you wish to ask about. It involves asking hypothetical questions, such as "What **would** you do..." Candidates' answers are then assessed against model answers prepared in advance.

Conversation Management relates to how you conduct the interview. It is a set of behaviours which will put the candidate at ease and encourage open and honest answers.

The table below shows the pros and cons of the Behaviour Description and Model Answer approaches.

	Behaviour Description	**Model Answer**
Pros	Quality evidence through real-life examples Through the use of probing questions interviewers should be able to test candidates' abilities in detail	Enables you to test candidates who may not have had 'real life' opportunities to demonstrate the criteria
Cons	Candidates may not give full and accurate accounts of what actually happened Examples on candidates' application forms may not be representative of their day to day performance	Answers may not be representative of what the candidate would actually do in practice Easy to prepare 'the perfect answer' – particularly if the questions are predictable ones

Chapter 2 – The Key Skills

Purpose of this chapter:

To introduce four core skills which are essential to effective recruitment.

Introduction

In this chapter we will look at how you can develop the following essential skills …

- **Questioning skills** – to enable you to obtain the information you need from the candidate at interview
- **Listening skills** – to enable you to quickly identify where the candidate is providing the information you need, and where you need to ask further questions
- **Note taking skills** – to enable you to record the candidate's answers so that you can assess them fully following the interview
- **Analytical skills** – to enable you to assess candidates against the criteria set out in the person specification, at both the sift and interview stages

Questioning Skills

> ***"I keep six honest serving men (They taught me all I knew);***
>
> ***Their names are What and Why and When And How and Where and Who"***
>
> **Rudyard Kipling**

In day to day life we ask many different types of questions, without any need to analyse them or their effects. When preparing to conduct an interview it is necessary to bring these subconscious skills into our awareness, so that we can consciously use the types of questions that will be most productive in obtaining the evidence we need from the candidate.

In this section we will consider the following question types …

- Open-ended questions
- Open probing questions
- Hypothetical questions
- Closed questions
- Limiting questions
- Leading questions

- Multiple questions

We will identify which of these question types are likely to prove productive at interview, and how they can be deployed to best effect. We will also identify which types of questions to use with caution, and which to avoid.

Open-ended Questions

Open-ended questions are a key part of Behaviour Description Interviewing. They are designed to encourage the interviewee to recall a critical incident in detail, enabling them to open up and provide a full and thorough answer. They also allow the interviewee to control the flow of information.

An open-ended question will often begin with the phrase 'Tell me', or the words 'Describe' or 'Explain'. A skilful interviewer will precede the question by linking it to the relevant criteria or a situation described by the candidate on their application form. Some examples ...

> *One of the attributes we're looking for here is the ability to resolve problems for a customer when things go wrong.* ***Tell me*** *about a time when you've done that.*

> *You state on your application form that you managed a poor performer who you brought up to the required standard.* ***Describe*** *how you went about doing that.*

> *You mention on your application form that you maintained performance in priority areas when your team was under pressure.* ***Explain*** *to me how you did that.*

Once you have asked an open-ended question it is important to shift into listening mode (see below). Research shows that the most reliable and detailed answers are secured from asking open-ended questions. Ideally you should listen until the interviewee has finished answering, at which point you may investigate key points of the answer in more detail by asking open probing questions.

One of the risks of asking open-ended questions is receiving open-ended answers, which may be very lengthy and stray from the point. If this is the case you may need to intervene and gently redirect the candidate, by using phrases such as ...

> *If I can just stop you there...*

> *The part I'd like to know more about is...*

> *What I'm really interested in is...*

I was really interested when you said... Tell me more about that.

Open Probing Questions

These questions are the 'six honest serving men' referred to by Kipling. They can be used to generate more detailed information about a particular situation than the candidate may have provided in their response to your initial open-ended question. Remember that some answers which initially sound impressive may not stand up to scrutiny – there may be areas that the candidate has chosen to 'gloss over' or details they may have missed out. It is therefore important to always ask probing follow-up questions as set out below.

'What' questions establish and clarify points of information; e.g.

> ***What*** *was the first thing you did?*

They can be used to probe the candidate's thinking; e.g.

> ***What*** *were you thinking at that moment?*

'What' questions can also generate important evidence by establishing details of dialogue; e.g.

> *You said you were angry with your colleague –* ***what*** *exactly did you say to her?*

'Why' questions establish the reasoning behind the candidate's actions; e.g.

> ***Why*** *did you decide to do that?*

Be careful with your tone when asking 'why' questions – with the wrong tone of voice or body language they can come across as interrogatory or accusing. You can sometimes soften the tone by changing a 'why' question into a 'what' question – e.g.

> ***What*** *made you decide to do that?*

'When' questions enable you to establish the sequence of events; e.g.

> ***When*** *did you talk to your staff member about this?*

> ***When*** *exactly did you get back to the customer?*

'How' questions can be used to establish the processes followed by the candidate; e.g.

> ***How*** *did you go about doing that?*

As with many probing questions it can be helpful to link it to the candidate's previous answer; e.g.

> *You say that you tackled the team member about his persistent lateness – **how** did you go about doing that?*

'Where' questions provide information about the location of events, but can also provide important indications about the candidate's judgment; e.g.

> *So you talked to the team member about his persistent lateness – **where** did that discussion take place?*

'Who' questions provide information about who was involved in particular events; e.g.

> ***Who** was involved in that discussion?*

Once again they can also be used to test the candidate's judgment; e.g.

> ***Whom** did you consult before making that decision?*

Note that all the open-ended and probing questions illustrated here are in the **past tense**. If you stray into the present tense the candidate will generalise instead of talking about the specific examples you want to investigate.

Hypothetical Questions

Hypothetical questions may sound similar to those already covered, but while the open ended and open probing questions involve getting the candidate to talk about what they **actually did** in a specific situation, hypothetical questions ask what they **would do** if they were faced with a particular situation. For example …

> *What **would** you do if you heard a team member having an argument with a customer?*

> *How **would** you handle the situation if you had a team member who persistently arrived late?*

You would ask hypothetical questions such as these if you were applying Model Answer Interviewing. However, as suggested in chapter 1, this approach should only be used if a candidate is genuinely unable to discuss specific examples in relation to some of the criteria. There are two main reasons for this.

One is implicit in the name of the technique – Model Answer Interviewing. An intelligent candidate will anticipate your questions and come prepared with a stock of model answers! While these may sound very impressive they may not be an accurate guide to what that candidate would actually do if faced with the situation in practice.

The second reason to use hypothetical questions with care is that they generate hypothetical answers – which lack the depth, richness and complexity of real life examples. For this reason you should always ask about specific examples where possible, and only use hypothetical questions to plug the gaps.

Closed Questions

A closed question is one that can be answered 'yes' or 'no'. E.g.

> ***Did** you do that?*
>
> ***Was** that your idea?*

Generally speaking closed questions are not encouraged as part of Behaviour Description or Model Answer Interviewing. One reason for this is that they encourage short – often 'Yes' or 'No' – answers, when what the interviewer should be doing is encouraging the candidate to open up and provide detailed evidence of their capabilities. There is the additional risk that the 'right' answer is implicit in the question – if a candidate has just described an idea that worked well their answer to the question 'Was that your idea?' is likely to be yes!

Occasionally it will be appropriate to use a closed question in order to quickly establish the facts of what happened, particularly if you have a candidate who is verbose and has difficulty keeping to the point. In these circumstances you might clarify the information provided and draw the example to a close by asking clarifying questions such as ...

> ***Is** that what you decided to do?*
>
> ***Was** that what you actually did?*

Limiting Questions

Limiting questions give the interviewee a controlled choice of answers. They might be used to clarify information given by the candidate, or to confirm the sequence of events. For example ...

> *So who did you speak to first – the customer or your colleague?*
>
> *So what was your priority – meeting the new target or clearing the work arrears?*

The risk with using limiting questions is that none of the options you offer may match with what the candidate actually did. This may prevent you from obtaining a full and accurate picture of the situation the candidate has been describing.

Leading Questions

If limiting questions are to be used with caution, leading questions should not be used at all. However, they sometimes 'slip into' an interview, particularly when the interviewer is keen to confirm the impression they have already gained of a candidate rather than gathering further information. For example ...

> *Would you say that your decision was a good one?*

A candidate will almost certainly answer yes, unless there is already clear evidence to the contrary.

> *I guess you learnt a lot from that experience, didn't you?*

Again it will be clear to the candidate that the 'right' answer to this question is 'Yes'!

Multiple Questions

Interviewers do not usually intend to ask multiple questions, but they arise when the interviewer is trying to take in a lot of information and is uncertain of which line of questioning to pursue next. This can result in a series of questions all coming out together, e.g.

> *So your team member had this big argument with the customer – what did you say to him? Who did you speak to first – your team member or the customer? And how did you calm things down? It must have had an effect on everyone else in the waiting area – what did you do about that?*

These are all potentially productive lines of questioning, but they need separating if you are to be successful in obtaining detailed evidence of what the candidate did. When multiple questions are asked candidates will often only answer one part – often the part that shows them in the best light!

Exercise – Questioning Skills

Consider the 10 questions below. Put a tick beside the ones you would use in a **behaviour description interview** and a cross beside the ones you would not use. Then compare your answers with my thoughts here.

For Read Out loud Readers: The following table has 3 columns and 10 rows.

1	Tell me about a time when you had to communicate a difficult message to your team.	
2	Why did you say that first?	

3	What would you do if one of your team members seemed unmotivated?	
4	Was that your idea?	
5	When did you do that?	
6	How do you go about organising that work?	
7	Why do you do it that way?	
8	Did you achieve the outcomes you were hoping for?	
9	Didn't you consider any alternatives?	
10	What did you learn from this experience?	

Listing Skills

"We have two ears and one tongue so that we would listen more and talk less."

Diogenes

As stated in chapter 3, in a recruitment interview around 80% of the talking should be done by the interviewee. While this is taking place the main responsibility of the panel members is to listen.

The problem with this is that each panel member will have other things going in their mind which interfere with their ability to listen effectively. The chairperson will be monitoring progress of the interview, and noting down areas for follow-up questions at the end. The panel member who is not leading the questioning at this stage of the interview will be taking notes. It may seem surprising that note taking is not conducive to effective listening, but the focus of the note taker's attention will be on simply recording what is being said, not interpreting or making sense of it. Meanwhile the final panel member, who is leading the questioning, may be too focused on thinking about what they will ask next to listen properly to the candidate's answers!

All of these factors lead to **superficial listening.** The panel members will be aware that they have a responsibility to appear as though they are listening. They will therefore adopt appropriate body language, such as looking at the candidate, and perhaps sometimes nodding to demonstrate understanding. They may support this with verbal signals such as 'mmm's or neutral terms such as 'I see'. It may therefore appear to the candidate that the panel are listening attentively, but in reality they are going through the motions and, most crucially, not taking everything in.

It is clear from this that questioning skills alone are not enough. There is no value in asking detailed questions that probe and investigate specific incidents unless one or more of the panel members is engaged in listening intently to the answers. They need to **listen actively**.

An organisation which is reliant on people having excellent listening skills is the Samaritans. They train their volunteers to help people in distress just by being there to listen to them, which demonstrates what a powerful skill active listening can be. The Samaritans define active listening simply as 'helping someone to talk', and identify it as having five main aspects ...

1. Ask open questions

As we have already identified, asking the right question at the right time is a key skill for an interviewer. Asking open questions is the first stage in encouraging someone to talk openly to you.

2. Summarise

This helps to show that you've listened to, and understood, what's been said. An accurate summary helps everyone involved in the interview as follows ...

The Candidate – because it demonstrates that you're listening and understanding their main points

Yourself – because it enables you to pause and make sense of what the candidate has said before you formulate your next question

The Chairperson – because it helps them to identify which criteria have been covered, and where there might be gaps to address with follow-up questions at the end

The Note taker – because it gives them a chance to catch up!

3. Reflect

Whereas **summarising** demonstrates your understanding of the **content** of a candidate's answer, **reflecting** demonstrates your understanding of how they might have been **feeling**. Demonstrating this deeper level of understanding will encourage a candidate to tell you more. You can do this by using a phrase or even just a single word that captures how the candidate seems to be feeling about the situation they are describing, e.g.

'That sounds very stressful'

'Challenging...'

If done accurately your reflection will help recapture the emotion that the candidate felt in the moment, which will enable them to recall what happened and talk about it in detail.

4. Clarify

There may be aspects of their examples that candidates wish to skirt around or gloss over. This may be for a variety of reasons – it may be an emotionally charged situation that they still find difficult to talk about, or they may not feel completely happy with the way they handled some aspects of it.

Getting a candidate to talk more fully about these aspects of their experience will provide you with telling evidence of their ability to perform effectively in challenging situations. You may need to clarify what happened by using open ended questions and phrases such as ...

'Tell me more about...'

'What exactly happened when...'

'I was interested that you mentioned...'

5. React

As a panel member you don't have to be completely neutral. We have already identified the benefits of building rapport and showing empathy with the candidate. If they tell you about a stressful or emotionally challenging situation it is appropriate to react by empathising with them, and at the end by thanking them for telling you about it ...

'That sounds like it must have been really difficult. Thank you for talking about it so openly.'

As the Samaritans say about active listening ...

All of this sounds quite simple. And it is. All you're doing is listening, and from time to time giving responses which encourage the other person to keep on talking. ***That's often the key – get them to keep on talking.***

Exercise – Identifying Active Listening Skills

		Person 1	Person 2	Person 3
1	Write down the names of three people you would describe as being good listeners.			
2	Now list the **attributes, skills and behaviours** they demonstrate which lead you to describe them as good listeners.			
3	How will you apply these attributes, skills and behaviours when conducting interviews?			

Note Taking Skills

"A job interview is not a social occasion. It is a business meeting. And in a business culture, taking notes in support of a business meeting is considered not only appropriate, but often a sign of professionalism."

www.job-interview-questions.biz/?s=Note+taking

In many organisations the only record of what is said during an interview is the notes taken by the panel members. It is therefore vital that panel members are able to take notes which provide a thorough record of both …

The questions asked

- To ensure that all the interview criteria have been fully covered
- To provide a record of questions asked in case of appeal by the candidate – e.g. if they complain that questions asked were discriminatory or unfair

and …

The answers given

- To ensure that there is a full and accurate record of answers given by the candidate
- To provide information for the assessment process following the interview
- To provide a record of answers given in case of appeal by the candidate

Effective note taking is both important and difficult to do, but despite this it is often neglected when interviewers are being trained or interviews are being prepared. When planning the interview it is essential to …

- Allocate roles – so that no-one will be expected to lead the questioning and take notes at the same time, and that it is clear who is responsible for note taking at each stage of the interview
- Draw up interview record sheets. Opening questions can be recorded on these in advance, reducing the amount of note taking required during the interview. These will also ensure that notes are taken in the same format in all interviews, making it easier to compare the evidence provided by candidates

An example of an interview record sheet can be found on the following page. A template for your own use can be downloaded here.

