

Lecture 26

Interview

An interview is a formal consultation usually to evaluate qualifications of a prospective student or employee. In this process, the concerned person should give his best because this is where the applicant will make the first and the last personal impression. Remember that the employer is seeking for the best applicant for his or her institution, company or organization.

26.1. Purpose of Interview

Purpose of interview is interaction of views of the employer(s) and client(s) by communicating and exchanging opinions and ideas of two or more than two individuals. One-on-one conversation between a job applicant and employer/representatives of employer is an opportunity for employer to match applicant's qualification and employer's needs so that the employer can pick up the best candidate for his or her company, institution or organization. Interviews can also occupy different positions in the selection process. An interview may occur before more in-depth assessments (such as an assessment center) or it may occur at the very end of the selection process as a final decision-making tool (e.g. as part of an assessment center). This is important because interviews are often used to explore, in more depth, data gathered from other selection methods (e.g. to discuss the findings from a personality questionnaire).

Interviews can also be guided by different approaches of psychology. Some view interviews from a social perception perspective. From this perspective, the interview is a subjective experience for all parties involved. The interviewer is not seen as a detached observer of candidate performance, but rather as a participant observer whose thinking and behavior shapes the process and its outcomes. This perspective on interviewing focuses on the formation of mutual expectations or the start of a psychological contract between the candidate and the interviewer (i.e. the employer's representative). To meet these requirements, a low degree of structure is often needed.

26.2. Interview Types

There are seven types of interview.

Screening Interview: First meeting with employers, eliminating incompetent candidates. Examples include on-campus and job fair interviews

Follow-up Interview: This is a second interview, identifying finalists for a position after asking specific job-related questions by several interviewers

Phone Interview: Such an interview is an alternative for screening and follow-up, and is used by an employer located distance away. The evaluation is based on responses of the candidate and his or her tone, enthusiasm, comfort and adaptability

Selection Interview: This is usually the final interview by supervisor/manager alongside other representatives.

Search Committee Interview: In this interview type, you are required to respond to questions from each person of a search committee. It is very important that you maintain eye contact.

Group Interview: You are interviewed as a group of several candidates together to evaluate group task, leadership, decision making, flexibility or even adaptability.

Breakfast/Lunch/Dinner Interview: Some interviews are conducted in a restaurant or café and are a little informal in nature. In such interviews, the client's personality may be judged thoroughly as the prospective employer may have a chance to observe the behavior of a client in a social setting. Another example may be by the Quality Assurance division with the people working in your prospective organization.

26.3. Interview Styles

There are four types of interview styles:

Directive: In this interview style, you are required to provide the answers of raised questions directly. You do not control the flow of the discussion.

Non-Directive: As the name implies, this is directly opposite to the directive interview style. In this interview style, you direct the interview by controlling the discussion. You get to ask questions.

Stress/Confrontational: To unsettle you, interviewers might want to evaluate how you respond with a challenging, creative answer.

Behavioral: For some positions, you will need to display robust behavior. In this regard, interviewers may seek responses that may give insights to personality traits and critical skills. These include leadership ability; intellectual competence; personal or team skills; adjustment and flexibility; motivation or communication, administrative and technical skills.

26.4. Most Common Interview Mistakes

Following are the list of some common interview mistakes:

- Arriving late will leave an everlasting impression that you do not value someone else's time.
- Arriving early is generally a good idea in order to get used to the environment. However, arriving too early will only add to the stress.
- Ensure that you dress appropriate to the job position and environment of the organization.
- Take your time to dress.
- Do not, under any circumstances, smoke during an interview. It is another bad idea to chew gum
- If you don't do your homework regarding the organization or job description, it might give away the impression that you're not interested. This preparation should be your priority.

