

RECRUITMENT AND APPOINTMENT

SELECTION INTERVIEWING GUIDELINES

Introduction

The selection interview is the most frequently and extensively used source of acquiring information from candidates that contributes to the overall assessment of capability. It is also an opportunity to exchange information about the organisation and the vacancy that will enable both the selection panel and candidate to evaluate the match between the individual's needs and those of the organisation.

It is critical that the selection panel uses the interview effectively to ascertain, probe and clarify the candidate's related expertise and competence aligned to the vacancy. The information will be consolidated with information from other sources, such as the application, referees etc. to enable a recruitment decision to be made.

Conducting the Interview

The interview process should be made as comfortable as possible for the panel members and candidate. It should not resemble an interrogation or a pure "question & answer" session. It is important to remember that the more relaxed a candidate is, the greater likelihood of acquiring information that will enable the panel to assess their suitability.

In **preparation** for the interview, the Chairperson should ensure a:

- Structured interview timetable/program, typically allowing 30-40 minutes for the actual interview plus a further 10-15 minute period for panel assessment;
- Suitable waiting area for candidates;
- Suitable and confidential venue for conducting the interview and ensure no interruptions;
- Interview Question Form for each panel member containing a list of agreed questions assigned to respective panel members with space for assessment notes (Refer to the "Interview Question Form" template); and
- Ensure a copy of the position description, selection criteria and any other relevant information is available to the candidate.

To put the candidate at ease, the Chairperson should commence the interview by:

- Thanking the candidate for attending the interview;
- Introducing the other panel members;
- Explaining the purpose and structure of the interview (including how long the interview should go for) and that notes will be taken by panel members;
- Explaining that the questions are based on the selection criteria and that all candidates will be asked the same questions; and
- Advising the candidate that they will have the opportunity to ask questions at the completion of the formal questions.

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During the interview:

- The Chairperson will need to maintain control by directing the panel members and/or candidate to ensure the interview is conducted effectively and appropriately;
- Follow-up or probing questions are encouraged to be asked to obtain clarification of a response or more specific information;
- The panel members will need to demonstrate appropriate body language and display interest in the candidate's responses;
- When asking questions, provide the candidate with sufficient time to respond;
- Keep all discussion focussed on the requirements of the vacancy and the relevant capabilities of the candidate and avoid "going off the track";

In **concluding** the interview the Chairperson should conclude the interview by:

- Advising the candidate that the formal questions are finished;
- Inviting questions and/or asking the candidate whether they have anything further to add;
- Advising them of the next steps in the process and the approximate timeframe; and
- Thanking them for attending the interview.

To **simplify** the process, selection panels:

- Should hold all interviews at the same time and venue;
- May provide the interview questions to candidates approximately 10 minutes prior to the interview. This will enable them to prepare answers and provide relevant examples. It is important to remember that you are assessing the candidate's suitability for the job, **not** their ability to perform in an interview;
- Should leave approximately 15 minutes between each interview to discuss the candidate and agree on an assessment/rating.

In the 15 minutes scheduled between interviews, panel members will need to individually rate candidates and then discuss their assessments to derive a final rating.

Common Interviewing Problems

There are varying opinions as to whether interviews are an effective selection method or not. Some of the problems associated with interviews include:

- *Comparisons to previous candidates:* Assessing a candidate in comparison to other candidates instead of seeing what they as an individual have to offer.
- *Discriminatory questions:* The panel asking questions that are not based on the selection criterion and are not relevant to the position.
- *First impressions:* The appearance or behaviour of the individual (sometimes the way he or she dresses or the layout of his/her application) can bias interviewers for or against an

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candidate and interfere with the reception of the information presented in the rest of the interview. Having more than one person conducting the interview tends to reduce the negative impact.

