

# Abstract



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Abstract The interview can be regarded as a selection device that is adopted by almost every company (Lowry, 1994). Experts in this area would think a structured interview is more reliable and valid than an unstructured interview due to its consistency and standardization (McDaniel et al., 1994). The situational interview is a typical structured interview. Compared to other conventional types of interviews, such as psychological interviews, job-related interviews and behavioural interviews, situational interviews can yield higher validity and reliability (McDaniel et al., 1994). This paper aims at discussing why situational interviews tend to be more valid and how situational interviews achieve higher validity. Additionally, the author will suggest a typically successful procedure of a situational interview and some possible mistakes as well as recommendations will be given at the end.

Structured Interview Interviews can differentiate from each other by their standardization extent. Experts in this field may not have the same definition of a structured interview, whilst most of them would consider that an interview is structured in that the content of questions and acceptable answers were predetermined and candidate's responses will be rated for the appropriateness of their content (McDaniel et al., 1994). According to Dessler (2011), a structured (or directive) interview can be defined as an interview that follows a predetermined subsequence of questions. On the contrary, unstructured interviews usually gather information from candidates in a less symmetric way. Seldom can people predict the answers in unstructured interviews. Consequently, there is hardly any scoring standard in unstructured interviews. Based on previous research (McDaniel et al., 1994; Schmidt & Zimmerman, 2004), people are inclined to hypothesize more validity and reliability on structured interviews rather than unstructured

interviews. Empirically and theoretically, the interview structure can affect evaluation results in two approaches. First, the lower degree of standardization may lead unstructured interviews to lower reliability and validity (Schmidt & Zimmerman, 2004). Second, structured interviews are able to acquire wider range of information than unstructured interviews (Lowry, 1994). In addition, it is hard to clearly draw a line between structured interviews and unstructured interviews. Practically, the distinction between them is a matter of extent (Dessler, 2011).

### Situational Interviews Can Yield High Validity

1. The validity of interviews To evaluate the effectiveness and efficiency of situational interviews, validity is of immense significance. According to Walsh and Bets (2001), an interview can be conceived as valid if it can measure what the interviewers want to measure. Usually, the validity of interviews is tested in terms of predicting candidates' job performance and training performance. Referring to past research (McDaniel et al., 1994; Schmidt & Zimmerman, 2004), structured interviews, despite the content, can yield higher validity than unstructured interviews. Also, with regard to interview content, situational interviews are more valid than job-related interviews, which are more valid than psychological interviews (McDaniel et al. 1994).
2. Situational interviews A situational question is usually a dilemma based on symmetric job analysis, which requires candidates to give a possible solution (Gary et al. 1980). Although interviews can be categorized by various content of questions, basically, all situational interviews are structured interviews (McDaniel et al. 1994). Because the questions and acceptable answers of a situational interview are designed in advance, the interview tends to be more structured rather than unstructured. There are two factors influencing a situational interview to be

valid. First, a situational interview is a high-standardized interview, which conduces to keeping the whole interview in consistency (Maurer, 1997). In terms of interview procedure, a situational interview follows a standard manner. Questions and acceptable answers are also determined in advance, so the questions will be designed to qualify candidates' abilities that match the company's need. Also, there will be a scoring standard for interviewers to follow. Simultaneously, interviewers will rate applicants in a relatively fair way. With respect to interviewees' response, it is difficult for them to fake the answer, because situational questions are more complicated than traditional questions. The answers cannot be simply scored on the basis of right or wrong. Interviewers may just find what can match their requirement in the responses. Briefly, a situational interview is more valid on the ground that it is structured. Second, compared to other structured interviews, a situational interview can assist the company to gather more information about whether the candidates are flexible, creative and solution-oriented (Latham et al., 1980). One advantage of situational questions is that the direction can be multiple. A situational question can also be job-related (Latham et al., 1980). In addition, when candidates are giving their responses, they may use experience as a basis, so the interviewers can see whether they are capable to solve problems. However, to answer a situational question, candidates cannot be limited in their experience. What they are expected to do is to demonstrate their creativity and flexibility. In short, situational interviews are more functional than others so that companies can acquire the candidates more to choose the right one. Historically, scholars used to think that a situational interview is the last selection alternative to be valid. They believed that a psychological test