Further guidance on preparing for the interview can be found in chapter 5.

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Interview Record Sheet

Criteria:- *[Complete in advance during pre-interview discussion]*	
Opening Question	**Candidate Answers**
[Complete in advance during pre-interview discussion]	
Follow-up Questions	

When taking notes it is particularly important to record the parts of the candidates' answers that relate directly to the criteria being tested. Other aspects, such as background detail or setting the context for an example, can be summarised.

It is also acceptable to summarise the questions in your notes. If the panel member leading the questioning summarises an answer before leading into a question about what happened next it is acceptable to write ...

Summary – what next?

A question such as 'Why did you take that decision?' may be abbreviated to

Decision – why?

When taking notes of both questions and answers it is acceptable to use abbreviations and acronyms, as long as they will be understandable to your fellow panel members and anyone else who has to look at the notes afterwards.

As with most skills, note taking becomes easier with practice. If possible it is good preparation to sit in on some interviews before you conduct them as a panel member. This is an opportunity to practice your note taking and compare them with those taken by the members of the panel.

Exercise – Note Taking Skills

Record a TV programme such as 'Question Time' or a radio programme such as 'Any Questions'.

Select an extract from the programme lasting 5-10 minutes. Then take notes of the discussion from that part of the programme. Your aim is to record accurately the main points made by each of the panellists.

Read through your notes then play the extract again. Compare what was said against the notes you have taken. Check your notes for accuracy against the discussion. Were you successful in noting the main points accurately?

For further practice select another extract from the programme and repeat the exercise.

Analytical Skills

> ***"Beautiful Evidence is about the theory and practice of analytical design."***
>
> Edward Tufte

The three skills we have considered so far in this chapter are the ones you need to use to gather and record evidence during an interview. Once the interview has finished you need to **analyse** the evidence you have gathered to identify ...

- Where the evidence presented by the candidate meets the specified criteria
- Where the evidence presented by the candidate fails to meet the specified criteria
- Which of the candidates has demonstrated meeting the criteria most fully

However, this is not the first point in the process where you need good analytical skills. They are needed throughout the recruitment process at the following stages ...

- Analysing the requirements of the job, in order to draw up an accurate job description
- Analysing the knowledge, experience, skills and attributes required in order to do the job effectively, so that these can be set out in the person specification
- Analysing the evidence presented on the application forms at the sifting stage, in order to identify which candidates to invite for interview

There are many definitions of analytical skills. Most include the following components ...

- The ability to solve problems
- The ability to weigh up a range of sources of evidence – which may conflict with one another
- The ability to make logical decisions based on the available evidence

The stages at which you need to analyse the evidence presented by job applicants are ...

1. The sift
2. Following the interview

At both of these stages the criteria against which you are analysing the candidate's evidence will be the same, i.e. how fully he/she meets the requirements of the person specification. What will be different is the standard the candidate needs to achieve. At the sift you want to be satisfied whether there is sufficient evidence in the application form of the candidate's ability to meet the criteria to justify inviting him/her to interview. At the interview stage you will gather further evidence to enable you to make your final decision as to which of the applicants is the best person for the job.

At both stages analysing the evidence presented by the applicant involves considering it carefully against the requirements of the person specification. The following table sets out what constitutes good evidence, and what might be considered poor evidence.

Good Quality Evidence	Poor Quality Evidence
Examples which are directly relevant to the specified criteria. Specific examples of what the applicant has actually done. Explanations of the reasoning behind what the applicant did. Outcomes – positive results achieved as a result of what the applicant did. Examples which are clearly attributable to the applicant (i.e. based on their own actions and decisions).	Examples only vaguely relate to the specified criteria. General statements – non-specific and vague. No clear justification for applicant's actions. No evidence of what was achieved – or evidence of negative outcomes. Examples which may be attributable to the actions and decisions of others.

In addition to being clear about what constitutes good and poor quality evidence you will need to be able to apply a rating scale in order to score each applicant for each of the criteria. An example rating scale and panel rating form is included in **Chapter 3 – Laying the Foundations**.

Chapter 4 – Sifting Applications, and **Chapter 7 – After the Interview**, will look in more detail at applying your analytical skills at those stages of the process. These chapters also include exercises where you can practice analysing the evidence presented at sift and at interview.

Summary of this Chapter

In this chapter we have explored four key skills ...

- Questioning skills
- Listening skills
- Note taking skills
- Analytical skills

These skills are the essential tools you will need to be an effective member of a recruitment panel.

Questioning skills will enable you to gather the information that you need about a candidate at interview. Begin by asking open-ended questions, to encourage candidates to talk about specific examples. Then follow up with open probing questions, to find out in detail about what they did and why they did it.

Active listening skills will show candidates that you are interested in what they have to say, and enable you to understand and interpret their evidence as it is being presented. This will enable you to make sound decisions about which areas to probe further.

Effective note taking will enable you to make an accurate record of the key points of the interview, which will then form the basis of the assessment process following the interview.

Analytical skills are essential throughout the recruitment process, particularly when considering evidence presented by applicants on their application forms and at interview.

All of these skills can be developed through practice, by working through the exercises in this Useful Guide.

Chapter 3 – Laying the Foundations

"He who has not first laid his foundations may be able with great ability to lay them afterwards, but they will be laid with trouble to the architect and danger to the building"

Niccolo Machiavelli – The Prince

Purpose of this chapter:

To help you to put the foundations in place so that both you and prospective applicants are clear about the requirements of the job and how they will be tested.

Laying the Foundations

The purpose of the recruitment process is to find the right candidate for the job. The interview is a key stage in this process – it gives us the opportunity to meet candidates face to face, and to find out in detail about their experience, knowledge and skills. But in order to make the most of the interview we have to make sure that it is based on firm foundations, and that the initial stages of the process ensure that …

- Everyone is clear about the requirements of the job
- Applicants have the opportunity to provide relevant evidence of their ability to do the job
- Panel members have had an opportunity to systematically consider the evidence presented

If this is to be achieved the following documents need to be produced …

- Job description
- Person specification
- Candidate application form
- Rating forms

Activity

Before we consider them in detail, take a few moments to write down what you consider to be the purpose of each of these documents.

Document	Purpose
Job Description	
Person Specification	
Application Form	
Rating Forms	

The Job Description

The purpose of the job description is to define the purpose of the job, its context within the organisation, and its key tasks and accountabilities.

Job descriptions should be fairly brief and to the point. If a job description is too long it may be difficult both for applicants and panel members to identify the key aspects. There is also the risk of an overly detailed job description becoming restrictive – the applicant may get the impression that it encompasses everything that the job will ever entail. In changing times it is important for both applicants and panel members to understand that the job description is simply a snap-shot of how the job looks at the current time.

For this reason it is unwise to simply send out the last job description that you had on file – however pushed for time you may feel! Make sure that the job description you use not only reflects how the job looks now, but how you will want it to look when the new job holder has been recruited.

If you work in a large organisation you may need to check with HR before amending existing job descriptions – the changes you wish to make may have an effect on the grading of a job, which would have implications for the wider grading structure and the salary to be paid.

The next page shows an example Job Description. If you would like a copy to use as a template in your own organisation you can download it here.

Example: Job Description

Job Title: Operations Manager	**Service Area:** Operations
Division/Section: South	**Job Number:** P4U/17
Grade: 3	**Date last updated:** 1 March 2011

Premises 4 U - Operations Manager

EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY

We are committed to and champion equality and diversity in all aspects of employment with Premises 4 U. All employees are expected to understand and promote our Equality and Diversity Policy in the course of their work.

Overall Purpose of Job

To manage the office team and ensure that we deliver excellent customer service. To support the sales team and to keep to within budget.

Job Context

The Operations Manager reports to the Sales Director.

The Operations Manager has line management responsibility for 1 Contract Manager, 3 Admin staff, 1 Advertising Manager, 1 IT support staff and 1 Exhibition Manager. This number of staff may change.

The Operations Manager has budget responsibility for the staff, office rent, building maintenance, the IT infrastructure, the telephone system, utilities, pool cars, stationery, mobile equipment, furniture, the refreshment area, delivering advertising and exhibitions. This budget is currently £2.5M and will be increasing to £3.5M.

The Operations Manager may be required to work evenings, weekends and occasional public holidays, in order to meet customer requirements.

Key Tasks and Accountabilities

Key tasks and accountabilities are intended to be a guide to the range and level of work expected of the Operations Manager. This is not an exhaustive list of all tasks that may fall to the Operations Manager and the Operations Manager will be expected to carry out such other reasonable duties which may be required from time to time.

- To keep within budget while attending to all aspects of financial management and ensuring that bills are paid on time.
- To manage team members including full performance management, pay, bonuses, expenses, training, recruitment, induction and discipline.
- To maintain a good working relationship with the Sales Director and all sales staff, including meeting each month with the Sales Director to present the monthly report.
- To develop and maintain the Quality Management System including routine audits, external auditor visits and documentation updates.
- To ensure the IT systems and mobile equipment (lap tops, mobile phones etc) provide the facilities required by the admin and sales staff to do their jobs effectively. To ensure the system is backed up daily and all software updates are implemented.
- To ensure the telephone system is always in service and that customers can contact one of the sales consultants at any time.
- To ensure the pool cars are well maintained and always ready for use.
- To ensure that the office and refreshment areas are always well maintained for prospects, customers and staff and that health and safety requirements are met.

The Person Specification

Having prepared an up to date job description your next task is to write a person specification.

While the job description is **task-focused**, the person specification is **person-focused**. It sets out the attributes, skills, knowledge, experience and qualifications which are required in order to successfully carry out the tasks set out in the job description. It breaks these requirements down into understandable and manageable chunks, enabling them to be clearly understood and tested during the selection process. In recruitment the person specification may also include the methods of assessment for each of the areas covered.

As discussed in chapter 1 it is important that the recruitment process is fully transparent, and that candidates are informed of how their applications will be assessed. This enables them to provide relevant information and evidence, which in turn helps the panel to make their decisions. By documenting how they have assessed the candidates' evidence against the requirements of the person specification panel members are also protected against any suggestions that the process has not been conducted fairly.

On the next page you will find an example of a person specification, again for the post of Operations Manager with Premises 4 U. If you would like a copy to use as a template in your own organisation you can download it here.

Premises 4 U Operations Manager – Person Specification

Job Title: Operations Manager	**Service Area:** Operations
Division/Section: South	**Job Number:** P4U/17
Grade: 3	**Date last updated:** 1 March 2011

CRITERIA	METHOD OF ASSESSMENT
KNOWLEDGE Very good knowledge of performance management. Good knowledge of Quality Management systems. Understands Office Health and Safety requirements. Understands computer network backup processes. Good knowledge of Equality and Diversity issues.	Application form Interview References
QUALIFICATIONS Educated to degree level or able to demonstrate success in a similar position. GCSE Mathematics Grade 3 or above. Full clean driving licence.	Documentation to be brought to interview
CRB Not applicable.	
EXPERIENCE Successful experience of managing people in a busy office environment. Has had to work within budgets. Has recruited people. Has worked in a sales environment.	Application form Interview References

Has significant experience of meeting prospects and customers.	
SKILLS AND ATTRIBUTES <u>People Management</u> - Able to manage both good and poor performance - Develops effective working relationships with colleagues - Communicates effectively with colleagues at all levels <u>Task Management</u> - Able to maintain a Quality Management System - Able to prioritise and ensure that tasks are completed on time - Anticipates potential problems and develops plans to tackle them <u>Customer Relations</u> - Able to attract new customers - Builds and maintains effective relationships with customers - Promptly resolves problems for customers if things go wrong <u>Personal Qualities</u> - Enthusiastic in dealings with customers and colleagues - Remains calm under pressure - Self motivated - Always looking to improve the way things are done <u>Equal Opportunities</u> - Promotes fairness and equal opportunities in all dealings with customers and colleagues <u>IT Skills</u> - Able to use MS Excel, MS Word, MS Outlook, MS PowerPoint	Application form Interview References IT Skills Test

The Application Form

Your next decision is to decide whether to ask candidates to submit a CV, application form or both. The table below sets out the advantages and disadvantages of each.

Application Form

Advantages	Disadvantages
Standard format for all applicants. Tailored to the specific requirements of the job. Easier for panel members to assess.	May provide less information about the applicant than a detailed CV.

CV

Advantages	Disadvantages
Provides detailed information about the candidate.	Formats will vary between applicants. May contain some irrelevant detail. Harder to identify relevant information and to assess against your criteria.

Both

Advantages	Disadvantages
Double the information!	Double the reading!

In most instances we recommend using an application form, possibly accompanied by a CV if the nature of the post means that you require a particularly detailed and thorough picture of the applicants.

The application form should be sent to applicants with the job description and the person specification. It should contain the following sections …

Important Information for Applicants

This might include information on how to complete the application, including drawing applicants' attention to the requirements set out in the person specification. You might also highlight any particularly significant policies or priorities, such as your organisation's commitment to equality and diversity.

Personal Details

Basic personal information about the applicant such as name and contact details.

Experience

The purpose of this section is firstly to get information about the applicant's career history, but secondly to see how this relates to the requirements of the job. To avoid getting lengthy lists of vaguely relevant details you should be quite clear at the start of this section about the information you are looking for. This may be broken down into three parts...

1. The applicant's **experience**
2. The applicant's **knowledge** – and how they have applied it in their current and previous roles
3. The applicant's **achievements** – what results have they achieved as a result of applying and implementing their knowledge?

The most important of these elements when it comes to assessing applicants is part 3 – their achievements. An applicant may have all the experience and knowledge in the world, but they will not be an asset to your business unless they can apply it to achieve results.

Skills and Attributes

This is the section where applicants can provide specific evidence of their ability to demonstrate the skills and attributes set out in the person specification. When designing this section of the application form it is important to be clear about ...

1. What the key skills and attributes are
2. How the applicants should demonstrate their ability to meet them

A heading such as 'People Management' tells the applicant that this will be an important aspect of the job, but to enable them to provide meaningful evidence of their skills and attributes in this area we need to be more specific about which aspects of people management are particularly important to the job. This can be done by highlighting key bullet-points from the person specification, e.g.

- Able to manage both good and poor performance
- Develops effective working relationships with colleagues
- Communicates effectively with colleagues at all levels

This provides clarity of what is required, both for applicants completing the forms and for panel members when they are assessing them.

It is also important to provide applicants with information about how you want them to present their evidence. Providing a word limit will encourage them to be succinct and to the point, and again help panel members when reading the forms. Applicants who fail to remain within the stated limits should have their applications rejected – after all, do you want to employ someone who demonstrates that they are unable to follow simple instructions?

You need to make it clear to applicants that you expect them to provide **specific examples** of how they have met the criteria. Every applicant will claim to have 'excellent people skills' – what you need to see is specific evidence to substantiate that claim.

Technical Skills

The post you are looking to fill may require specific technical skills, such as the ability to use I.T. The application form should ask applicants to provide relevant information about their experience, and also state clearly if skills will be tested.

