

Why the Job Interview is the Worst Selection Tool

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The job interview seems to be the most popular selection tool in Zimbabwe. However, most people who love this selection method are not aware that the interview is an unreliable selection method. Research has consistently shown that unstructured interviews are the most unreliable selection method.

Research shows that the interview methods on average only explains 8% of the variation in performance. This means that if you hire 100 people using an interview there is a chance you will find only 8 of these people being good performers despite your interview results have confirmed all the 100 candidates as performers. Given the low reliability and validity of the interview, most people still prefer it when hiring. The question is; why is the interview method so popular despite the documented shortcomings?

The reason why the interview method is generally popular is that it is easy for managers to manipulate the process and the results to suit a certain outcome. If you have attended interviews as interviewee, sometimes the candidate who eventually gets the job shocks you. Untrained raters are easily influenced to favor a certain candidate. Interviewers can typically over inflate ratings for certain candidates even if there is no evidence of competency. Interviewers are rarely asked to justify their ratings with evidence. We have heard of scandals locally related to how organisations end up hiring incompetent people due to a number of factors.

Most of the interviews you see on the market are unstructured. This means they are unstandardized; meaning the questions being asked may not be core to the job. This can also mean that the answers expected from each question are not agreed in advance. Interviewers due to the unstructured nature of the questioning and responses can rate candidates based on their own preference instead of the requirements of the job.

Some of the factors that tend to make the interview unreliable and less valid as a selection tool are; interviewers tend to ask questions that are not related to the job. The interview process is affected by biases. Some of the common useless interview questions often asked are: How old are you? Are you married? What is your religion? There many more demographic related questions that are asked but have no relationship to performance in the target job.

In some instances, you find that interviewers are biased. For example, research shows that smartly dressed candidates tend to be rated higher in interviews even if they do not have the competencies for the job. Overconfident candidates also tend to get higher ratings in interviews even in cases where they do not have the necessary competencies for the job. Others factors often smuggled as a criterion in an interview are race, tribe, religion, gender even though research has consistently shown that these factors have zero relationships with performance on the job.

The biggest driver for people to prefer the interview method over other more reliable methods is that it is

easy to manipulate the process. The process structure of most interviews in this country is flawed. It allows managers to hire relatives, political colleagues, and many other incompetent individuals. Most people who prefer this method over known effective methods {supported by a wealth of scientific evidence} such as psychometric tests are not interested in the success of the organisations but are more interested in furthering their own interests ahead of the organisation's interest. This is the tragedy of the modern-day Zimbabwe organisations.

The wrong usage of interviews is compounded by the fact that most organisations do the selection process in reverse order hence the poor quality of candidates they end up hiring. Once candidates have been shortlisted for interviews {through meeting minimum education and experience} the next stage is for them to go through psychometric tests. However, because other managers may have hidden agendas they start with interviews immediately after shortlisting. This is a sure way to get the wrong candidates.

For those who love the interview method use it only after the candidates have passed through psychometric tests. With that approach, you ensure that you only interview candidates with the right cognitive ability for the job.

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