- *Primacy and Recency:* This is the tendency to recall the first few candidates and the last few. Those in the middle become a blurred memory. To reduce this, you should take notes for all candidates as the interviews take place and assess candidates at the completion of each interview.
- *Halo effect:* Sometimes a panel member will be so impressed by a candidate on one criterion that he or she will attribute positive qualities for all other criteria regardless of the evidence. The requirement for you to record evidence for each criterion can help reduce this.
- *Cloning effect:* Seeking candidates who display the same qualities as panel members. Can result in an organisation of similar people; therefore, reducing innovation, new ideas and the ability to see things from different perspectives.
- *Insufficient knowledge of the job:* Some panel members may not be familiar with the requirements of the position; therefore impacting on their assessment of the candidate's suitability. To overcome this, it is suggested that you carefully read the position description and clarify any queries with the rest of the panel prior to interviews commencing.
- *Different weightings by interviewers:* In some cases panel members may weight various aspects of the job as more or less important than other panel members. It is recommended that you clarify and agree on any weighting prior to the shortlisting stage.

The following, lists common problems associated with interviews and the suggested strategies for dealing with them:

| Problem | Suggested Strategy |
|---|---|
| Wasting time interviewing unsuitable candidates. | Review position requirements and shortlist carefully. |
| Not asking questions which give specific behavioural examples. | Prepare and stick to an interview plan and standard question framework. |
| Asking misleading or discriminatory questions. | Stay with the prepared interview plan that is free of discriminatory questions. |
| Forgetting responses to important questions. | Take lots of notes. |
| Overweighting the first impression that may induce you to draw false conclusions. | Take notes. At the conclusion of the interview share notes with the other panel members and point out the biases. |
| Forming biases, prejudices and stereotypes. | Share interview notes and conclusions with other panel members. |
| Halo effect which puts a candidate in a negative / positive light simply because | Seek contrary evidence to test the effect. |

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| of the reaction to one characteristic. | |
| Not checking ambiguous data. | Seek clarification from candidates and do structured referee checks. |

Constructing Interview Questions

The purpose of the interview is to obtain information that will enable the panel to assess candidates against the selection criteria. Interview questions are developed aligned to the selection criteria and should gain the maximum information about the candidate's suitability for the position by establishing:

- How well the candidate meets the selection criteria; and
- How well the candidate could undertake the responsibilities of the position.

An effective interview question technique to apply is behavioural-based event or critical incident interviewing. The principle of this approach is that by focussing on a candidate's actual experiences, that the information obtained can be a strong indicator of future performance. This technique is based on the assumption that past performance is a key indicator to future performance.

Behavioural Event Interviewing consists of asking specific questions that require the candidate to give an example from past experience which illustrates how they behaved in a particular situation. This will give evidence of the behaviour sought as well as how the person went about it.

A sample behavioural based interview question would be:

- Q. Tell us about a time from your own experience that best demonstrates your ability to manage a project?
- Briefly describe the situation/assignment and then focus on what you did.

This type of questioning allows the panel to explore in detail what the candidate did, thought and felt.

How do behavioural questions differ from hypothetical questions?

A hypothetical question involves putting a situation to the candidate and asking how he or she would respond. This does not necessarily reflect what a person does in practice on the job, rather what they think they should do and what the panel will want to hear. It can also give a person who is acting in the job an unfair advantage.

Behavioural questions ask for actual examples of what the candidate did in practice. The answers are likely to be more candid, more honest and real because the person is asked to be specific.

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There is a place for one or two hypothetical questions in an interview. However, it is recommended that the majority of questions be behaviour based. Examples of behaviourally based questions can be found in Appendix Two. However, it is recommended that the Panel develop their own questions to reflect the specific selection criteria.

Question Types

The following are examples of the different types of questions that can be used.

OPEN QUESTIONS

These are questions that can't be answered with a simple yes or no. They force people to say more and allow the interviewer to say less. For example:

- What did you do in your last position to contribute towards teamwork? Can you please give some specific examples that would demonstrate this?
- Please give an example of a time when you had to reach a decision very quickly? What process did you follow?
- What type of work habits are important to you?