References

Applicants should be asked to provide the names of two referees, at least one of whom can comment directly on their performance at work. References should only be taken up for candidates who have reached the required standard at interview. The purpose of taking up references is to confirm that the information provided by candidates on their applications and at interview is accurate.

In the light of this it should be possible to reassure applicants that references will not be requested until after the interview, avoiding the risk of placing them in an awkward position with their current employers.

Closing Statement

Let the candidate know any important information that has not yet been covered, such as when you will be contacting them, and dates when they should be available for interview.

Close the application form by thanking the applicant for taking the time and trouble to complete it!

On the next page you will find an example of an application form, again for the post of Operations Manager with Premises 4 U. If you would like a copy to use as a template in your own organisation you can download it here.

Premises 4 U Operations Manager – Application Form

Job Title: Operations Manager	**Service Area:** Operations
Division / Section: South	**Job Number:** P4U/17
Grade: 3	

IMPORTANT INFORMATION FOR APPLICANTS

The criteria listed in this Person Specification are all essential to the job. Where the Method of Assessment is stated to be the Application Form, your application needs to demonstrate clearly and concisely how you meet each of the criteria, even if other methods of assessment are also shown. If you do not address these criteria fully, or if we do not consider that you meet them, you will not be shortlisted. Please give specific examples wherever possible.

EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY

We are committed to and champion equality and diversity in all aspects of employment with Premises 4 U. All employees are expected to understand and promote our Equality and Diversity Policy in the course of their work.

1. Personal details

Name	
Contact address	
Contact telephone number(s)	Daytime: Evening: Mobile:
Email address	

2. Experience

Give brief details of your experience and your achievements, beginning with your current or most recent post. You should demonstrate how your experience meets the following requirements:

- Very good knowledge of performance management
- Good knowledge of Quality Management systems
- Experience of managing a budget
- Understands Office Health and Safety requirements
- Understands computer network backup processes
- Good knowledge of Equality and Diversity issues

Dates	Post held	Brief details of experience and achievements

3. Skills and Attributes ***Provide specific examples of no more than 200 words to demonstrate how you meet the following criteria.***
<u>People Management</u> - Able to manage both good and poor performance. - Develops effective working relationships with colleagues. - Communicates effectively with colleagues at all levels.
<u>Task Management</u> - Able to maintain a Quality Management System. - Able to prioritise and ensure that tasks are completed on time. - Anticipates potential problems and develops plans to tackle them.
<u>Customer Relations</u> - Able to attract new customers. - Builds and maintains effective relationships with customers. - Promptly resolves problems for customers if things go wrong.

<u>Personal Qualities</u> - Enthusiastic in dealings with customers and colleagues. - Remains calm under pressure. - Self motivated. - Always looking to improve the way things are done.
<u>Equal Opportunities</u> - Promotes fairness and equal opportunities in all dealings with customers and colleagues.

4. Qualifications

The successful applicant will need to be educated to degree level or able to demonstrate success in a similar position. You will also require the other qualifications listed below.

Qualifications at degree level or above	
GCSE Mathematics Grade 3 or above	

Full clean driving licence	

Please note that you will be required to bring copies of the relevant certificates if invited to interview

5. IT Skills

Briefly state your experience of using the following IT:

Software	**Experience**
MS Excel	
MS Word	
MS Outlook	
MS PowerPoint	

Please note that your IT skills will be tested if you are invited to interview.

4. References

Please provide the name and contact details of two referees, at least one of whom should be able to comment directly on your performance at work.

Please note that referees will only be contacted if you demonstrate the required criteria at interview.

Referee 1	**Referee 2**
Name: Address: Job Title (if applicable): Daytime phone no.: E-mail:	Name: Address: Job Title (if applicable): Daytime phone no.: E-mail:

Thank you for applying for this post. We will contact you by [INSERT DATE] ***to let you know whether you are being invited for interview.***

Panel Member Rating Form

When the application forms are returned you will need a form which enables panel members to identify which applicants meet the standard required to be invited for interview. A well designed form is more likely to achieve consistency between panel members, and can be used to rate candidates both at the Sift and interview stages.

The form should include a rating scale, which is clear and straightforward for panel members to understand and use. An example rating scale is set out below:

Score	Definition
0	Applicant has not provided any relevant evidence of this criteria
1	Applicant has provided insufficient evidence of this criteria to meet the required standard
2	Applicant has provided sufficient evidence of this criteria to meet the required standard
3	Applicant has provided strong evidence of this criteria to exceed the required standard

A key phrase here is ‘the required standard’. The job description and person specification will help to define this, but panel members will all have their own views based upon their own knowledge and experience of the job. The process by which panel members reach agreement on which applicants to invite for interview is covered in Chapter 4 – Sifting and Shortlisting.

Unlike the first three forms covered in this chapter the panel member rating form is a document for internal use only, and will not normally seen by the candidate. However, you may be required to release the completed forms in the event of any complaint about the way in which the panel has been conducted, if it results in an internal investigation or employment appeal tribunal. In some organisations you will be required to file this documentation with HR at the end of the recruitment process.

Panel Rating Form

Once the panel has discussed each candidate the panel members' individual ratings should be recorded alongside the overall panel rating and reasons on a panel rating form. This should also include the panel's agreed comments on the candidate.

On the following pages you will find examples of a panel member rating form and the overall panel rating form. If you would like copies to use as templates in your own organisation you can download them here.

Panel Member Rating Form

Name of Applicant:

Date:

Sift / Interview (Please delete as appropriate)

Please rate each criteria in accordance with the following rating scale:

Score	Definition
0	Applicant has not provided any relevant evidence of this criteria
1	Applicant has provided insufficient evidence of this criteria to meet the required standard
2	Applicant has provided sufficient evidence of this criteria to meet the required standard
3	Applicant has provided strong evidence of this criteria to exceed the required standard

Criteria	Score	Comments
Relevant Knowledge and Experience		
People Management Skills		
Task Management Skills		
Customer Relations		
Personal Qualities		
Equal Opportunities		
Total		

Signed:

Name:

Date:

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Panel Rating Form

Name of Applicant:

Date:

Sift / Interview (Please delete as appropriate)

Please rate each criteria in accordance with the following rating scale:

Score	Definition
0	Applicant has not provided any relevant evidence of this criteria
1	Applicant has provided insufficient evidence of this criteria to meet the required standard
2	Applicant has provided sufficient evidence of this criteria to meet the required standard
3	Applicant has provided strong evidence of this criteria to exceed the required standard

Criteria	Chair	Member A	Member B	Panel's Agreed rating
Relevant Knowledge and Experience				
People Management Skills				
Task Management Skills				
Customer Relations				
Personal Qualities				
Equal Opportunities				
			Total	

Comments and Reasons for the agreed rating:

Signed ...

Chair:

Member A:

Member B:

Date:

Exercise

Consider the posts in your own team. Do you have up to date and current job descriptions and person specifications? Do you have a recently designed application form in case a vacancy arises in the team?

If the answer to any of these questions is 'No', use the templates provided here to draw up the relevant forms for the posts in your team.

Summary of Chapter 3 – Laying the Foundations

In this chapter we have identified how to lay the foundations for successful sifting and interviewing by

- Writing the job description
- Writing the person specification
- Devising the application form
- Drawing up the panel rating forms

In the next chapter we will look at how to put these tools into practice when sifting and shortlisting.

Chapter 4 – Sifting and Shortlisting

"Sift – To examine critically or minutely: to scrutinise"

Webster's Dictionary

Purpose of this chapter:

This chapter will cover how to review applications and select the right candidates to interview. It also covers the processes for notifying both successful and unsuccessful candidates.

Introduction

We have already referred to the Sift several times in the earlier chapters of this Useful Guide. In Chapter 2 – The Key Skills, we identified that good analytical skills are essential to effective sifting. As highlighted by the definition at the top of this page, the Sift is your opportunity to scrutinise the written evidence submitted by the candidate, and to decide whether it justifies progressing them to the interview stage. In order to do this you will need to systematically evaluate the evidence they have provided for each area of the person specification, and assess each area in accordance with the agreed rating scale (see Chapter 3 – Laying the Foundations).

This chapter firstly sets out the process for doing this, and then provides some guidance on successful sifting. It then looks at how to notify the results to both successful and unsuccessful applicants. The chapter concludes with a sifting exercise which provides an opportunity for you to practice your skills.

The Sifting Process

The sifting process can be divided into two parts – firstly the individual stage, where panel members will scrutinise the applications and come to their own initial assessments; and secondly the collective stage, where they will meet as a panel and decide which candidates should be invited for interview.

Before the individual stage it may be productive for panel members to discuss how to score the application forms. This might involve discussing the type of evidence required to justify the ratings required at each level for each of the criteria. This type of discussion at the outset encourages consistency of approach between panel members, reduces the range of individual scores and will usually save time at the collective stage. It is particularly helpful to do this if the panel includes members who are sifting applications for the first time.

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The Individual Stage

You will need ...

- Your own set of application forms (either electronic or paper copies)
- Panel member rating forms

Set aside sufficient time to read through and mark all of the application forms. If there are not too many try and do this at a single sitting. This will help you to focus on the criteria and weigh up the evidence presented by the applicants.

As you read through the forms you will find it helpful to ...

- **Highlight** sections or statements which provide key evidence of the candidate's ability to meet or not meet the criteria
- **Annotate** the forms with notes – e.g. of questions arising from the evidence provided that you may wish to follow up at interview
- **Note** on the panel member rating form your initial score for each of the criteria

Remember that at this stage the scores you are recording are only your **initial ratings**, in order to provide a basis for discussion with your colleagues when you meet as a panel. You may subsequently change these initial ratings following discussion, e.g. if one of your colleagues has identified a piece of relevant evidence that you may have missed.

The Collective Stage

Once you have individually scored the applications you should meet as a panel to decide who should be invited to interview. You will need to decide at the outset the minimum requirements for this. Applying the rating scale we are using here, for example, you may decide that the minimum requirement for an applicant to be considered for interview is a score for each criteria of

2 – Applicant has provided sufficient evidence of the criteria to meet the required standard

You will also need to consider how many applicants you wish to interview. If you only have one vacancy to fill it is unlikely that you will want to spend more than one day interviewing. If this is the case you may decide only to interview the four or five highest scoring candidates – as long as they score a rating of at least 2 for each of the criteria. As you will see in chapter 5 – Preparing for the Interview – I recommend that you should not try and conduct more than five interviews in a day.

We have now identified the requirements for being invited to interview as ...

- Must score a rating of at least 2 for each of the criteria
- Must be one of the top five highest rated candidates

When you meet as a panel you will need to consider each applicant in turn. The Chairperson should ask the panel members for their ratings and record these on the panel member rating form. The panel should then discuss the ratings given for each candidate.

Particular attention should be given to areas where panel members disagree.

In these instances the Chairperson should lead a structured discussion on the evidence considered by each panel member which led to their decision. The aim of the discussion should be to reach an agreed rating as a panel. When doing this remember that the person in the minority may be the one with the right rating – they may have identified evidence that their two colleagues have missed.

At the end of the sift meeting the following papers should be attached together for each candidate...

- Panel rating form
- Panel member rating forms completed by the individual members
- Application form

The applications should be separated into two clear piles...

- Candidates to be invited to interview
- Candidates not to be invited to interview

Ensuring Effective Sifting

Consider the evidence from the whole of the form when scoring the applicants. There will be overlaps between the criteria; for example, a candidate's evidence for their ability to remain calm under pressure, listed under Personal Qualities, may also provide evidence of their ability to prioritise and ensure that tasks are completed on time, listed under Task Management. It is therefore important to read the whole form before scoring candidates and to take into account all available evidence.

Develop a system for sifting – e.g. using different colours to highlight positive and negative evidence, or areas that you might wish to follow up with questions at interview. Using a system consistently will help you when it comes to the sift discussion and preparing for interview. Ideally, for ease of reference, all panel members should use the same system.

Look critically at the evidence provided. Application forms provide a useful initial guide to the candidates' capabilities, but cannot provide the depth of evidence which arises in an interview.

Beware of candidates simply restating the criteria set out in the Person Specification. For example, for 'People Management' a candidate may write ...

> *I have extensive experience of successfully managing both good and poor performance. I have a proven track record of developing excellent working relationships with the full range of colleagues. I do this by ensuring that I communicate effectively with them all, no matter what their level.*

This may initially look impressive, but does not provide specific evidence of anything the candidate has actually done. They have identified from the Person Specification what they think you want to read, and then simply rehashed it. You should also beware of candidates who over-use the latest management buzz-words. They may claim to be 'an outstanding leader with a strategic perspective and commitment to achieving excellent results through empowering the team' – but have they actually provided any evidence to back this up?

Sifting Problems

Too many applications

Your options for dealing with this problem may depend on when it is identified. If you realise early on that you are receiving more applications than expected it may be possible to withdraw your advertising and bring forward the closing date for applications. If it is not possible to do this, or the problem is not spotted until later, you may need to consider pragmatic solutions for sifting a large number of applications quickly. These may include

- Getting your administrative team to check whether minimum criteria have been met – e.g. do applicants have the required qualifications, have they completed the application forms correctly and completely, have they remained within specified word limits etc.
- Splitting the applications between panel members instead of each panel member looking at all of them. The sift discussion can then focus on the highest scoring candidates identified by each member.

Too many good quality applications

You may have a number of applicants with similar scores, making it difficult to decide which ones to invite for interview. If this is the case you may wish to consider including an additional stage in the process between the Sift and the interview. This may take the form of short telephone interviews, targeted at the key criteria, in order to identify the leading candidates from your shortlist. Alternatively you may introduce additional tests before the interview stage, using the methods set out in chapter 9.

A shortfall of good quality applications

While it may be tempting to interview the ‘least bad’ applicants, if they do not meet the minimum criteria set for interview they are unlikely to be the quality candidates you are looking for. You may wish to consider factors such as the wording, presentation and placement of your advertising and then to re-advertise the post. It may be frustrating to have to delay the process, but it is better to address the problem at this stage than to continue in the vain hope that one of your unpromising candidates will suddenly display hitherto unseen qualities at interview. As highlighted in the Introduction to this Useful Guide, the costs of appointing the wrong candidate are considerable.

Notifying Sift Results to Applicants

Once you have reached your decisions about who to invite to interview you need to notify the applicants. When notifying unsuccessful applicants it is important to remember that they are likely to be disappointed. They have demonstrated a desire to work in your organisation and probably put a good deal of time and effort into completing the application form. It is therefore important to be sensitive in the wording of the letter, in order to leave them with a positive impression of your organisation and a feeling of having been treated respectfully and fairly.

You may also wish to offer them the opportunity to receive feedback on why their application has been unsuccessful. If you decide to do this you need to include …

- Which panel member should be contacted for feedback
- When they can be contacted

Feedback will normally be provided by phone. If you are the panel member responsible for doing this ensure that you have the sift papers to hand. When providing feedback you will need to strike the right balance between being positive and encouraging, e.g. by recognising areas where the applicant scored well, while being very clear about where there were gaps between the evidence they presented and the required standard.