- Not knowing your own strength and weaknesses (SWOT Analysis) is another sign that you are not comfortable with asking critical questions.
- Asking too many questions might make you sound eager or a pest. Contrariwise, asking no questions at all is a sign that you're unprepared. Always have at least one good question with you.
- Never inquire about benefits too early in the interview. On similar lines, unless explicitly asked, revealing your expected salary package is another bad idea.
- Getting impatient on some inappropriate question shows that you are not comfortable in handling stress.
- Criticizing your old boss shows that you are disloyal and not to be trusted.
- Lack of energy and passion displays apathy. Organizations look for people who will actively work with them. This may be judged by your conversation tone or even a weak handshake.
- Glancing at your watch time and again reveals that you're impatient.
- Playing the role of a savior for the company or organization sounds too self-centered.
- Unless allowed, do not put your belongings on the interview desk.

26.5. Planning

Here are few tips for giving a better interview:

Self-Assessment: Review your skills, abilities, background, values, experience, education, training, and career goals.

Understanding Field of Interest: Know the field, industries, industry trends, major competitors, future projections, characteristics of working individuals in the field you're going into.

Employer's Information: Knowledge about products, services, location, previous and projected growth, future prospects is always useful and can even equip you with better interview responses. This is tied with having awareness of job description to prove that you know you are fit for the post

Preparing for the Anticipated Questions: Giving a few mock interviews is always beneficial.

Making a List of Questions: In case you are asked to raise questions, always begin by showing your interest in the company.

26.6. Preparation

Some points you can keep in mind before giving any interview are as follows:

- In case of your very first interview, you may write out the answers of anticipated questions.
- Practice saying your responses out loud (in front of a mirror); becoming aware of your facial expressions and gestures. It might help to film or record your responses for further refinement by self-assessment.
- Ask for feedback on content, its organization and delivery.

26.7. General Instructions

Here are some general instructions which are beneficial for a good interview:

- Arrive early to avoid traffic problems.
- Arrive prepared with your résumé, references and academic transcripts organized in a folio
- Give a thoughtful and complete answer: avoid one-word answers. If necessary, ask for clarification in confusion.
- Pausing to consider answering is acceptable.
- Make a good first impression with your behavior and attitude.
- Regardless of what people say, your appearance matters the first time! Dress professionally instead of being overdressed with flashy colors or styles.
- If you're a female, use make-up moderately and avoid excessive jewelry. If you're a male, make sure that your hair and mustache are well trimmed.
- Avoid strong perfumes, colognes and aftershaves.
- Keep your shoes shiny, fingernails clean and wear a clean set of glasses.
- Have a firm handshake, maintain eye contact, smile and be friendly.
- Do not overextend the interview
- Project confidence, respect, enthusiasm, sincerity, commitment and optimism.
- Always turn off your cell phone. It is considered impolite whenever your phone rings within a formal setting.
- Just remember that in case you receive a verbal offer, do not accept or reject it immediately without thinking

26.8. Interview Tips for Specific Interview Types

There are four specific types of interviews:

26.8.1. Screening Interview

As already discussed, you may be asked to give a telephonic interview or over the internet if you or your prospective employer are located at a distance. If that is the case, schedule the interview at an ideal time (when you are fresh) and an ideal place (with quiet and good Wi-Fi). Be prepared with a list of points (skills, accomplishments, questions to ask), keep a copy of your résumé at hand, listen actively and avoid interrupting the interviewer, speak clearly and slowly (not too slow) and project enthusiasm in your voice. Any other relevant tips covered above apply. For each type of interview, the following further advice may be helpful:

26.8.1.1. Phone Interview

- If possible, stand up to revive energy.
- Smile at intervals to have its effects in your voice.
- Avoid fillers (umm, err, uh) and be more impressionable on the phone.
- Dress formally to have an interview mindset.
- Have the interviewer's website open for reference.

26.8.1.2. Video Interview

- Look at the camera instead of the screen for eye contact with the interviewer.
- Dress like you have an in-person interview.
- Pick a place with a neutral background.
- Get used to technology by running a practice interview with a friend.
- Pay attention to your body language.

