Asynchronous video interviews in the hospitality industry: Considerations for virtual employee selection

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ABSTRACT

Hospitality organizations utilize a variety of selection tools to hire the best candidates. Traditionally, hospitality recruiters have relied on face-to-face interviews for choosing the most qualified candidates to represent the firm. While real-time Internet-based interviewing platforms are increasingly utilized among hospitality organizations, a cutting edge technology-based interviewing phenomenon has emerged: the use of asynchronous video interviews (AVIs). In order to conduct this modality of interviews, employers send text-based questions electronically and the candidate records his or her responses using a webcam via various proprietary software platforms. Following the promise of reduced costs and increased efficiencies, many organizations have adopted this modality of interviews; however, little research has been conducted regarding their effectiveness among both providers and users. Additionally, the appropriateness and alignment of AVI in the hospitality industry for the use of selecting service representatives should be investigated. In light of this, the present research examines the literature on interviewing modalities, predictive validity of selection tools, and electronic Human Resources and presents several propositions as well as an agenda for future research. Furthermore, the present research presents a conceptual model for AVI using the literature on electronic Human Resources as a backdrop.

1. Introduction

The employment interview is a key component to the applicant selection process, and is one of the essential functions of Human Resources Management (HRM) in addition to job analysis, recruitment, training and development, compensation and benefits, and employee safety and relations (Woods et al., 2012). Traditionally held face-to-face and via telephone, the modality for interviews has undergone a revolution in recent years, and increasingly, with the emergence of web-based communications platforms, preliminary interviews are conducted over the Internet. Furthermore, as a result of the weak employment market after the most recent recession, the number of job applications has risen dramatically and companies have become more and more dependent on using technology-based selection platforms (Weber, 2012), a practice shared among an estimated 50 to 75% of employers (Milne-Tyte, 2011; Montage, 2013; PRNewswire, 2012).

Interviews conducted over the Internet (i.e. video interviews or online interviews) fall into one of two categories: (1) synchronous interviews which occur in real time, requiring all parties to be online simultaneously; or (2) asynchronous interviews which are not conducted in real-time, therefore allowing all users greater flexibility as to the scheduling component (O'Connor et al., 2008). Real-time or synchronous interviews currently used in organizations, are also known as "two-way" interviews. Synchronous video platforms, such as Skype, Adobe Connect, GoToMeeting, and FaceTime, enable recruiters to streamline selection and hiring activities, thus improving cost and time-savings efficiencies (Kiviat, 2009; Weber, 2012). While synchronous video interviews have become more commonplace in the hospitality industry, the use of asynchronous video interviews (AVI) has emerged in recent years as a cutting edge technology-based interviewing platform among the major brands.

According to the Linux (2005), asynchronous communication is defined as "the exchange of messages, such as among the hosts on a network or devices in a computer, by reading and respond-

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ing as schedules permit rather than according to some clock that is synchronized for both the sender and receiver or in *real time*". Toldi (2011), one of the first researchers to study AVI's, explained how these interviews work as follows: "A recording of a candidate answering interview questions. The candidate is only able to give information due to the asynchronous nature of a nonlive video interview. They are unable to ask the interviewer questions and receive other information from the employer. The interview is recorded at one point in time and is reviewed by the interviewer at another point in time." (p. 20) In contrast to synchronous interviews, AVI, also known as "one-way" interviews, employs asynchronous communication by means of a video format. For example, upon receiving an invitation link from a recruiter, the applicant utilizes a web camera with an Internet-based software platform to record his or her interview (Tolan, 2012). These interviews occur at the convenience of the applicant and upon completion, his or her responses are stored in a virtual data file, which can then be accessed by recruiters and hiring managers at a later date and time. Some of the advantages to using AVI proprietary software platforms, as opposed to two-way alternatives such as Skype and others, include the reliability of a high-quality audio connection, availability of technical support among all users, and opportunities for branding (Zielinski, 2012).

Since the 1990's companies have been looking at different interview modalities with the aim of making the selection process more efficient. In this regard, initial change of interview modality entailed replacing an initial face-to-face interview with a telephone interview: a phenomena which was documented in several research studies (Blackman, 2002; Fletcher, 1997; Funder, 1995; Silvester et al., 2000). As technology evolved and recruiters had other means of communication at their disposal, computer-mediated interviews began. Compared with synchronous video interviewing technologies, AVI is even less explored in the literature. The nascent stream of literature on AVI's include a study on the potential role of AVI in tele-psychiatry (Yellowlees et al., 2010) and applicants' technology acceptance (Brenner et al., 2016). Within the field of hospitality management, two recent studies have been conducted with the first one addressing the perceived fairness of and AVI experience among candidates (Toldi, 2011), and the second reporting effects on applicants regarding the selection process (Guchait et al., 2014).