If you have a large number of unsuccessful applicants it may save time if you provide brief feedback in the letter.

Applicants who have been successful at the sift stage should be invited to interview, and be asked to confirm their attendance. It is good practice for advertisements to include interview dates so that applicants can keep their diaries free. If it was not possible to do this then the letter should give applicants at least two weeks' notice of the interview date.

The letter to a candidate being invited to interview will need to include ...

- Time and place of interview
- Length of interview
- Names and job titles of panel members
- Instructions on what to do on arrival
- Details of any documents they are required to bring (e.g. certificates)
- Details of any additional aspects of the selection process (e.g. I.T. tests, presentations, psychometric tests etc)

On the following pages we have included example letters to send to candidates following the Sift. If you would like copies to use as templates in your own organisation you can download them here.

Pansophix

Letter to Unsuccessful Candidate at Sift

[Current Date]

Dear ***[First Name]***,

Vacancy for Operations Manager with Premises 4 U

I am writing following your recent application for the above post.

We received a very good response to this recruitment campaign and unfortunately we will not be taking your application further on this occasion.

If you would like to receive feedback on your application please phone ***[Name]*** on ***[specify telephone number]*** on ***[specify date].***

I would like to take this opportunity to wish you every success in your future career. Thank you for your interest in Premises 4 U.

Yours sincerely

[First Name] [Surname]

[Job Title]

Letter to Candidate Invited for Interview

[Current Date]

Dear ***[First Name]***,

Vacancy for Operations Manager with Premises 4 U

Following your recent application for the above position of I have pleasure in inviting you for an interview.

The interview will take place on ***[date]*** at ***[specify location and time].*** A map and directions are enclosed.

When you arrive please ask for ***[specify name]***.

Before the interview starts you will be asked to take a short test of your I.T. skills. You will then be interviewed for approximately forty minutes by

[Insert names and job titles of the three panel members]

Please bring certificates with you as confirmation of your qualifications and documents from the attached list as confirmation of your entitlement to work in the UK.

Please contact ***[specify name and telephone number]*** by ***[insert date]*** to confirm whether you will be able to attend.

Yours sincerely

[First Name] [Surname]

[Job Title]

Exercise: Sifting Applications

Download the sifting exercise from here.

Read through the five applications for the post of Operations Manager with Premises 4 U.

Make a note or annotate the forms identifying...

- Where the candidate has provided evidence that meets the standard
- Where the candidate's evidence does not meet the standard
- Questions you might ask to investigate the evidence more fully at interview

When you have reviewed the applications complete a panel member rating form for each candidate, including a brief note of the reasons for your rating.

When you have finished compare your findings with my thoughts which can be downloaded from here.

Summary of this chapter

In this chapter we have identified what is involved at the individual and collective stages of the Sift process. At the individual stage each panel member considers the application forms and comes to their initial ratings. The panel then meet to discuss their views and decide which applicants should be shortlisted for interview.

We have identified the problems which can arise at the Sift stage and how to overcome them.

We have covered the process for notifying successful and unsuccessful applicants at this stage, including providing feedback for unsuccessful applicants.

Chapter 5 – Preparing for the Interview

Before anything else, preparation is the key to success.

Alexander Graham Bell

Purpose of this chapter:

To set out the steps needed to create the appropriate environment for the interviews and what panel members need to do to ensure the interviews run smoothly.

Introduction

In this chapter we will look at what needs to be done to ...

- Create the right environment for the interviews
- Draw up the interview timetable
- Define and agree panel members' roles and responsibilities
- Draw up the interview plan
- Prepare the interview questions

Creating the Right Environment

Creating the right environment begins with ensuring that interview candidates are able to easily find their way to your office and, when they do, that they are able to get into the building and find their way to the right part of it! Transport and car parking arrangements should also be made clear. As seen in the previous chapter, this information should be included in the letter inviting candidates to interview.

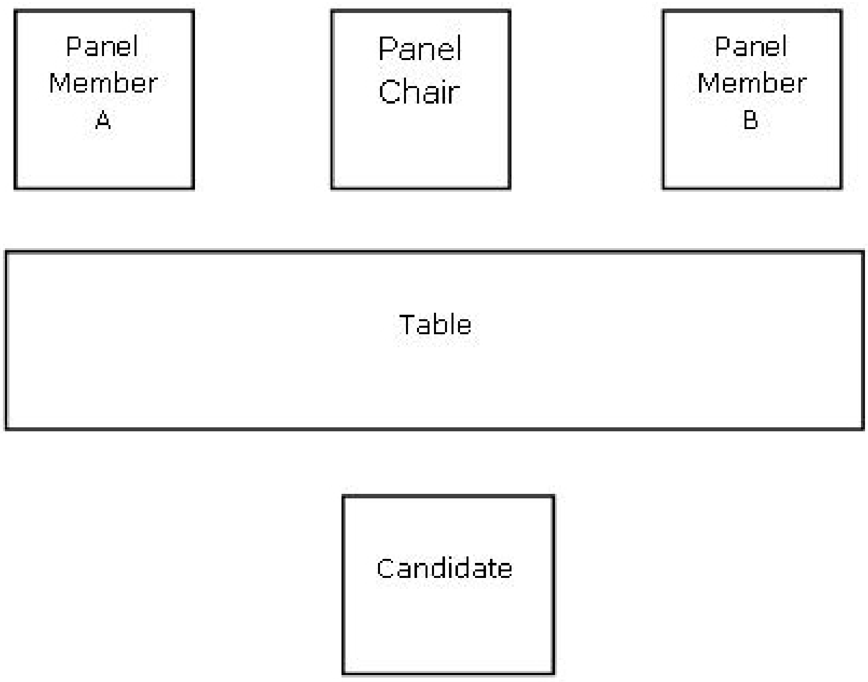
On the day of the interview ensure that Security or Reception staff have written details of who is attending and when. Ensure that they are clear about where to direct candidates when they arrive. Consider appointing a member of your team as a 'meeter and greeter', who can welcome the candidates and take them to the waiting area. This should be a quiet, comfortable area with hot drinks and water available and easy access to toilet facilities. Advance consideration of these points will create an environment where your candidates can prepare to give their best in the interview.

It is important to set up the interview room in a way which is appropriate to your organisation and the nature of the post to be filled. If your company works in the Creative Sector, it may be appropriate to create a very informal environment for the interview, with soft seating and low, unobtrusive coffee tables. At the other end of the spectrum there is the traditional formal environment, with the panel members sitting facing the interviewee from behind a desk. The two options are illustrated below.

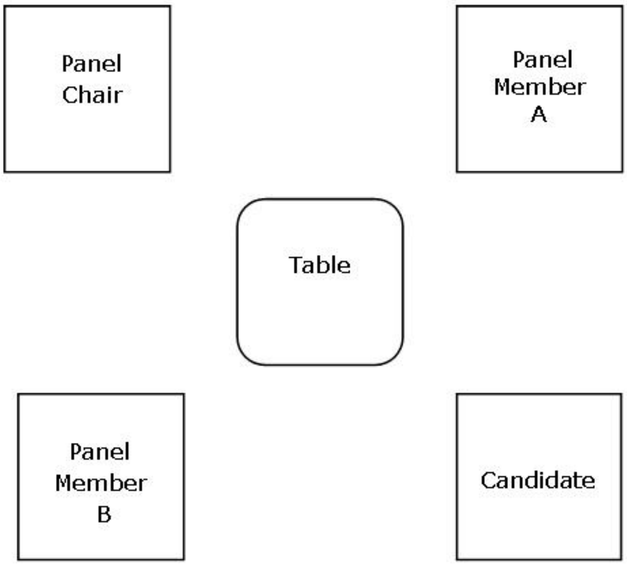
Generally speaking candidates are more likely to talk openly if they feel relaxed, and this is more likely to be the case in an informal environment. However, this is not the only factor to consider. If you are interviewing for a post in a very formal profession, such as the law, you may wish to create a formal environment in order to see how candidates come across in the type of setting that they will be working in. If you are interviewing candidates for high pressure posts, such as members of a sales team, you may consider that a very relaxed and comfortable environment may not be a good match for the role.

You also need to consider what refreshments to offer candidates. If your aim is to create an informal environment in which candidates will feel welcomed and comfortable you may offer hot drinks and biscuits. If you have already provided these in the waiting area – or if you don't want your candidates to feel too comfortable - you may only provide water. The minimum that should be available is a glass of water for everyone – both candidates and panel members may suffer from a dry throat or mouth during the interview.

Formal Interview Environment



Informal Interview Environment



The Interview Timetable

We identified in chapter 4 that, in order to allow sufficient time for preparation and assessment, you should not try to schedule more than four or five interviews in a day. This may be reduced if you are using interviews alongside other selection methods such as presentations or practical exercises, particularly if the panel members are involved in observing these.

An example of an interview timetable is included on the following page. A template can be downloaded here.

Interview Timetable

9.00	Panel convenes
9.15	Prepare Interview 1
9.30	Interview 1
10.15	Assess Candidate 1
10.30	Break
10.45	Prepare Interview 2
11.00	Interview 2
11.45	Assess Candidate 2
12.00	Prepare Interview 3
12.15	Interview 3
1.00	Assess Candidate 3
1.15	Lunch
2.00	Prepare Interview 4
2.15	Interview 4
3.00	Assess Candidate 4
3.15	Prepare Interview 5
3.30	Interview 5
4.15	Assess Candidate 5
4.30	Review interviews, select successful candidate and complete paperwork
5.00	Close

Defining and Agreeing Panel Members' Roles

Between the Sift and the day of the interviews you will need to decide on the panel members' roles. A brief face to face meeting is ideal, but a conference call is a practical alternative. You need to decide …

- Who will test each criteria
- The order in which each person will lead the questioning
- Who will take notes at each stage

This should then be recorded on the Interview Plan – see below. It is simplest if the same plan is followed for each of the interviews. It may be self-evident as to which panel member should lead the questioning on some of the criteria; for example, if some of the criteria are technical it would make sense for the technical specialist on the panel to lead on these (hopefully he/she will also understand the answers!). However, there may be circumstances where you vary the interview plan. If you are involved in a major selection panel, with interviews taking place over several days, you may swap responsibilities around in order to avoid becoming stale.

The Interview Plan

When drawing up your interview plan pay attention to the sequencing of the interview. In the example below the interview is sequenced to start with areas that the candidate is likely to find easier to talk about, in order to put them at ease and encourage them to talk openly. Most candidates feel comfortable talking about their knowledge and experience, and most candidates will also be able to call to mind examples of Customer Relations – anyone with experience of a customer-facing role will have stories to tell of customers they have found challenging or difficult. The second half of the interview then moves on to cover the more challenging areas, such as Task Management and demonstrating the required Personal Qualities.

Note taking responsibilities fall to panel members A and B. The chairperson's prime responsibility is to get an overall picture of the candidate and the evidence they provide. This enables the chairperson to identify and note any areas which need following up or investigating further at the end of the interview.

An example interview plan is included on the following page. A copy for your own use can be downloaded here.

Interview Plan

Lead Responsibility	Time Allowed	Criteria to Cover	Note Taker
Chairperson	10 minutes	Welcome & Introductions Criteria 1 – Relevant knowledge & experience	Member A
Member A	10-15 minutes	Criteria 2 – Customer Relations Criteria 3 – People Management Skills	Member B
Member B	10-15 minutes	Criteria 4 – Task Management Skills Criteria 5 – Personal Qualities	Member A
Chairperson	10 minutes	Criteria 6 – Equal Opportunities Any outstanding questions? Close the interview	Member B

Preparing Your Questions

Once the interview plan has been devised each panel member will know which of the criteria they have lead responsibility for testing. They should then review the evidence presented on the candidate's application form, and note the key questions they wish to ask to ensure that the criteria will be fully tested.

We have already discussed questioning skills in chapter 4, but this is the point in the process where you can apply those general principles to develop questions which are specifically relevant to the evidence provided by the particular candidate. You will draft opening questions starting with phrases such as …

- "You mention on your application form …"
- "On your application form you gave an example of Customer Relations when …"
- "On your application form you talked about a time when you had personal responsibility for a major project …"

Use an interview preparation sheet to **write down** your opening question exactly as you intend to ask it. Remember that you may have to quickly shift gears between the roles of note taker and lead interviewer. You may also feel nervous – it's generally recognised that candidates get nervous, but interviewers do too! Sometimes the effect of these nerves can be that the opening question doesn't come out as clearly as you intended it to, which means that the candidate may set off in the wrong direction because you failed to provide a clear enough steer. Having your opening question written down minimises the risk of this happening.

Do not write down a whole list of questions. The effect of this will be that you spend your time searching through your list instead of listening to the candidate's answers. Have a few key questions jotted down as an aide memoire, but once your opening question has sent them moving down the right track your follow-up questions should simply be prompts to get them to tell you the whole story.

A blank interview preparation sheet is shown on the next page and can be downloaded here.

Interview Preparation Sheet

Complete a separate interview preparation sheet for each of the criteria you are testing.

For Read Out loud Readers: The following table has 2 columns and 3 rows. Row 1 spans both columns. The right hand cells of rows 2 and 3 are blank.

Criteria:- People Management - Able to manage both good and poor performance - Develops effective working relationships with colleagues - Communicates effectively with colleagues at all levels	
Opening Question	
Possible Follow-up Questions	

For Read Out loud Readers: The table has finished.

Timekeeping

The chairperson has overall responsibility for ensuring that the interview runs to time. This means that they must have clear sight of the time, perhaps a clock on the wall behind the candidate, or a watch discreetly placed on the table. When the time allotted for each member's questions is coming to an end there should be an agreed signal to indicate to the panel member that they should draw their questions to a close. One way of doing this is to have a marker pen on the table, which the chairperson picks up and places in front of the panel member to alert them that their time is nearly up. Candidates are usually far too engrossed in presenting their evidence to notice this!

Summary of this chapter

In this chapter we have discussed the importance of thorough preparation before the interviews take place. This includes preparing …

The environment – this includes reception, the waiting area and setting up the interview room so that it is appropriate to the type of interview you wish to conduct.

The interview timetable – ensuring that everyone knows what is happening and when, and building in sufficient time to prepare for each interview and assess candidates as you go along.

An interview plan, so that panel members are clear about their specific roles and responsibilities.

Time keeping arrangements and signals.

Opening questions, which should specifically relate to the candidate's application and be written down.

Chapter 6 – Conducting the Interview

"A conversation with a purpose"

Sister A Gerard

Purpose of this chapter:

To identify what panel members need to do in order to conduct a successful interview, and some of the pitfalls to avoid.

Introduction

In this chapter we will cover ...

- How to start the interview on the right note
- How to build rapport with the interviewee
- How to keep the interview on track and fully test the relevant criteria
- Potential pitfalls and how to avoid them
- Closing the interview

Starting the Interview

The opening three minutes of the interview are a crucial time. First impressions may be misleading (more on this when we come on to pitfalls!), but are nevertheless important. And while you may be aware of the need to guard against giving undue weight to first impressions, your candidate will be taking in information that will help form their view of you and your company. They will be keen to make a positive impression on you, but if you get things wrong they may begin to doubt whether yours is an organisation they wish to work for. So starting an interview badly may not just leave you feeling foolish – it could lead to you losing your best candidate.