CLOSED QUESTIONS

Sometimes the answers you receive may be too general and you will need to establish some specific facts. Closed questions are the most effective way of doing this. Closed questions narrow the range of responses available to the person answering the question. At the extreme you may only allow for a “yes” or “no” answer.

Some examples of closed questions are:

- What was your role?
- How long did it take to get the group to agree to that course of action?
- Were you always on time with your work?

RAPPORT BUILDING QUESTIONS

The purpose of the interview is to encourage candidates to talk about their background, experience and their ability to match the selection criteria. Rapport building questions are intended to put the candidate at ease, gain their confidence and encourage them to talk about their strengths, etc.

Ask questions that are easy such as anecdotal conversation about non-threatening topics.

ENCOURAGING QUESTIONS

Rather than quickly continuing onto the next question, good interviewers encourage a candidate to expand on the last answer. This can be done non-verbally (eg. head nod) or by using phrases such as “go on”, “tell us more” etc.

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ASKING FOR CONTRARY EVIDENCE

The interviewee is motivated to give as many positives as possible about his or her skills and abilities. Consequently it is important for the interviewer to ask questions which will provide evidence about mistakes, weaknesses or problems in the past.

PROBING QUESTIONS

Probing questions are the ones to ask when you need more information, more specific information or more focused information.

The panel should prepare questions which require the candidate to describe how he or she would undertake the various activities by outlining how they have performed similar responsibilities in the past. Things to keep in mind:

- Questions should be open ended but not designed to lead to specific answers that may advantage some candidates;
- Questions should not limit a candidate's response to the criterion by being too specific or combining two selection criteria into one question;
- Avoid general hypothetical questions but encourage answers based on the candidate's past behaviours;
- Keep questions brief and to the point; and
- Interview questions should aim at eliciting information, not intimidating or catching candidates out.

Questions must be agreed by the panel prior to commencing the interview stage and all candidates should be given the same questions in the same order. As a general rule, interviews should last for a maximum of 45 minutes and have about eight questions. Follow-up questions should be asked to clarify candidate answers.

Equal Opportunity Considerations

Selection panels must be vigilant to identify if a candidate with a disability or impairment requires any special arrangements to enable the individual to participate effectively in the interview.

If required, selection panels should proactively identify ways in which a candidate with a disability or impairment could undertake the role and be prepared to provide an environment and requisite aids. Funding exists to assist work areas to ??????????

Interview questions should focus on the candidate's capability to undertake the role. The questions should directly align to the requirements of the vacancy.

A problem area is asking for information that may be used to unlawfully discriminate. Sometimes these questions are asked out of habit; sometimes they reflect assumptions or biases about certain groups of people.

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Below is a list of examples of questions that may result in discrimination or appeals on the basis of equity considerations. Such questions may also be unlawful in some circumstances and can result in appeals to the Equal Opportunity Commission. These types of questions should be avoided.

Questions which may result in discrimination:

Are you married?

Have you any plans to get married?

Do you intend to work only until you get married?

Have you ever been divorced?

Do you have a family?

What are the ages of your children?

Will your husband/wife/partner need work?

Are you going to have any more children?

What does your spouse do for a living?

How much income does your spouse earn?

Is your spouse likely to be transferred?

Who collects the children after school?

Who looks after the children when they are sick or on school holiday?

Why do you work when your husband can support you?

Where were you born?

Where were your parents born?

What is the name of your church or parish?

What religious holidays do you observe?

What political organisations do you belong to?

How will you manage the household if you have to work overtime/shiftwork/weekend work/travel on University business?

In some cases, you may need to get information which is relevant to the position; however, it could be perceived as discriminatory depending on how the question is phrased.

Rather than ask: “How will you manage the household if you have to work overtime/weekend work/travel on University business?”

You should say: “This position requires extensive travel on University business, can you meet this requirement?”

There is no need to question in these areas because they have no relevance to job related selection criteria

If a job requires overtime/shiftwork, state this and ask “Can you meet that commitment?”