Structured behavioral and conventional interviews: Differences and biases in interviewer ratings

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ABSTRACT

This research examined three issues: (1) the degree to which interviewers feel confident about their decisions when they use a specific type of interview (behavioral vs. conventional), (2) what interview type shows better capacity for identifying candidates' suitability for a job, and (3) the effect of two biases on interview ratings: a) the sex similarity between candidate and interviewer and b) having prior information about the candidate. The results showed that the SBI made raters feel more confident and their appraisals were more accurate, that prior information negatively affects the interview outcomes, and that sex similarity showed inconclusive results. Implications for theory and practice of personnel interview are discussed.

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Entrevistas conductuales y convencionales estructuradas: diferencias y sesgos en las valoraciones de los entrevistadores

RESUMEN

Esta investigación examinó tres cuestiones: (1) el grado en que los entrevistadores se sienten seguros con sus evaluaciones cuando utilizan un tipo específico de entrevista (conductual o convencional), (2) qué tipo de entrevista muestra mejor capacidad para identificar la idoneidad de los candidatos y (3) el efecto de dos sesgos en las calificaciones de las entrevistas: (a) la similitud entre el sexo del candidato y el del entrevistador y (b) tener información previa sobre el candidato. Los resultados mostraron que los evaluadores se sienten más seguros de sus evaluaciones y que éstas son más precisas con la entrevista conductual estructurada - ECE, que la información previa sobre el candidato afecta negativamente a la entrevista y que la similitud en el sexo de entrevistador y entrevistado ha producido resultandos no concluyentes. Finalmente, se discuten las implicaciones para la teoría y la práctica de la entrevista de selección.

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Decades of scientific research have established three important findings concerning personnel selection interviews. First, according to a number of surveys carried out in different countries and with all types of organizations, the employment interview is the most frequently used procedure and it is the most relevant in the decision-making of practitioners (Alonso, Moscoso, & Cuadrado, 2015; Salgado & Moscoso, 2011). Second, research has also found that structured interviews have proven to be a valid procedure for predicting job performance (Huffcutt, Culbertson, & Weyhrauch, 2014; McDaniel, Whetzel, Schmidt, & Maurer, 1994; Salgado & Moscoso, 1995, 2006). The third finding has been to demonstrate, across the world, that interviews are overall the instrument which is most positively regarded by candidates (Anderson, Salgado, & Hülsheger, 2010; Liu, Potočnik, & Anderson, 2016; Steiner & Gilliland, 1996).

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A scarcely researched issue concerning the selection interview is the degree to which interviewers feel confident about their decisions when they use a specific type of interview (e.g., unstructured vs. structured). A second issue is to identify what structured interview content (e.g., conventional vs. behavioral) shows a better capacity to identify candidates' suitability for a job. A third less investigated issue is related to two biases that can affect the assessments: a) the degree to which sex similarity between candidate and interviewer affects interview decisions and b) the effect of having additional information about the candidate (e.g., test results, resume, and recommendation letters).

The objective of this research is to shed further light on these four neglected issues concerning the usefulness of the interview as a procedure for making hiring decisions.

Employment Interviews: Types and Psychometric Properties

There are three main interview types depending on their content and degree of structure (Salgado & Moscoso, 2002): (1) Conventional Unstructured Interview (CUI), which is the most used personnel interview, refers to an informal conversation between the candidate and the interviewer, who formulates the questions according to the course of the conversation and without following any previous script (Dipboye, 1992; Goodale, 1982); (2) Structured Conventional Interview (SCI), in which the interviewer works from a script or a series of guidelines about the information that must be obtained from each interviewee and it typically includes questions about credentials, technical skills, experience, and self-evaluations (Janz, Hellervik, & Gilmore, 1986); and (3) Structured Behavioral Interview (SBI), which is based on the evaluation of past behaviors (Janz, 1982, 1989; Moscoso & Salgado, 2001; Motowidlo et al., 1992; Salgado & Moscoso, 2002, 2011). Meta-analyses have shown the reliability and construct and criterion validity of the different types of interviews (e.g., Huffcutt & Arthur, 1994; Huffcutt, Culbertson, Weyhrauch, 2013, 2014; McDaniel et al., 1994; Salgado & Moscoso, 1995, 2006). Other studies have also reported on content validity (e.g., Choragwicka & Moscoso, 2007; Moscoso & Salgado, 2001).