The previous chapter, 'Preparing for the Interview', covers the importance of briefing your Security and Reception staff and making a comfortable waiting area available. The next point that needs to be clear is how candidates will get from the waiting area to the interview room. You have two main options ...

1. Arrange for a member of staff to be available to show them in. The advantage of this approach is that the panel can be ready and in position for the interview to start, creating a professional first impression for the candidate.
2. Have a member of the interview panel collect them from the waiting area and bring them through. The advantage of this approach is that the panel

member is able to immediately 'break the ice' and begin the process of rapport building before the interview begins.

Once the candidate is in the interview room the chairperson should first check that they have the right person! Timetabling mix-ups are not unknown, and in a busy building where lots of people are coming and going it is quite possible for people to end up in the wrong places. It's like those occasional mix-ups on TV news programmes, where hapless drivers suddenly find themselves in front of the cameras being grilled about the major news stories of the day.

Once you've established that the right person is in the room check how they wish to be addressed. Do this in a way which invites them to agree with the approach you've chosen to adopt; i.e. if you're planning to conduct a fairly informal interview, say something like "So you're Robert Simpson – o.k. if we call you Robert?" If the candidate's reply is, "Well – most people call me Bob" - then go with their preference and call them Bob.

If you're really not sure how to address a candidate then ask them! It's better to check at the start than to undermine all your other attempts at rapport building by mispronouncing their name throughout the interview.

The chairperson should also introduce the panel members. If you are using the candidate's first name then it is obviously appropriate to include your first names. Introductions should be along the lines of ...

"On my right is Sue Jones, our HR manager..."

Pause to give each panel member the chance to smile and say hello – this is an important part of building rapport.

As a panel you should have an agreed approach to shaking hands with candidates. It is disorientating for the candidate if one panel member stands to shake hands when they enter the room while the others remain seated. If your agreed approach is to shake hands that this should happen as the chairperson introduces the panel members when the candidate enters the room, before they are invited to sit down.

Once the candidate is seated the chairperson should ...

- Thank the candidate for coming
- Outline the interview procedure – how long it will last and the order in which the panel members will be asking their questions
- Reassure the candidate that the questions will all be related to the criteria covered in the person specification

- Let them know that notes will be taken to provide a record of the interview
- Invite them to have a drink of water if they wish

Rapport Building

All of the above steps will help put a candidate at ease and, if done in a welcoming way with the appropriate tone, start building rapport between the panel and the candidate. You will remember in Chapter 1 – The Theory of Effective Interviewing, we discussed Conversation Management – the art of managing the interview in such a way that the candidate will feel sufficiently at ease to answer your questions openly and honestly. The behaviours described by the 'RESPONSE' acronym are key to creating this rapport at the start of the interview.

Some further specific steps that panel members can take to build rapport are ...

- Making eye contact
- Smiling
- Looking interested when the candidate is talking to you
- Using appropriate body language, such as adopting an open posture (i.e. not sitting hunched up with your arms folded!)
- Avoiding annoying personal habits (e.g. clicking a pen or rocking on your chair)

Sometimes these points are outside of our awareness. For this reason, while it is sometimes an uncomfortable experience, it is beneficial to see yourself on video. Perhaps you could create an opportunity to do this - for example, if you have a team member who would benefit from practice as an interviewee you could hold a 'mock' interview for them and video it. You could then provide feedback to each other and watch the video to identify learning points for yourselves. When people do this they often identify non-verbal and verbal habits that they were previously unaware of – aspects of their body language that may get in the way of building rapport with candidates, or verbal patterns that may become irritating, such as excessive 'ums' or repeated use of words such as 'Right' and 'Okay'.

Keeping the Interview on Track

However good your preparation has been there may still be times when an interview seems to drift off track. The candidate is talking, but they do not seem to be providing the evidence you need to assess their ability to do the job. This can happen for many reasons, some to do with the candidate and some to do with the interviewer …

Interview Going Off-Track	
Interviewer's Responsibility	**Candidate's Responsibility**
• Lack of rapport building • Unclear or poorly phrased questions • Questions not sufficiently clearly related to the criteria • Understanding not demonstrated through use of skills such as summarising or reflecting • Inability to intervene effectively and get the candidate back on track • Attention drifts	• Not listening closely enough to the question • Not understanding the question • Not wanting to answer the question • Wanting to divert the interview to their own agenda – not that of the panel • Attention drifts

In order to keep the interview on track you need two sets of skills – firstly the skills to minimise the risk of drifting off track in the first place, and secondly the skills to intervene effectively and bring the interview back on track if it happens.

The way that an interviewer can keep both their questioning and the candidate's answers closely focused on the relevant criteria, is by following the four steps of the Interviewing Skills Flow Chart.

The Interviewing Skills Flow Chart

1. **Opening Question** – aimed straight at the criteria

⇩

2. Get the candidate talking about a **specific example**

⇩

3. **Ask relevant open questions** – What, Why, How, Who, When, Where?

⇩

4. Listen!

Following these four steps is the key to your success as an interviewer – so let's look at each of them in more detail.

Step 1 – Ask an open-ended question which is directly relevant to the criteria

You may remember these examples from chapter 2 ...

> *One of the attributes we're looking for is the ability to resolve problems for a customer when things go wrong.* ***Tell me*** *about a time when you've done that.*

> *You state on your application form that you managed a poor performer whom you brought up to the required standard.* ***Describe*** *how you went about doing that.*

> *You mention on your application form that you maintained performance in priority areas when your team was under pressure.* ***Explain*** *to me how you did that.*

These questions point the candidate in the right direction, by being clear and specific about the type of examples you are looking for.

Step 2 – Ensure that they answer with a relevant, specific example

Asking for a relevant, specific example does not necessarily mean you will get one! People often find it easier to generalise – it is what we tend to do in day to day speech. You may also find candidates who are confident in their ability to sound impressive when generalising, but fear being exposed if they have to talk in depth about a specific example from their experience.

The following phrases are sure signs that a candidate is **NOT** providing you with a specific example...

> *What I* ***always*** *say is...*

> *What I* ***would do*** *is...*

> *The way* ***we*** *deal with that* ***is*** *to...*

Notice that these phrases use either the present tense ('What I always say is...') or the future tense ('What I would do is...'). If a candidate talks in the present tense they are generalising, if they talk in the future tense their answers will be hypothetical. A candidate needs to talk in the **past tense** if they are to provide you with the specific, detailed evidence you need.

You should also listen carefully for use of the word 'we' instead of 'I'. Given that many tasks involve working as part of a team it is sometimes genuinely difficult for a candidate to isolate their part in what was done. However, you are not interviewing them as a representative of their team – you are interviewing them as an individual candidate. You therefore need to get the candidate to be specific about their personal contribution to any team activity.

If you hear a candidate using these words and phrases you need to be prepared to assertively intervene at an early stage in order to redirect them back to the criteria (see below – 'Assertive Interruptions').

Step 3 – Once they are talking about a relevant, specific example – ask them questions about it!

As we have already seen it can be hard work focusing a candidate in order to generate the kind of detailed evidence you are looking for – so once you've got them talking about a relevant example make sure that you milk it for all the evidence you can! A good example will be dripping with evidence like a wet sponge, and your job as an interviewer is to wring out that soggy sponge so by the end of the interview you have a bucket full of evidence. In order to do this remember Kipling's Six Honest Serving Men from Chapter 2 ...

> *"I keep six honest serving men (They taught me all I knew);*
> *Their names are What and Why and When And How and Where and Who"*

Step 4 – Listen!

This may sound obvious, but actually doing it may be harder than you think. What should happen in an interview is that you ask a question, then listen intently to the candidate's answer. But what often happens is that once you have asked a question, you immediately start thinking about what you will ask next. This means that when the candidate stops talking you haven't got a clue as to what they have just told you, and your next question may not make sense to the candidate at all. Even worse, you may ask them something they have just told you.

There are three steps involved in listening to and making sense of the candidate's answers ...

1. **Listen carefully** to what the candidate says. This involves focusing and giving them your **full attention** – not allowing yourself to be distracted by anything else that's going on – including what you might ask next.

2. **Make sense** of what they have said. If they have given a lengthy answer a useful technique is to **paraphrase it** – state the key points back to them. E.g.

   "So you heard shouting, went out to the office and two team members were squaring up to each other."

   Paraphrasing has benefits for everyone involved in the interview ...

   - It enables **you** to make sense of what the candidate has said to you
   - It demonstrates to **the candidate** that you have understood – or gives them a chance to correct any errors or misunderstandings
   - It gives your **note taker** a chance to catch up!

3. **Formulate your next question**. With practice you will find that this starts to flow naturally from your paraphrasing – e.g. ...

   "So you heard shouting, went out to the office and two team members were squaring up to each other – what did you do?"

Assertive Interruptions

Sometimes candidates are allowed to talk generally or hypothetically at some length because the interviewer feels unable to interrupt them. Many of us are brought up believing that it is rude to interrupt, or lack the self-confidence to do so. However, the result of this in an interview is that the precious and limited time available for generating evidence ends up being frittered away on generalities. This is not in anyone's best interests – the panel or the candidate.

An interviewer therefore has a responsibility to interrupt and re-focus a candidate if they are not providing the evidence you need. This can be difficult to do, particularly if a candidate is in full flow and it seems hard to get a word in edgeways. For this reason interviewers need to practice and develop the skill of assertive interruption.

To assertively interrupt a candidate you first need to adopt the appropriate body language. Lean forward and raise your hand – like a police officer stopping traffic. As you do this say ...

"Let me stop you there ..."

Usually a candidate will respond to this and stop talking. If they fail to respond raise your hand again and say …

> "I need you to stop for a moment …"

Once the candidate has stopped talking and given you their attention then re-direct them to the avenue you wish them to go down – again like a police officer directing traffic! If possible do this by recognising and building upon something they have said which was of value, e.g. …

> "Let me stop you there… I was interested when you mentioned that the argument was overheard by the customers who were waiting in reception. What did you do about that aspect of it?"

If it is not possible to do this you may need simply to provide the candidate with very clear clarification of what you are looking for, e.g. …

> "You've been talking about an argument between two of your colleagues, but I'm interested in your Customer Relations skills. Tell me about a situation which directly involved you dealing with a customer."

Sometimes a candidate may go off track because your line of questioning was not sufficiently clear to begin with. If this is the case then be honest about it …

> "I'm sorry – perhaps my question wasn't sufficiently clear. What I'm interested in is how you dealt with a situation directly involving your customers, not one involving your colleagues."

Whichever of these approaches you use, it is essential that you develop the ability to politely but firmly interrupt – and if you are not getting the evidence you need it is in the candidate's best interests for you to do so.

Some pitfalls and how to overcome them

In this section we will identify some of the pitfalls that can arise during the interview, what you can do to overcome them or – ideally – to minimise the risk of them arising in the first place!

1. Paying too much attention to first impressions

Read any guide to being a successful interviewee and it will tell you that it is vital to make a good first impression. Why? Because it's true! First impressions count, and studies suggest that the first few minutes of an interview are crucial in deciding whether or not a candidate will be offered a job.

A candidate may make a positive first impression by dressing smartly, smiling at you, using assertive body language and speaking in a clear, authoritative tone of voice. Most powerfully, they may remind us of how we would like to see ourselves!

This can create what psychologists have called the 'Halo effect'. Interviewers immediately feel that this is the 'right type of person', leading to them spending the rest of the interview seeking evidence to confirm that initial judgment, rather than objectively seeking evidence of the candidate's ability to fully meet the specified criteria.

The opposite of this is called the 'Horns effect', where a candidate makes such a poor first impression that you mentally attach a pair of devilish horns to the sides of their head! Again the risk is that once panel members have formed this initial judgment they spend the rest of the interview trying to prove themselves right.

As an interviewer it is important that you guard against attaching too much weight to your first impressions. The candidate who makes a great first impression may turn out to be superficial and shallow, the candidate who makes a terrible first impression may simply have been nervous, or not able to afford to buy a smart suit. To get a full picture of a candidate's abilities you need to pay full attention to the evidence generated throughout the whole of the interview.

2. Prejudices and stereotyping

This pitfall is closely related to the Halo and Horns effects, which often arise because of prejudices and stereotypes held on the part of panel members. The chairperson should remind panel members of their responsibilities in relation to the law, particularly the Equality Act 2010 (see chapter 8). This will minimise the risk of unlawful discrimination against candidates with the 'protected characteristics' covered by the Act.

However, the risk of unfair discrimination arising from prejudices and stereotyping is wider than this. I remember chairing an interview where one of the panel members said in the assessment discussion that she would not employ a candidate who had chewed gum during the interview. I pointed out that chewing gum had nothing to do with the assessment criteria, but the panel member was insistent that the candidate had behaved inappropriately in the interview and should be marked down for this.

In the subsequent feedback discussion with the candidate (who was passed by the panel overall) I mentioned this issue. The candidate told me that she got very nervous during interviews, and chewing gum was the only way to stop her mouth from becoming completely dry. If we had acted upon the panel member's prejudice against her for chewing gum during the interview we would have failed a strong candidate, who went on to do a great job.

In order for panel members to guard against making judgments that may inadvertently be prejudicial it is important to apply the principle of 'Notice the first thought, act on the second'. Your first thought may be based on an inappropriate prejudice or stereotype triggered by some aspect of the candidate's behaviour or appearance, but you then need to ask yourself whether it has anything to do with the assessment criteria specified for the interview.

The chairperson should remind panel members that all candidates must be judged on merit, against the specified assessment criteria for the interview.

3. The candidate who takes control of the interview

Some candidates will have their own agenda for the interview and will attempt to stick to this, no matter what you might ask them. It's a like listening to a politician being interviewed, when they ignore the questions in order to say whatever they want to say.

The problem with this type of candidate is that what they want to talk about may not match up with what you need to find out about. The interview can then degenerate into a battle for control, which can end in frustration for everyone involved.

It is important to use your assertive interruption skills with this type of candidate, and to be quite explicit about why you are asking particular questions. For example ...

> "One of the key responsibilities for this job is managing a budget of 3.5 million pounds. I need you to demonstrate that you have the experience and skills to manage that kind of budget."

Under no circumstances should you give up and allow control to pass to the candidate. If they do not respond to your first assertive interruption then keep doing it until they do. Remember that you and your colleagues are likely to be much clearer about the key requirements for the job than the candidate, and it is therefore your responsibility to point the candidate in the right direction.

If a candidate repeatedly fails to respond to your efforts to point them in the right direction, then that becomes their responsibility. Their failure to answer your questions should be recorded in your notes of the interview and should be addressed explicitly with the candidate if they request feedback (see chapter 7).

