



STRUCTURED ORAL INTERVIEWS

BACKGROUND

One of the tools public safety agencies can utilize during the selection process is a structured oral interview (SOI). The SOI consists of a series of questions that seek to assess the candidate's job-related skills and abilities. These questions usually cover a broad range of topics, skills and abilities in order to collect a vast amount of information from which to make a selection decision. The SOI is a great selection tool that assesses additional skills and abilities that cannot be assessed through the written examination.

STRUCTURED VS. UNSTRUCTURED

I/O Solutions promotes the use of a structured oral interview versus an unstructured oral interview as a selection tool for public safety departments. Unstructured oral interviews are not consistent from one candidate to the next, such that different questions may be asked from one candidate to another. Probing questions, asked if assessors would like the candidate to expand and explain more, lead to more variation in interviews. A structured oral interview is very consistent and standardized, providing each candidate the same exact questions, asked by the same individual, in the same order. This standardization proves the structured oral interview to be a valid selection tool (Huffcutt & Arthur, 1994).

TRAINING ASSESSORS

Another practice that demonstrates standardization of the SOI is the use of trained assessors to ask the candidates the questions

and to rate each candidate on his or her response. Assessors are typically experts in the public safety industry who have experience and understanding of the responsibilities for the specific position. Prior to interviewing the candidates, the assessors are trained on different areas related to assessing the candidates. These areas of training include common rater errors, the importance of standardization, consensus scoring and an explanation of the behavioral criteria the assessors will be rating. The use of behavioral criteria ensures that each candidate is rated consistently over the same job-related criteria.

PROCEDURES TO ADD STRUCTURE

Standardizing the oral interview process results in a reliable and valid selection tool, and the steps that I/O Solutions takes with the development and the administration of the SOI demonstrates this. These steps include training the assessors on all aspects of the interview, asking questions that are situational, setting time limits for the candidates' responses, using a performance-anchored rating scale, rating candidates on each question on pre-determined criteria, asking all of the candidates the same questions, not using prompting questions for any of the candidates, using multiple assessors and using quasi-consensus ratings (Campion, Palmer, & Campion, 1998). Applying the aforementioned methods to add structure when developing and administering an oral interview enhances the legal defensibility of the oral interview.

CUSTOM SOIs

I/O Solutions has developed a system that allows each agency to format their SOI to fit the agency's needs. A catalog of our stock, or off-the-shelf, questions is provided to the agency. The questions focus on critical situations/incidents that occur on the job and are categorized by performance dimensions. These dimensions include, but are not limited to the following: decision-making ability, interpersonal skills, supervisory skills, problem-solving skills and teamwork orientation. An agency can review all of the different questions and select which questions they would like their SOI to consist of.

Agencies are also invited to request customized SOI questions to be developed specifically for the agency. In order for the items to be customized to the department, a job analysis needs to be conducted. From the job analysis, the questions will be developed based on the essential knowledge, skills and abilities for the specific rank.

The finalized SOI is provided to the agency, as well as the necessary materials that allow the agency to self-administer the SOI to its candidates. The additional materials include the rating criteria that correspond with each question, an assessor training manual, rating forms and orientation materials for the candidates.

REFERENCES

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- Campion M.A., Palmer, D.K., and Campion, J.E. (1998). "Structuring employment interviews to improve reliability, validity, and users' reactions." *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 7(3), 77-82.
- Huffcutt, A.I. and Arthur, Jr., W. (1994). "Hunter and Hunter (1984) revisited: Interview validity for entry-level jobs." *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 79(2), 194-190.