26.8.2. Second Round Interview

If you've been called for a second-round interview, congratulations for making it this far! All the previous rules to getting a good interview still apply. Additionally, you'll need to review your first interview and research the employer to gather more information. Try to find staff members working in the company who are not part of the hiring committee to help you with possible strategies. Depending on the requirements of the second interview, make preparations accordingly. In the next section, this handout describes a few possible questions.

26.9. Nature of Interview Questions

According to your job requirement, you may be asked a combination of either set of the following:

- **Traditional Questions:** Such questions are generic in nature and may ask for your experience, background or personal qualities.
- **Behavioral Questions:** As the name implies, your personality will be assessed in such questions.
- **Technical or Case Questions** are field-specific and you're the best judge of which questions you need to be on the look-out for, though there are some guidelines present in the proceeding topics.

26.9.1. Traditional Questions

Traditional interview questions enable the interviewer and job candidate to establish a rapport and to get to know each other in a less stressful environment than behavioral interviews or case interviews. At any rate, you need to address the question directly.

Following are some traditional questions used commonly in an interview:

- Tell me about yourself.
- Why are you interested in this position/industry/organization?
- What do you know about us?
- Why should we hire you? What can you offer us?
- Describe your ideal job.
- What are your greatest strengths and weaknesses?
- Tell me about an accomplishment that you are proud of.
- What have you learned from your failures?
- What motivates you to do good work?
- How do you prefer to be supervised?
- How would a former supervisor describe you?
- How about your friends?

- Why did you decide to attend XYZ university?
- Why did you choose your major?
- Which classes did you enjoy most/least and why?
- What do you see yourself doing in five years?
- Do you plan to return to school for further education?
- What other positions are you interviewing for?

26.9.2. Behavioral Questions

Such type of questions asked in a job interview whereby the applicant is asked to describe past behavior to determine whether he or she is suitable for a position. For example, an interviewer may ask "tell me about a time when you dealt with a disruptive customer".

Following are the terms and their associated sample questions which may be used in behavioral questions:

26.9.2.1. Interpersonal Skills

- When working on a team project, have you ever dealt with a strong disagreement among team members or a team member who didn't do their part? What did you do?
- Tell me about the most difficult or frustrating individual that you've ever had to work with and how you approached the situation.
- Tell me about a time when you had to be assertive.

26.9.2.2. Communication Skills

- Tell me about a time when you had to present complex information – how did you get your point across?
- Describe a time when you used persuasion to convince someone to see things your way.
- Tell me about a time when you used written communication skills to convey an important point.

26.10.2.3. Initiative

- Provide an example of when you had to go above and beyond the call of duty to get a job done.
- Tell me about a project you initiated.

26.9.2.4. Creativity/Innovation

- Describe a time when you provided a creative solution to a problem.
- What is the most creative thing you have done?

26.9.2.5. Leadership

- Tell me about a time when you influenced the outcome of a project by taking a leadership role.
- Describe your leadership style and provide an example of a situation where you successfully led a group.
- Provide an example that demonstrates your ability to motivate others.

26.9.2.6. Planning and Organization

- Tell me about an important goal of yours – how did you reach it?

- Describe a situation when you had many assignments or projects due at the same time – what steps did you take to finish them?
- Provide an example of what you’ve done when your time schedule or plan was upset by unforeseen circumstances.

26.9.2.7. Flexibility

- Describe a situation in which you overcame a “personality conflict” for getting results.
- Describe a time where you were faced with issues that tested your coping skills.
- Describe a time when you received constructive criticism.

26.9.2.8. Decision-Making

- Provide an example of when you had to make a difficult decision. How did you approach it? What kind of criteria did you use?
- Describe a time when you had to defend your decision.
- Summarize a situation where you had to locate relevant information, define key issues, and determine the steps to get a desired result.