4. The candidate who goes quiet

This is the opposite of the last example, but can be equally difficult to handle. It is a powerful skill for an interviewer to be able to live with silence, but if it feels like it will never end it can be disconcerting for everyone involved.

If your question is initially met with silence it may simply mean that the candidate is thinking about what they want to say. Intervening too early may interrupt their thought processes, and have an adverse effect on their answer.

Watch the candidate's body language. According to the theory of Neuro Linguistic Programming if their eyes move upwards and to the right it may mean that they are trying to visualise a situation as it happened. If they are looking downwards, particularly if this is accompanied by fidgeting of the hands, legs and feet, it is likely to indicate that they are feeling anxious and struggling to come up with an answer. So in the first instance you should give them a few moments' thinking time, while in the second you may need to intervene.

Interventions may be on a content level or on a process level. Examples of **content level** interventions would be ...

"Would you like me to repeat the question?"

or

"Do you need me to clarify the question?"

Examples of **process level** interventions may be ...

"Take a few moments if you need to"

or

"You've gone very quiet – do we need to take a break for a few moments?"

5. The candidate who becomes upset

On rare occasions a candidate going quiet is the first signal that they are becoming upset or distressed.

If a candidate is showing signs of distress the chairperson should offer to ‘pause’ the interview to give them time to gather themselves. Remind them that there is water available if they would like some. Offer them the opportunity to leave the room for five minutes before restarting the interview – but also remember that this can only be five minutes – there are other candidates waiting and it would be unfair to delay their interviews.

It should be the candidate’s choice whether to re-start or to abandon the interview. If they do not wish to continue it may be appropriate to ask one of your staff to get them a cup of tea or to sit with them for a while before they leave. You may also wish to phone them later to check that they are okay.

Remember that if a candidate becomes upset it is unlikely to have been your fault. Many people find interviews to be stressful experiences, and this is likely to be exacerbated if they are experiencing other difficulties in their lives. As panel members you need to respond to the situation professionally, and balance your duty of care to that individual with your responsibility to provide fair interviews to the other candidates.

6. The panel member who overruns

As discussed in chapter 5 the chairperson has overall responsibility for ensuring that the interview runs to time, but good timekeeping is a collective responsibility of the whole panel. Each panel member should be aware of time so that they can cover their allotted criteria before the chair gives the signal for them to draw their questions to a close.

Some panel members are better at meeting this responsibility than others! There are a number of reasons why panel members sometimes fail to respond to the chairperson’s time signal – they may be so engrossed in discussion with the candidate that they miss it, or so sure that they are generating quality evidence that they choose to ignore it.

If the initial time signal fails to get a response the chair should repeat the signal. If it is ignored for a second time the chair needs to make a polite but firm intervention, along the lines of …

"Sorry to interrupt, but we need to draw this part of the interview to a close now."

Closing the interview

Before closing the interview the chairperson should check whether the panel members have any remaining questions they wish to ask. This provides a final opportunity to address any gaps which may be remaining from the discussion during the interview.

It is the chairperson's overall responsibility to check that all of the criteria have been fully tested during the interview. It is a good idea for the chairperson to have a fresh copy of the person specification in front of them for each interview. He/she can then tick off the criteria when satisfied that it has been fully tested, and note any follow-up questions to ask at the end of the interview.

Once the panel have asked all their questions the chairperson should give the candidate an opportunity to ask any questions. These should be answered fully but as succinctly as possible. You may find it helpful to anticipate likely questions and ensure that you have the answers – typical questions relate to how to claim travel expenses, where the post will be located and who the line manager will be. Do not get drawn into a fresh area of discussion with a candidate when you are bringing the interview to a close.

Let the candidate know when and how (i.e. by phone, e-mail or letter) they will be hearing from you. Thank them for attending the interview and show them out of the room. Make sure that you have agreed the arrangements for this in advance – it's another stage with the potential for unnecessary awkward moments!

Exercise - Conducting the Interview

1. Go to the video, **Interviewing 1**, at 247freetips.com.
2. Watch the opening section of the interview between Monica and Stuart.
3. Pause the video, at the fade to black, when Monica asks 'What has happened here?'
4. Note your answer to this question.
5. Run the next section of the video.
6. Pause the video again at the second fade to black, after Monica has asked, 'What's the best way to respond?' Again, note your response to this question and write down the open probing questions you would ask in order to generate evidence.
7. Run the next section of the video.

8. Listen to hear what Monica intends to do and pause the video again at the third fade to black. How does this compare to your thoughts?
9. Run the rest of the video. How do the questions you wrote down compare with those asked by Monica?

You can also use this clip to practice your note taking skills.

Summary of this chapter

In this chapter we have discussed ...

The importance of starting the interview on the right note, by making sure that the necessary practical arrangements run smoothly and by building rapport with the candidate once they enter the room.

The need to keep the interview on track – by following the interviewing skills flow chart and, if necessary, using the technique of 'Assertive Interruption'.

The importance of fully testing the criteria. This involves each panel member keeping to the interview plan. The chair of the panel has overall responsibility for ensuring that all aspects of the criteria have been fully tested before the candidate leaves the room.

Six potential pitfalls – how to minimise the risk of them arising in the first place and how to manage them if they do.

How to close the interview.

Chapter 7 – After the Interview

"A wise person decides slowly, but abides by those decisions."

Arthur Ashe

Purpose of this chapter:

To provide a structured process for assessing evidence and selecting the right candidate and to set out the steps required to complete the selection process.

Introduction

In this chapter we will cover ...

- What to do when the candidate leaves the room
- A structured process for assessing evidence and reaching agreement as a panel
- Ensuring that you select the right candidate
- Notification of successful and unsuccessful candidates
- Requesting references for successful candidates
- Giving feedback to unsuccessful candidates

When the candidate leaves the room ...

Stay quiet! There are two reasons for this. Firstly, the candidate may still be in the corridor outside and able to hear what you say. An injudicious remark which is overheard by him/her, even though the interview has finished, could result in a complaint and ultimately lead to an Employment Appeal Tribunal. At the very least it will undermine the professionalism with which you have conducted the process up to that point.

Secondly, a comment at this stage will undermine the integrity of the assessment process. As with the sift stage each panel member should come to their initial assessment independently. Premature comments about the candidate are a barrier to this taking place.

The panel should follow a **structured process** for assessing evidence and reaching agreement. This involves three stages ...

Stage 1 – each panel member reviews the evidence and comes to his/her individual assessment for each of the criteria

Stage 2 – the panel share and discuss their ratings for each of the criteria

Stage 3 – the panel agree and record their ratings for each of the criteria and their overall rating

We will now look at each of these stages in more detail.

Stage 1 – Individual Assessments

Each member of the panel should have a blank panel member rating form. They should work through the criteria listed, noting their initial ratings and brief reasons for the ratings. Although there should be no discussion **it is essential that panel members look at the notes of the whole interview** – either by swapping the notes between them or making a quick copy. This is for two reasons ...

1. Human memory is fallible, and what you think you recall from a particular stage of the interview may differ from what was actually said. Notes taken at the time are more likely to be accurate than your recollections.

2. As we have already seen in this Useful Guide, the criteria will often overlap with each other. For example, you may feel that there is a gap in the evidence provided by the candidate when they were talking about Customer Service. However, if they talked about another Customer Service example when discussing Equal Opportunities, their answers might have included evidence which addressed this original gap. It is therefore important to consider all of the evidence before you reach your conclusions.

Stage 2 – The Panel Discussion

When the panel members are ready the chairperson should ask each of them to state their ratings, which he/she should record on the overall panel rating form. Once the panel members have given their ratings the chairperson should reveal his/her own ratings. The reason for this is that the chairperson is usually the most senior member of the panel, and if he/she goes first, the other panel members may be influenced before fully discussing the ratings.

As with the Sift, the panel should then discuss the ratings given for each criteria. Particular attention should be given to areas where panel members disagree. In these instances the chairperson should lead a structured discussion on the evidence considered by each panel member which led to their decision. The aim of the discussion should be to reach an agreed rating as a panel. When doing this remember that the person in the minority may be the one with the right rating – he/she may have identified evidence that his/her two colleagues have missed.

Stage 3 – Agreeing and Recording the Ratings

As each of the criteria is discussed the chairperson should summarise the discussion, then check the proposed panel rating with the other members. Once it has been agreed it should be recorded by the chairperson on the panel rating form and discussion should move on to the next criteria.

Once ratings have been agreed for each of the criteria they should be added up to give the candidate's overall rating. The chairperson should complete the panel rating form with the panel's agreed comments and reasons for the overall rating. These comments should be brief and to the point, and must be directly related to the selection criteria. Remember that at some point in the future they may be seen by the candidate – as part of the feedback process, or in the event of an appeal against the panel's decision.

Selecting the right candidate

If the structured processes set out in this Useful Guide have been followed, this stage should be simple! At the end of the interviews you produce a ranking list (see example below – a blank template can be downloaded here, from the highest scoring candidate down to the lowest scoring candidate, and offer the job to the person at the top of the list. However, there are circumstances when this is more complicated than it may first appear. If the interviews have gone well, you may end up with more than one candidate with an equally high score. If the interviews have gone badly, you may find that none of the candidates have reached the required level and that candidates who looked promising at the Sift stage did not fulfil this promise at interview.

If you have two or more candidates with equal scores at the top of your list, you will need to re-examine the evidence they presented at interview. They may both have received the highest rating for a particular aspect of the assessment criteria, but is there anything in the evidence they presented which makes it possible to distinguish between them? For example ...

- Both may have demonstrated extensive relevant knowledge and experience, but when you scrutinise it in detail one of them may have more complete all-round experience, or more relevant sector experience, or have managed at a more senior level.

- Both may have demonstrated excellent people management skills, but one of them may have done so in particularly challenging circumstances, such as managing a substantial restructuring programme.

It is by looking in detail at the candidate's evidence against the requirements of your specification which will enable you to choose between two candidates who are closely matched.

If you scrutinise the evidence available and remain unable to decide between equally highly rated candidates you may decide to invite the candidates to return for a further interview, or test them using some of the other selection methods set out in chapter 9.

The other way in which you might choose between two equally rated candidates is through positive action, which is permitted under the 2010 Equality Act (see Chapter 8 - Interviewing and the Law). If a panel cannot distinguish between two equal candidates they can appoint a candidate with a 'protected characteristic' covered by the Act if it helps to redress existing under-representation in their organisation. To give an example, imagine that you are recruiting for a senior management position, in an organisation where 8 out of 10 posts at this level are currently occupied by men. If a male candidate and a female candidate score equally at interview you could award the post to the female candidate, on the grounds that you are redressing an existing under-representation of women.

However in most circumstances – and in all my years' experience of recruitment (since 1986) – there will be something in the evidence that will enable you to distinguish between the candidates on merit.

The opposite situation is that in which no candidates meet the required standard to be offered the post. It is not uncommon for candidates to score less well at interview than they did at the Sift – part of the purpose of having an interview is to weed out those candidates who may have looked good on paper, but whose evidence does not stand up to being scrutinised through probing questioning.

In these circumstances it is sometimes tempting still to appoint the highest-scoring candidate – after all, it avoids the expense and delay of going through the process of advertising, sifting and interviewing all over again. Before doing this you should think carefully through the implications of taking on a candidate who may not be up to the job. It is not in anyone's interests for someone to be offered a post that is beyond them – it will be demoralising for them, disrupt your team and adversely affect your organisation's performance. It is better to examine why your recruitment process has not produced the right candidate, learn the necessary lessons then re-advertise the vacancy.

If you are applying the rating scale used throughout this Useful Guide you should ensure that a candidate has scored a minimum of 2 – *Applicant has provided sufficient evidence of the criteria to meet the required standard* – for each criteria before offering them the post.

Interview Rating List

	Candidate name	Score
1		
2		
3		
4		
5		

Signed …

Chair:

Member A:

Member B:

Date:-

Notifying the Successful Candidate

The chairperson may contact the highest scoring candidate and make them a verbal offer of employment, subject to references, once ...

- The panel have agreed the ratings for all candidates and signed the ranking list
- The candidate's entitlement to work in the UK has been confirmed
- The candidate's educational certificates have been seen and verified

This should be done as soon as possible. A good candidate may be in demand, and the last thing you want is to offer them a job only to find they have been snapped up by one of your competitors!

If the candidate indicates that he/she wishes to accept the offer it should be confirmed in writing. If the candidate does not accept the offer, for example because he/she has just accepted the offer of another post, then you should ask him/her to confirm in writing that they are no longer interested in the post. This should be done as quickly as possible – an e-mail will be fine. Once you have received this you can then go on to offer the post to the second candidate on your list (assuming they have achieved the required score, of course!).

The verbal offer is also an opportunity to discuss the start date with the prospective employee.

The verbal offer should be followed up in writing using a letter which includes the following ...

- Start date for employment
- Location
- Details of salary
- Details of working hours
- Period and nature of employment (i.e. permanent or fixed term)
- Details of probation period
- Other key benefits – e.g. holiday entitlement
- Any other key conditions of employment

The letter should also make it clear if the employment offer is subject to conditions such as ...

- Satisfactory references being obtained
- Proof of a right to live and work in the UK being provided
- Passing a Criminal Records Bureau check
- Proof of qualifications

Offer letters should be used in conjunction with full employment contracts – these may either be enclosed with the letter or sent out later by the HR Department.

An example letter to the successful candidate is included below; you can download a template for your own use from here.

Letter to Successful Candidate

Dear…

Offer of Employment

Following your interview on (insert date), I am pleased to offer you the post of Operations Manager.

As we discussed in our phone call your start date will be …

Your salary will be £XXXXX per annum and you will be required to work 36 hours per week, Monday to Friday. Premises 4 U operate a flexible working hours policy and your core hours are 10.00 am to 4.00 pm.

You will be employed on a permanent basis, subject to satisfactory completion of a probationary period of six months. Your employment may be terminated in accordance with the provisions set out in the enclosed contract of employment.

You will initially be entitled to 25 days paid holiday per annum. You will also have the option of enrolling in the company's pension scheme.

I am enclosing two copies of your contract of employment. Please read this carefully and sign and return one copy as confirmation of your acceptance of this offer of employment.

I look forward to welcoming you to our team at Premises 4 U.

Yours sincerely,

Name

Job title

Taking Up References

When you make the verbal offer to the successful candidate you should confirm that they have no objection to you taking up their references. Partly this is a matter of courtesy, but it also reinforces the relationship of openness and trust which will provide a good foundation for the employer-employee relationship.

References should be used as means of confirming the information you have gained about the candidate from their application and the interview. They **should not** be requested as a means for distinguishing between two apparently equal candidates – this should be done by using the methods we have already discussed.

You should not place too much reliance on references, partly because the information they contain is notoriously unreliable! This is due to the following reasons …

- Employers fear legal action if they provide a bad reference
- An employer may be keen to get rid of your candidate – their chances of doing so may be reduced if they provide you with a detailed reference
- Personal referees have been selected by the candidate – they are unlikely to be critical!
- References are often completed quickly and lack detail

So the usefulness of obtaining references is limited, but they have the following benefits …

- Employer references are another means of confirming the candidate's identity
- Employer references provide hard information, such as how long a person was in post, their job title and their attendance record
- Hopefully – confirmation of the information you have gained about the candidate at interview

If you find a reference bland or ambiguous you may wish to call the referee to obtain first hand information about the candidate.