could yield highest validity, which was proved by the research of Dunnette et al (1971), Hunter and Hunter (1984) and Reilly and Chao (1982). The reason might be there was seldom any patterned interview at that time. Unlike today, people were inclined to use unstructured interviews for the reason that there is not a certain interview structure to follow. Although situational interviews have been proved to produce higher validity, the research still left something to be desired. First, previous researches (Latham et al., 1980; McDaniel et al. 1994) were based on different samples to compare the validity of situational interviews and other types of interviews. No research could be found that the incremental validity of situational interviews over the validity of typical interviews is specifically investigated in evaluating the exactly same sample. If the researchers can test the same people who experienced both situational interviews and others, the results may be more convincing. Second, practitioners would question that situational interviews are not as practical as others (Latham and Finnegan, 1993). One approach to their objection is situational interviews may be too structured for interviewers to examine the effects of asking candidates probing follow-up questions.

Successful Situational Interviews A typical and successful situational interview procedure can be described as follows. Before the interview, it is indispensable to prepare job analysis, which the entire interview will base on. This is probably the most vital part of a valid selection interview (Lowry 1994: 203). Next, interviewers should rank the job analysis based on the degree of importance, for example, rating the different requirements of knowledge, skills and abilities (KSA). Third, it is also crucial to create questions, which can measure critical aspects of the positions. After the creation of questions, benchmarks of questions are needed, which

can contribute to standardizing the scoring process. Subsequently, it is time to conduct the interview. Finally, evaluation of the entire interview should not be neglected (Pursell 1980: 911). As is mentioned above, some practitioners may think the situational interview is too structured to implement. In the future, researchers can try to find a more practical way to implement situational interviews.

### Common Interviewing Mistakes of Interviewers and Interviewees

Even professional interviewers may make mistakes whilst interviewing candidates. As far as the consequence is concerned, the top two deadly mistakes for interviewers can be monopolizing the conversation or letting candidates control the interview and being too arrogant. First, spending too much time talking rather than listening may let the interviewers fail to obtain enough information from candidates (Nierenberg, 2005). The result would be failing to select right people to fill the position. Also, if candidates lead the whole interview, the validity of the interview may be extremely low, because interviewer cannot test what they want in this way. Thus, interviewers should balance the degree of controlling. Second, being arrogant can also be a deadly mistake (Hinrichs, 1984). An interview is not only the way where interviewers can get to know candidates, but also the way where interviewees can acquire the company. Face-to-face meetings may leave a much more stronger impression than websites. If interviewers are patronizing, the candidates may feel uncomfortable and be pushed away. Even if the interviewers can select qualified ones, candidates may choose not to enter the company due to the arrogant attitude. For interviewees, the most serious mistake can be failing to research the company, which may result in saying too little or too much irrelevant stuff, ignoring or misunderstanding the cues indicated by

the interviewers, and asking no question or asking stupid questions (Nierenberg, 2005). These would undoubtedly leave a negative impression. Therefore, it is highly recommended being prepared, search information about the company as much as possible before the interview. Conclusion In conclusion, structured interviews can produce higher validity than unstructured interviews, mainly because the interview structure can keep the whole interview consistent and standardized. As a typical structured interview, a situational interview is more valid than other conventional interviews on the ground that it is structured and functional. However, there is something to expect in future research, such as using the exactly same sample to compare situational interviews and other types of interviews, and finding a more practical way to implement situational interviews. In addition, this paper provided a conventional procedure of a situational interview. Eventually, there are some mistakes that both interviewers and interviewees should avoid. Interviewers should prevent from monopolizing the interview and being arrogant, which may result in choosing the qualified candidates. Interviewees should prepare for the interview in advance. A successful situational interview needs sufficient preparation and appropriate implementation.