26.9.3. Strategy for Behavioral Questions

Star Formula: The situation, task, action, result (STAR) format is a job interview technique used by interviewers to gather all the relevant information about a specific capability that the job requires. The interviewer will be looking for information on what you did, why you did it and what the alternatives were.

Car Formula: A good rule for answering an interview question is to go out and get yourself a CAR, which stands for Context, Action, and Result to answer interview questions. Have a CAR in your back pocket and you can take the interview anywhere you want to go.

Behavioral Questions: How to Say It

Question: Describe a time when you worked in a team. What role did you play?

CONTEXT: Last semester, I was part of a team of five people for a group project in my Introduction to Marketing class. We were given an assignment to develop a marketing strategy for a new line of toys for Mattel. As part of the project, we were required to create a 15-page marketing plan by the end of the last day of class.

ACTION: I was the team leader, in charge of coordinating all of the group meetings and delegating tasks. I took the initiative to create a meeting schedule so that our group met every Wednesday afternoon, emailed the agenda to each group member prior to our meetings, and kept an Excel spreadsheet of all of the tasks. I also worked on making the team cohesive and supportive of each other by mediating conflicts. To do so, I facilitated discussions, listening to each member, and helping them to work towards a compromise.

RESULT: As a result of my efforts, we finished the project one week ahead of schedule and were chosen as the group with the “most innovative” marketing plan. Also, the number of conflicts between members significantly decreased and we were able to agree upon a marketing plan that satisfied everyone.

Block 1 An example of the CAR formula

26.9.4. Technical Questions

Traditional interview questions tend to be straightforward questions that focus on your personality, preferred ways of interacting with others and how you would handle hypothetical situations. Traditional interview questions enable the interviewer and job candidate to establish a rapport and to get to know

each other in a less stressful environment than behavioral interviews or case interviews. Such questions are common in finance, accounting, consulting, engineering and computer science fields. The questions may be related with concepts learned from coursework, industry knowledge, specific skills. To master these, practice them and consult other workers and alumni for an opinion.

26.9.5. Tricky Questions

If someone asks you a trick question, they ask you a question which is very difficult to answer, for example because there is a hidden difficulty or because the answer that seems obvious is not the correct one. Following are some tricky questions:

- Tell me about yourself? (Reply keeping in view audience and purpose)
- What are your greatest strengths and weaknesses? (Be honest and turn it into an opportunity)
- What are your salary expectations? Start with “I am sure you have a range in mind” and then “What are you willing to offer?” instead of quantifying the answer immediately

One area that I have been working on is feeling more comfortable with public speaking. While I have given presentations in class on several occasions, I noticed that I do get more nervous than I would like when speaking in front of large groups of people. For this reason, I took the initiative to join the Debate Society at Cal to get more experience with public speaking. I recently participated in a regional debate competition where I helped my team win second place. Because of my experience in the Debate Society I have felt less nervous and more confident about speaking in public and feel that this position would be a good fit for me because I could continue to develop my communication skills.

Block 2 Sample Strength and weakness

26.10. Questions for Employer

Following are some of the questions which are asked by interviewer to employer:

- What kind of training do you offer to new employees?
- When and how are employees evaluated?
- What are the best/most difficult aspects of working in this group/organization?
- What’s the biggest challenge facing this group/organization right now?
- How would you describe the culture of this organization?
- What do you see as unique about your organization compared with your major competitors?
- What are your plans for expansion in terms of product lines, services, new branches, etc.?
- How would you describe this organization’s management style?
- How are decisions made?
- What are some typical first-year assignments?
- How does this position fit into the overall organizational structure?
- May I have your business card?
- What are the next steps in the hiring process?

26.11. After the Interview

Thing which we should do after an interview are following:

- Write a Brief “Thank you note”. In this note, you should reiterate your interest and state why you are ideal candidate, realistically, after evaluating the whole interview process. In case of silence from the employer, communicate with them after a wait of week or two to show your continued interest for the position, as a follow-up email.

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