References should be requested using a standard letter. We have included an example on the following page related to our case study of the post of Operations Manager with Premises 4 U. You can download a blank template for your own use from here.

Reference Request

Confidential - Request for Reference

Date:

Name of applicant:

The above has applied for a job as XXX with us and has agreed that we can contact you for a reference. Please rate and comment on his/her performance in the areas listed below. Please don't write anything that might compromise you or your organisation, but I would appreciate whatever information you are able to provide.

If you'd prefer to speak on the phone please call me on XXX.

The above person was/is employed with us as XXX from date(s):

Knowledge and Experience

Please rate and comment on the applicant's knowledge and experience in the areas below.

	Very Satisfactory	**Satisfactory**	**Unsatisfactory**
Performance management			
Quality management systems			
Office health & safety requirements			
Computer network backup processes			
Equality & diversity			

Please add any comments:-

Skills and Attributes

Please rate and comment on the applicant's skills and attributes.

	Very Satisfactory	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory
People management			
Task management			
Customer relations			
Personal qualities (enthusiasm, motivation, calmness under pressure)			
Promoting Equal Opportunities			

Please add any comments:-

Performance and Conduct at work

	Very Satisfactory	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory
Overall performance			
Conduct at work			
Attendance			

Please add any comments:-

Respondent's/Referee's signature:

Date:

Respondent's/Referee's name and title:

On behalf of (employer/organisation, if applicable):

Please return this form to ...

First Name Last Name

Address

Thank you for your assistance.

Notifying Unsuccessful Candidates

We have already noted that applicants who were unsuccessful at the Sift stage are likely to be disappointed and this will be even more the case with candidates who are unsuccessful at interview. They have demonstrated a desire to work in your organisation and probably put a good deal of time and effort into their application and interview. It is therefore important to be sensitive in the wording of the letter in order to leave them with a positive impression of your organisation and a feeling of having been treated respectfully and fairly.

You may have two categories of unsuccessful candidates ...

1. Those who have not met the required standard to be appointed.
2. Those who met the required standard but were not at the top of your merit list.

Your letters should reflect this. Applicants from the second group should be told that they met the required standard, and that their papers will be kept on file in case a similar vacancy arises within the next six months.

You may wish to include some brief feedback in your letter, but should also offer the opportunity to receive verbal feedback from a member of the panel. You need to include...

- Which panel member should be contacted for feedback
- When they can be contacted

Feedback will normally be provided by phone. If you are the panel member responsible for doing this ensure that you have the interview papers to hand. When providing feedback you will need to strike the right balance between being positive and encouraging, e.g. by recognising areas where the applicant did well, while being very clear about where there were gaps between the evidence they presented and the required standard.

An example letter to unsuccessful candidates is included on the following page. A template for your own use can be downloaded from here.

Letter to Unsuccessful Candidate at Interview

Dear ***[First Name]***,

Vacancy for Operations Manager with Premises 4 U

I am writing following your interview for the above post on [INSERT DATE].

I regret to have to inform that your interview did not fully demonstrate the required knowledge, skills and attributes required for the post, and that I am therefore unable to make you an offer of employment.

OR

We interviewed some very strong candidates for the post, and I regret to have to inform you that on this occasion your application has not been successful. However, we were very impressed by your interview and would like to keep your details on file and contact you again if a similar vacancy arises over the next six months.

If you would like to receive feedback on your interview please phone ***[Name]*** on ***[specify telephone number]*** on ***[specify date].***

I would like to take this opportunity to wish you every success in your future career. Thank you for your interest in Premises 4 U.

Yours sincerely

[First Name] [Surname]

[Job Title]

Completing the Process

The recruitment process is almost at an end! Completing the process may include the following steps ...

Record keeping

Ensure that you have collected together the following papers ...

- Candidates' application forms
- Interview notes
- Panel members' individual rating forms
- Panel rating forms
- Ranking list

These papers must be stored securely, either by the chair of the panel or the HR Department. You may need to check your own organisation's procedures and record keeping requirements.

Follow-up action

Actions will include ...

- Initial contact with the successful candidate
- Letter offering employment to the successful candidate
- Reference requests
- Ensuring relevant documentation has been checked – confirmation of right to work in the UK, educational certificates etc
- Letters to unsuccessful candidates

Reviewing the panel's performance

There is no such thing as a perfect recruitment interview! Every interview is an opportunity to learn and improve, so at the end of the day's interviewing the chairperson should lead a brief feedback discussion with the panel members. Each member of the panel should be invited to self-appraise their own performance, as well as providing feedback to each other. All panel members will bring different perspectives to this ...

- The chairperson, as the senior member of the panel, will be able to draw upon greater experience
- Specialist panel members, such as HR representatives or technical experts, will be able to offer independent insights
- New panel members – while they may be less experienced – are also likely to have been more recently trained and may be able to (diplomatically) point out any bad habits!

Sitting on an interview panel can be a challenging experience and the chairperson should seek opportunities to provide constructive and encouraging feedback to less experienced colleagues.

Summary of this chapter

In this chapter we have discussed what needs to happen after the interview. This begins when the candidate leaves the room, with the structured decision making process of ...

- Individual ratings
- The panel discussion
- Agreeing and finalising the panel ratings

Once the interviews are complete a ranking list is drawn up. We have identified the reasons for contacting the successful candidate first verbally then in writing. Unsuccessful candidates should then be notified in writing and offered the opportunity to receive feedback.

Finally we have identified the steps required in order to complete the process, by ensuring that records of the interviews are complete and stored securely, that paperwork is completed and that panel members have the opportunity to provide feedback to each other.

Chapter 8 – Recruitment and the Law

"The good need fear no law; it is his safety, and the bad man's awe"

Ben Jonson

Purpose of this chapter:

To enable you to conduct the recruitment process in accordance with current UK legislation.

Please note that the summarised information set out in this Useful Guide should not be taken as a substitute for reading the Acts themselves or for obtaining qualified legal advice. Where appropriate I have included links to the relevant government websites.

Legal Requirements

This chapter focuses on three main responsibilities that the law places upon you when recruiting staff.

Firstly, the **Immigration, Asylum and Nationality Act 2006** makes it a criminal offence to employ a person who does not have the right to work in the UK. Employers are liable for a fine of up to £10,000 per employee who does not have the right to work in the UK.

It is important that everyone involved in the recruitment process knows their responsibilities in order to prevent this situation from arising.

Secondly, the **Equality Act 2010** places a responsibility on employers to ensure that recruitment is conducted with due regard to the principles of fairness and equality enshrined in the Act. Failure to comply with these legal requirements may result in an applicant appealing against your conduct or your decision and may lead to a case being taken against you at an Employment Appeal Tribunal.

Finally the **Data Protection Act 1998** sets out a number of legal obligations for employers when handling job applicants' personal information.

In this chapter we will look at each of these areas of the law, and what you need to do to comply with the legislation.

The Immigration, Asylum and Nationality Act 2006

This Act was introduced for three main reasons...

- to make it difficult for people who overstay their permission to be in the UK and/or their entitlement to work to remain in employment in breach of the UK's immigration laws
- to help employers to ensure they employ people who are legally permitted to work in the UK
- to assist the Government to tackle illegal working by helping the UK Border Agency take appropriate action against employers who use illegal labour

It puts the onus on employers to check and ensure that employees are entitled to work in the UK. For new employees the logical time to do this is as part of the recruitment process.

The UK Border Agency is clear that in making these checks employers must avoid practices which may constitute unlawful discrimination. Its guidelines state …

> It is important to remember that the UK population is ethnically diverse. Many people from ethnic minorities in this country are British citizens, and many non-British citizens from black and minority ethnic communities are entitled to work here. Therefore, you must not assume that someone from an ethnic minority is an immigrant, or that someone born abroad is not entitled to work in the UK.
>
> Employers who refuse to consider anyone who looks or sounds foreign are likely to be unlawfully discriminating on racial grounds. If document checks are carried out only for prospective employees who by their appearance or accent seem not to be British, this too may constitute unlawful racial discrimination. If a tribunal upholds a complaint of racial discrimination, there is no upper limit on the amount of compensation that the employer can be ordered to pay.
>
> Employers have a legal duty under current race relations legislation to avoid unlawful discrimination on racial grounds, and are therefore advised to carry out document checks on every prospective employee. The best way for employers to make sure that they do not discriminate is to treat all job applicants in the same way at each stage of their recruitment process.

The UK Border Agency publishes a guide to avoiding unlawful discrimination which can be downloaded from

http://www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/sitecontent/documents/employersandsponsors/preventingillegalworking/

The key part of this statement for our purposes is that employers are …

… ***advised to carry out document checks on every prospective employee***

This means that every applicant who is invited to interview should be asked to bring documentation which confirms their entitlement to work in the UK. There are two lists of documents …

List A – documents which establish that the person has an ongoing right to work in the UK

List B – documents which indicate that the applicant has restrictions on their entitlement to be in the UK

The two lists and detailed guidance are contained in the UK Border Agency Guide 'Prevention of Illegal Working', which can be downloaded from

http://www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/sitecontent/documents/employersandsponsors/preventingillegalworking/

In terms of the recruitment process for most employers, all this means the following …

- Applicants invited for interview should be asked to bring original documents (not photocopies) which confirm their entitlement to work in the UK.
- A member of the panel or a representative from the HR Department should check that the documentation appears authentic.
- If the documentation appears to be in order, it should be photocopied. The person who checked the document should sign the photocopy, recording that they have seen and checked the original document. The original document should be returned to the applicant, and the copies should be attached to the applicant's application form.

If you have any doubts about the authenticity of the documents supplied you may, in the first instance, request further documents. If your concerns remain you should notify the UK Border Agency.

You may be relieved to note that you are not expected to become an expert on forged documents! The UK Border Agency Guide states ...

> As an employer, if you are presented with a false travel document or visa, you will only be required to pay a civil penalty if the falsity is reasonably apparent. i.e. you could not have been reasonably expected to realise that the document in question is not genuine.

The Equality Act 2010

The aims of the Equality Act 2010 are to protect individuals and groups from being discriminated against unfairly, while making things easier for businesses by consolidating equal opportunities legislation under one Act.

The Act states that it is unlawful to discriminate on grounds of age, disability, race, religion or belief, gender, sexual orientation, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity. These headings are defined by the Act as '**protected characteristics**'.

The Act defines seven types of discrimination ...

1. **Direct discrimination** – e.g. refusing to employ someone on the grounds of a protected characteristic
2. **Associative discrimination** – direct discrimination against someone because they are associated with someone with a protected characteristic. This would include people with caring responsibilities for disabled or elderly relatives – it would be unlawful to refuse them employment on grounds of these responsibilities. Associative discrimination would also include actions such as discriminating against someone because of the race or ethnic origin of their partner or spouse.
3. **Indirect discrimination** – a rule or policy that applies to everyone but disadvantages someone with a protected characteristic. An example would be imposing a condition such as a height requirement when advertising a job. Although the requirement would apply to all applicants it would potentially indirectly discriminate against women, who tend to be shorter than men, some racial groups and people with some disabilities.

4. **Harassment** – which the Act defines as 'behaviour deemed offensive by the recipient'. The behaviour does not have to be directed against that individual for it to constitute harassment. So if an interview candidate overheard a panel member or another employee making an offensive comment about an individual or group covered by the 'protected characteristics', it would constitute harassment.
5. **Harassment by a third party**. Employers are potentially liable for harassment by people they don't directly employ, such as contractors. So if the behaviour of a contractor working on your premises is deemed offensive by an interview candidate you may again be liable.
6. **Victimisation**. It is unlawful to discriminate against someone because they have made or supported a claim under the Equality Act.
7. **Discrimination by perception** – direct discrimination against someone because others think they have a protected characteristic, even if they don't.

In addition to the seven types of discrimination it is also unlawful to put pressure on others to discriminate.

All of this has implications for panel members and the way the recruitment process is conducted. These include …

- Advertising vacancies. Care must be taken to ensure that advertisements do not include discriminatory statements, or requirements that cannot be met by people with protected characteristics. Examples include statements such as …

  'Must be able to lift heavy loads' – This may be considered discriminatory on grounds such as disability or gender

  'Must be able to work additional hours as required' – This may be considered discriminatory against people with caring responsibilities

- Person specifications and Job descriptions. Again, these must not include requirements that cannot be met by people with protected characteristics.

- At the Sift stage care should be taken only to assess applications against the specified criteria. Giving a candidate low ratings because of spelling mistakes on their application form may, for example, constitute discrimination against an applicant with a disability such as dyslexia.

- During and following the interview. Candidates must only be assessed against the stated criteria. When planning and conducting the interview you should ensure that your questions relate directly to the set criteria. The table below sets out some questions which are likely to be considered unlawful, and which you should guard against asking.

Five Questions NOT to Ask at Interview

Question	Why it should be avoided
How old are you?	Age is unlikely to be directly relevant to a candidate's ability to do an effective job. Asking this question may lead a candidate to believe they are being treated unfairly as it may imply that the interviewer thinks they are either too young or too old for the job. As age is a protected characteristic this is likely to constitute Direct Discrimination.
Do you have any plans to start a family?	Evidence suggests that this question is more likely to be asked to female applicants than male applicants, in which case it would be considered Direct Discrimination. Even if it was asked to all applicants it might be considered Indirect Discrimination against women, particularly if the answer had been taken into account in deciding who should get the job.

How will you cope with this job as well as your caring responsibilities?	This question is likely to constitute Associative Discrimination – direct discrimination against the applicant because they are associated with someone with a protected characteristic – possibly an elderly or disabled relative. The applicant is unlikely to have applied for the job unless they are confident that they can put the necessary arrangements in place to get there.
How many days sick absence have you taken over the last year?	Under the Equality Act 2010 it is usually unlawful to ask a prospective employee about their health before offering them work. The reason for this is to reduce the risk of people with poor health records due to disability being discriminated against, and to provide them with an equal opportunity to demonstrate their ability to meet the requirements set out in the person specification. Health screening then takes place once the job offer has been made.
Will you be able to cope with lifting heavy files?	It would only be lawful to ask this question if you could demonstrate that lifting was an essential element of the job. You would have to specify this in the job description and person specification, and ask the same question of all candidates. You would also be required to demonstrate that you had made 'reasonable adjustments', such as supplying equipment that would make it possible for a candidate with a disability to do the job.

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Positive Action

The Equality Act 2010 allows employers to take **positive action** – measures which aim to prevent discrimination or overcome past discrimination.

Examples of positive action include the following ...

- Job adverts can be aimed at people of different races, women or some other groups if an employer wants to make their workforce more diverse because they do not currently have any employees from those groups, or because these groups are currently under-represented in the workforce.