Although academic inquiry as to the use of AVI is still emerging, several hospitality organizations have already implemented this technology for the purpose of selection and hiring. One of the first firms who have embraced AVI is the Walt Disney Company, utilizing this platform for the Disney College Program (http://cp.disneycareers.com/en/default/). As part of the application and screening process, applicants are granted a web-based interview upon meeting preliminary criteria. There are dozens of ancillary blogs, websites, chat rooms, and YouTube videos available on the Internet, all offering advice and tips for mastering the Disney College Program AVI. Disney also provides its own blog sponsored by the Disney Parks & Resorts Internships & Programs division (https://disneyprogramsblog.com/), delivering AVI information to prospective candidates.

In addition to Disney, there are several third-party vendors offering AVI to early technology adopters in the hospitality industry for selection and hiring purposes. Third party software development companies such as Hirevue (hirevue.com), Vidrecruiter (vidrecruiter.com), and Interview Rocket (interviewrocket.com), for example, have become more common among hospitality organizations seeking to conduct AVI and these platforms claim to assist organizations in streamlining their selection process. HireVue's (http://hirevue.com/customers/) proprietary software, "Talent Interaction Platform," includes customers from Hilton Worldwide, Panda Restaurant Group, Inc., Dunkin' Brands, and Car-

nival Cruise Line, for example. VidCruiter (http://www.vidcruiter.com/) offers an entire suite of e-recruitment products and platforms and includes client SilverBirch Hotels & Resorts, Canada's leading hotel management company operating under independent and franchised brands such as Marriott, Hilton, and Radisson. SparkHire's (https://www.sparkhire.com/) hospitality clients utilizing their proprietary AVI software include Delta Airlines, KFC, NewCastle Hotels & Resorts, Pizza Hut, Sky West Airlines, and Taco Bell. New developers offering similar AVI technologies have entered the market, gaining traction as the number of hospitality companies using this technology continues to increase. In light of the growing popularity of AVIs in the hospitality industry and the relatively smaller amount of academic research in the area, the present research sought to make a contribution to theory and practice. Throughout the course of the next sections, the researchers explore the literature on employee selection with an emphasis on interview modality and electronic human resource systems. The paper posits a number of propositions, a conceptual model, and an agenda for future research.

2. Theory

2.1. Congruency of AVI use in the hospitality industry

The adoption of AVI technology among hospitality employers raises some potential congruency issues as to the use of this interviewing modality in the service sector. Services are characterized by inseparability of production and consumption, heterogeneity, and perishability, producing an aspect of intangibility within the employee-customer interaction (Zeithaml et al., 1985). Since service workers are the front-line face and voice of a company, worker characteristics transfer to the experience of the service itself. Moreover, the heterogeneous nature of services calls for workers who can produce unique service experiences, and these "moments of truth" are difficult to replicate, thus potentially providing a source of competitive advantage (Carlzon, 1987).

In addition to these features, services are largely co-created between customers and a service organization (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004; Vargo and Lusch, 2004), fostering an environment for the customization of services; therefore, the hospitality industry requires workers with the capacity to understand guests' needs and desires while simultaneously providing customized solutions. These sought-after hospitality employee characteristics are challenging to identify in face-to-face interview conditions, and with an increasing number of hospitality companies adopting AVI, it would be pertinent to ask whether this interviewing modality is capable of fully capturing these unique employee characteristics desirable in the industry.

The placement and use of AVI as an early screening tool in the employment selection process allows for a brief introduction of prospective employees, in contrast to the duration of full face-to-face interviews. Thin-slice empirical research investigating the accuracy of recruiters' first impressions of applicants via short videos has demonstrated that well-trained recruiters were skillful at assessing applicants' personality profiles (Mast et al., 2011); while other thin-slice studies have shown that individual video raters' first impressions were poor predictors of performance, only increasing in validity when multiple raters' impressions were aggregated (Eisenkraft, 2013), and used in conjunction with structured interview approaches (Miles and Sadler-Smith, 2014). Further research is required to determine the extent to which relatively short AVI (in comparison to full length face-to-face interviews) can accurately be used to assess job candidates' personalities and organizational fit, in addition to the nuanced service orientation required of prospective hospitality employees.