With respect to reliability, Huffcutt et al. (2013) carried out a new meta-analysis to update the results found by Conway, Jako, and Goodman (1995). The results for low structure interviews (CUI) were .40 when they were evaluated by separate interviewers and .55 in panel interviews. For the interviews with a medium level of structure (SCI), the values increase to .48 (serial interviews) and .73 (panel of evaluators). Finally, in the category of "high structure" (SBI) they found a reliability of .61 in the case of serial interviews and .78 when the evaluation is performed by a panel of evaluators. In their meta-analysis, Salgado, Moscoso, and Gorriti (2004) found a coefficient of .83 for SBI. These results are like those found by Conway et al. (1995), that is, the higher the degree of structure, the greater the reliability among interviewers.

Several studies have found that structure is also an important moderator of validity since as the level of structure increases, the interview validity increases. Recently, Huffcutt et al. (2014) found higher validity coefficients. Specifically, their results showed a coefficient of .20 for non-structured interviews (CUI), .46 for conventional structured interviews (SCI) and .70 for those with a higher level of structure (SBI). This last result is very similar to the value of .68 found by the meta-analysis of Salgado and Moscoso, 1995, 2006), in which they concluded that the SBI was valid for all occupations with validity ranging from .52 for managers to .80 for clerical occupations.

Other relevant studies have found that the SBI is more resistant to adverse impact (Alonso, 2011; Alonso, Moscoso, & Salgado, 2017; Levashina, Hartwell, Morgeson, & Campion, 2014; Rodríguez,

2016). There is also evidence of the economic utility of the SBI (Salgado, 2007). As a whole, the results of the meta-analytical reviews performed supported the use of SBIs for hiring decisions.

Research vs. Practice Gap

Despite the empirical evidence on the psychometric properties of the SBI, there is still a gap between research findings and professional practice (Alonso et al., 2015; Anderson, Herriot, & Hodkinson, 2001). Nowadays, most medium and small companies continue using unstructured interviews rather than structured behavioral ones.

In this regard, there are some issues related to professional practices that have been insufficiently researched. For instance, research is scarce concerning the degree to which interviewers feel confident about the decisions based on SBI or SCI. Two small-sample studies carried out by Salgado and Moscoso (1997, 1998) found that the interviewers have more confidence in their assessments with SBI than with SCI. However, additional studies are necessary.

Research has also shown that access to previous information about candidates (e.g., resume, recommendation letters, academic record, and test scores) can produce impression bias in appraisals (Campion, 1978; Paunonen, Jackson, & Oberman, 1987). For example, Macan and Dipboye (1990) found that the interviewer's prior impressions on candidates correlated .35 with the ratings given to interviewees. The frequency of this kind of bias seems to be larger for unstructured interviews than for structured ones (Dipboye, 1997). In fact, research on highly structured interviews recommends against having access to the candidate's prior information (Campion, Palmer, & Campion, 1997; Latham, Saari, Pursell, & Campion, 1980). This recommendation has been supported by the meta-analytical studies of McDaniel et al. (1994) and Searcy, Woods, Gatewood, and Lace (1993), who found higher criterion validity when the interviewers did not have access to cognitive test scores.

Another scarcely researched issue is the degree to which sex similarity between candidate and interviewer can bias interview decisions. Elliott (1981) found that the female candidates were assessed slightly higher by male interviewers ($d = 0.28$) and that the male candidates were rated similarly by female and male interviewers in a SCI. Using a campus recruitment interview, Graves and Powell's (1996) findings showed that sex similarity of interviewer and candidate correlated .08 with the overall appraisal. In a third study, Sacco, Scheu, Ryan, and Schmitt (2003) found that the ratings for the candidate were higher when interviewer and candidate sex were matched ($d = 0.09$). More recently, McCarthy, Van Iddekinge, and Campion (2010) examined the effects of sex similarity on the evaluations for three types of highly structured interviews (experience-based, situational, and behavioral). They concluded that the effects of sex similarity were non-significant. Therefore, as a whole, the findings of these three studies are inconclusive, although they suggest that SBIs can be more robust against sex-similarity bias than SCIs and UCIs.

Aims of the Study

The first objective of this study is to compare the effectiveness of each interview in identifying the candidate's suitability for a job. Considering that the SBI has more validity than the SCI, the following hypotheses are considered:

Hypothesis 1: the SBI identifies candidates' capacities more accurately, which implies that it discriminates better between qualified and unqualified candidates than the SCI.