- Employers can train women, people of different races or people from other groups with protected characteristics to give them more chance of getting a better job with the employer. They can only do this when they have, for example, an existing under-representation of people who are black or too few women.

- A company needs a new person for 1 of its top jobs. All its other top jobs are done by men. When people apply for the job, the company finds 2 people are just right for the job – a woman and a man. The company can use positive action to give the job to the woman. This is because it will make the company's top people more diverse. But the company cannot give the job to the woman if the man is better for the job.

(Examples taken from the Government Equalities Office booklet 'The Equality Act, Making Equality Real')

Clearly these examples have implications for people involved in recruitment. These include...

- **Advertising** vacancies – if you wish to target groups which are currently under-represented in your organisation you may wish to think about where you advertise, e.g. by placing advertisements in publications aimed at those particular groups. You may also need to consider the wording of your advertisements, e.g. by stating that 'Applications are particularly welcome from...' then naming the relevant groups.
- **Training** – you may wish to set up training schemes for under-represented groups aimed at equipping them with the knowledge and skills needed to work in your organisation
- **Selection** – this is probably the most important point for readers of this Useful Guide. If you are choosing between **two equal candidates** for a

job you can use positive action to select the candidate from the under-represented group.

Validation Exercise

Which of the following examples are potentially unlawful discrimination? Note your answers and the reasons why. Answers can be found here.

Situation	Unlawful or Lawful?	Reasons
A Pakistani woman is refused a job because she was required to wear a skirt and her Muslim religion required her to wear trousers.		
No married female applicants are invited for interview. The Sift rating forms reveal that some of them initially received high scores from the two panel members, but that these were marked down by the panel chair.		
A job advert specifically invites applications from candidates from minority ethnic backgrounds, and is placed in community newspapers as well as the wider press.		
A panel member jokingly remarks to a candidate at interview "You look far too young to be working with the likes of us".		

While preparing for an interview a panel member mentions that he knows the candidate, and wonders how she will cope with the job as well as looking after her disabled child.		
A business only notifies the local boys' school about opportunities for school leavers.		

The Data Protection Act 1998

All employers are required to ensure that people's personal details are respected and properly protected.

The Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) has produced an Employment Practices Code, to help employers to understand and meet their responsibilities under the Act. A Quick Guide to the Employment Practices Code can be downloaded from

http://www.ico.gov.uk/for_organisations/data_protection/topic_guides/employment.aspx.

The Employment Practices Code defines the Data Protection Act as follows ...

- The Data Protection Act applies to information about living, identifiable people, such as job applicants and workers.
- Through the data protection principles, it regulates the way information about them can be collected, handled and used.
- It also gives them rights such as access to the information, and compensation if things go wrong.
- It applies to computerised information and to well-structured manual records, such as certain files about job applicants.

The 'well-structured manual records' referred to here would include notes taken when sifting applications and during interviews.

The Quick Guide includes a section on recruitment and selection which establishes three key principles ...

1. If you collect or use information about people as part of a recruitment or selection exercise, the Data Protection Act will apply. For example, you might obtain information about people by asking them to complete an application form or to e-mail their CV to you.
2. The Act does not prevent you recruiting staff effectively. What it does is help strike a balance between an employer's need for information and an applicant's right to respect for their private life.
3. The Act requires openness. Applicants should be aware what information about them is being collected and what it will be used for. Gathering information about an applicant covertly is unlikely to be justified.

The following guidance should be applied to the recruitment process ...

- Make sure that when you place a recruitment advert you identify your organisation properly – people should know who they are applying to. If you are using a recruitment agency, make sure the agency identifies itself.
- Use the information you collect for recruitment or selection only. If you are going to use the information for any purpose that goes beyond this, such as to add names to your company's marketing list, you must explain this clearly.
- Ensure that those involved in recruitment and selection are aware that data protection rules apply and that they must handle personal information with respect.
- Do not collect more personal information than you need. It is a breach of data protection rules to collect personal information that is irrelevant or excessive. Design your application forms with this in mind.
- Do not collect from all applicants information that you only need from the person that you go on to appoint, such as banking details, or information you only need from applicants for particular jobs, such as details of motoring offences.
- Keep the personal information you obtain secure; it should not normally be disclosed to another organisation without the individual's consent.
- Only ask for information about criminal convictions if this is justified by the type of job you are recruiting for. Don't ask for 'spent' convictions unless the job is covered by the Exceptions Order to the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974.

- If you are going to verify the information a person provides, make sure they know how this will be done and what information will be checked.
- If you need to verify criminal conviction information, only do this by getting a 'disclosure' about someone from the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB). Make sure you are entitled to receive this information and that you follow the CRB's procedures strictly. Only keep a record that a satisfactory/unsatisfactory check was made; do not hold on to detailed information.
- Only keep information obtained through a recruitment exercise for as long as there is a clear business need for it.

Summary

In this chapter we have identified your main responsibilities under the...

Immigration, Asylum and Nationality Act 2006

This puts an onus on employers to check that employees are entitled to work in the United Kingdom. For new employees this should be done by checking documents at the recruitment stage. Failure to comply with the Act may result in an employer being fined up to £10,000 for each non-eligible employee.

Equality Act 2010

The Equality Act aims to protect minority groups and those who are discriminated against, while streamlining and clarifying the law for employers. It identifies seven types of discrimination, most of which can occur during recruitment. It is important for panel members to ensure that they are familiar with the legislation and that they comply with it.

Data Protection Act 1998

The Data Protection Act exists to ensure that people's personal data is respected and properly protected. This applies to information gathered through the recruitment process including application forms, CVs, and both formal and informal records made by panel members.

Chapter 9 – A Brief Useful Guide to Other Selection Methods

...there is no single correct or even best method of selection. It depends on the job in question.

David A. Statt – 'Psychology and the World of Work'

Purpose of this chapter:

To provide an introduction to other methods of selection, which can be used alongside the interview.

Introduction

As we saw in Chapter 1 – The Theory of Interviewing, interviews are far from a completely reliable predictor of performance. Applying the structured approaches set out in this Useful Guide achieves a success rate of 66-70% in identifying candidates who will go on to be successful in the job. If the **right** methods can be identified to use alongside the interview it should be possible to improve this success rate and increase the likelihood of selecting the right candidate.

In this chapter we will briefly cover the following selection methods ...

- Presentations
- Exercises
- Tests

Presentations

Asking candidates to deliver a presentation will be particularly relevant if the job requires the ability to communicate effectively with groups. The Operations Manager at Premises 4 U, for example, is expected to be able to attract new customers. Requiring candidates to deliver a presentation as part of the selection process will help you to assess their suitability for this part of the role.

If you are asking candidates to deliver a presentation you need to provide sufficient information for them to prepare. You may provide this in advance or on the day – the former will provide evidence of their ability to prepare thoroughly, while the latter will test their ability to work under pressure. In making your choice you will need to decide which will be more helpful to you in assessing their suitability for the job.

You will need to provide a clear briefing about the subject matter for the presentation. Normally this will be relevant to the job, which also means that the presentation can be used to help assess their subject knowledge. However, you may choose a subject which is less directly relevant – if you want to use the presentation to find out more about the candidates themselves, or simply to test their presentation skills in isolation from other factors.

You also have choices to make about the audience for the presentation. Options include ...

- Presentation to the interview panel – this is easy to organise alongside the interview and can provide the basis for some of your questions
- Presentation to the interview panel and other candidates – this will enable you to see how the candidates' presentation skills compare, and also to see how they react to each other
- Presentation to a wider group of your staff – enabling you to consider a broader representation of views in selecting the successful candidate – e.g. by getting the staff members in the audience to complete a brief observation sheet on each candidate's presentation

Unless the ability to present is the main part of the job, e.g. for a training officer, the presentation should not last too long. 10 minutes should be sufficient time for you to assess the candidate's skills. Candidates should be informed of how long they have and should be stopped as soon as their time runs out – this tests their time management skills, ensures that everyone is treated fairly and enables you to keep to the timetable for the day.

The presentation may be followed by questions. This provides an opportunity for you to assess the candidates' ability to defend their points of view or further explain their ideas.

Exercises

You may wish to set up individual or group exercises in order to observe and assess how candidates perform in relation to aspects of the performance criteria. Often a combination of exercises are used together to create an assessment centre. Candidates' performance is observed and assessed to provide an all-round picture of their capabilities.

Individual Exercises

In-Tray

An in-tray exercise can be used to assess a candidate's ability to deal with the administrative and paper-based aspects of the job. The candidate is faced with an in-tray full of letters, reports and messages and has to prioritise the tasks before carrying them out. The exercise can be made more challenging by periodically adjusting instructions or adding material to the in-tray.

The in-tray exercise can be used to test criteria such as ...

- Ability to prioritise
- Decision making
- Performance under pressure

Case studies

Case studies can be written to reflect the types of situations that arise in carrying out the job. Candidates are required to identify not only what they would do, but the decision making process behind it, including their ability to identify and weigh up alternative courses of action before reaching their decision.

Report backs on case studies may either be verbal or in writing. The advantages of a verbal report back are that it provides further evidence of the candidate's presentation skills and an immediate opportunity to ask questions about their findings. The advantages of a written report are that it may go into greater depth, and provide evidence of the candidate's written skills. Once again, making the right choice will enable you to gather the evidence you need.

Individual Role play

Role play exercises involve observing the candidate responding to and dealing with situations that may arise in the workplace. Care should be taken to ensure that the role play scenario is as realistic as possible. Candidates should be provided with sufficient briefing to be adequately prepared, but not so much that they are overloaded with information. The other part in the role play may be played by a member of the panel or another member of staff, but added realism and consistency can be achieved by employing an actor for the role.

Scenarios for role play may include ...

- Responding to a dissatisfied customer
- Negotiating with an assertive senior manager
- Handling a disciplinary situation with a member of the team

The role play will enable you to observe the candidate's interpersonal, communication and decision making skills. As with presentations, the role play can then provide the basis for the panel to ask questions arising which are relevant to the selection criteria.

Group Exercises

Group Role Play

Role play can also be used as a group activity. For example, each candidate might be assigned the part of a manager of a department in the organisation, and have to make their case for extra funds to be allocated to their budget. This will test their ability to make a persuasive case initially, and their skills in negotiating with the other candidates.

In this example you may bring in your finance director to make the decision about how the money should be allocated so that you, and your fellow panel members, can concentrate on observing how the candidates behave and interact in the group. Ideally each candidate should be monitored by a separate assessor - which makes it a resource-intensive activity.

As with the individual role play care needs to be taken to provide the appropriate degree of briefing to the candidates. You also need to be careful when observing and assessing a group role play. There will inevitably be winners and losers at the end of the process, but it would be wrong to assume that the candidate who makes the best case for the extra funds is the candidate who has ‘won’ the exercise. **How** people persuade and negotiate is as important as the outcome they achieve, and you should be looking for candidates who behave in accordance with the values of your organisation.

Discussion Group

The discussion group involves candidates discussing or debating a topic. This may be general, such as ‘What do we mean by ethical business?’, or specific, such as ‘Identify five key steps that Premises 4 U could take to gain competitive advantage over its competitors’.

The discussion group is observed in the same way as the group role play. It is a useful exercise for identifying candidates who demonstrate leadership skills, and also for identifying other roles that candidates take within the group. In this way you could link the exercise to psychometric tests, such as Belbin’s Team Roles.

Practical Exercise

Practical exercises involve setting the group a specific task or challenge to achieve. The outdoors provides an opportunity for creating a more challenging environment, and there are plenty of centres around the country which specialise in providing facilities for team activities. A typical outdoor exercise might involve supplying the group with the equipment needed to build a bridge across a stream or river.

Indoor activities tend to be less challenging, but are less expensive and time consuming to set up. There are numerous manuals available of team activities which involve building structures with materials such as cardboard, drinking straws and uncooked spaghetti!

The point of the activity is to assess the candidates' demonstration of competencies such as leadership, planning and communication skills. As with the other team activities they will require close observation, ideally with one observer per candidate.

Doing the job

Getting someone to do the job they have applied for can be one of the best ways of finding out how the candidate performs in the work place. Actors have to audition, teachers have to demonstrate their ability to deliver a lesson. Prêt a Manger have people work in their shops for a morning as part of the selection process. If the employees are not impressed, the candidate does not get through to the next stage!

Tests

There are numerous tests available that can be used as part of the selection process. Broadly speaking there are four main types ...

Type of Test	What it indicates	What it doesn't indicate
Skill / Aptitude	Nature and degree of capability or skill; degree of potential	Motivation Commitment
Personality	Presence of personality traits* which can then be related to those required for effective performance in the job	Knowledge Job performance

Psychometric	Combination of personality characteristics, values and behaviour, which can be related to those required for effective performance in the job	Knowledge Job performance
IQ	Intelligence	Personality traits Behaviour Motivation Commitment Job performance

*Many personality tests are based on the 'big five' traits – Openness, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness and Neuroticism.

There are mixed views on the effectiveness of tests. Some advocates suggest that by using well-designed and reputable tests employers can increase their chances of selecting a candidate who will cope well with the job by up to 25 per cent. However, a study in 1990 by Blinkhorn and Johnson concluded ...

> '...we see little evidence that even the best personality tests predict job performance, and a good deal of evidence of poorly understood statistical methods being pressed into service to buttress shaky claims.'

What is clear is that it is essential to pay attention to selecting the right test for the role and your organisation. For a post with high intellectual demands and limited social contact an IQ test may be most relevant. For managerial positions requiring the characteristics associated with Emotional Intelligence, a personality or psychometric test is more likely to provide the information you need.

You should also pay attention to who will interpret the results of the tests and how the results will be used. Many well-established personality tests were originally designed for use by psychologists, and risk being misinterpreted if the people analysing the results have not had the appropriate training. As David Statt notes in 'Psychology and the World of Work' ...

> 'Some organisations cut corners by administering a paper and pencil test, like the MMPI or 16PF themselves and then try to interpret the results themselves. As interpretation is the greater part of psychological skill this is a dangerous form of penny-pinching.'

If tests are to be used it is worth investing not just in the instruments themselves, but in training your staff or utilising external sources to ensure that they are interpreted correctly. This has become easier with the advent of the internet, which makes it possible for results to be analysed quickly and independently online.

Summary

In this chapter we have briefly considered the methods that can be used alongside the interview to improve your chances of successfully recruiting the right candidate.

Presentations can easily be arranged alongside interviews. A short presentation will enable you to identify whether a candidate has the required skills for a position in an area such as training or sales.

A range of both **individual and group exercises** can be used to observe candidates carrying out activities in practice. Close observation will provide you with a great deal of information about their knowledge, skills and attributes.

A wide range of **tests** are available and can provide valuable insights as long as you pay attention to selecting the right one and ensure that it is properly administered.

All of these methods can add value to your selection process. The key aspects to ensuring that they do are to ...

1. Pay careful attention to selecting the combination of methods that will provide the information you need
2. Take a holistic approach to selection, ensuring that the methods you use are compatible with one another, and appropriate to the nature of the role and the values of your organisation.

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