The relentless pursuit of construct validity in the design of employment interviews

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ABSTRACT

The construct validity of employment interviews is the greatest challenge faced by employment interview researchers. In this paper, we discuss the theoretical and methodological issues which have an influence upon the construct validity of employment interviews. We pay special attention to issues that emerge at the conceptual development and design stage of interviews. So far, the structuring of employment interviews has been the primary method of improving construct validity. We argue that construct validity can be further improved by bringing theoretical rigor in the design of interviews. For this purpose, we propose steps to reframe the interview dimensions in theoretical frameworks of job performance, to explicate the nomological network of interview constructs, to clarify the validation strategy, and to improve the questions and assessment keys. In the end, we provide an example to illustrate the application of these steps.

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1. Introduction

Employment interviews have probably been around for almost as long as people have had to work for others. As such, the employment interview is one of the oldest and most frequently investigated techniques in human resources management research (e.g., Buckley, Norris, & Wiese, 2000). In spite of significant progress, much remains to be uncovered in order to fully understand the factors that influence how well employment interviews perform. As considerable support for the criterion-related validity of the employment interview has been demonstrated (Huffcutt & Arthur, 1994), many believe that construct validity is the next big puzzle to be confronted (Buckley & Russell, 1999; Macan, 2009). Nevertheless, some researchers consider this to be a vacuous endeavor (c.f. Harris, 1999), suggesting that the interview is a versatile instrument and can be used to measure almost any construct one wishes to investigate.

We believe that the pursuit of construct validity is neither elusive nor vacuous. In the last twenty years, efforts to create valid interviews have relied mostly on interview structure and job analysis. Grounding interviews in established human resource management theory and research could improve interview validity, but it is seldom done. Our primary objective is to provide concrete suggestions for future construct validity endeavors by focusing on theoretical grounding. Numerous researchers have highlighted the need for theoretical rigor in personnel selection research in general (Bartram, 2005; Binning & Barrett, 1989), and more specifically in assessment center research (Arthur, Day, & Woehr, 2008) and employment interview research (Harris, 1999; Landy & Shankster, 1994). However, we believe our approach to be unique because: (a) we specifically focus on employment interviews; this is the first attempt to systematically investigate myriad construct validity issues that plague the design of structured interviews; (b) we not only identify the gaps in the research, but also propose a comprehensive

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Table 1
Key design features of construct validity studies.

Publication	Study #[a]	N	Sample type	Focal job
1. Allen et al. (2004)	1	188	Students	A lab experiment
2. Conway and Peneno (1999)	2(I[b])	179	Students	Resident assistant
	2(II[b])	137	Students	
3. Huffcutt, Weekley, Wiesner, Groot, and Jones (2001)	3 (1)	59	Navy officers	Training program selection
	3(2)	93	Managers	Experiment
4. Klehe et al. (2008)	4(1)	123	Students	Mock interviews
	4(2)	269	Students	Mock interviews
5. Krajewski et al. (2006)	5	157	Applicants	High-level management
6. Motowidlo et al. (1992)	6(1)	107	Job applicants	Entry-level management
	6(2)	164	Managers	Mock interviews
	6(3)	195	Applicants	Entry-level management
	6(4)	176	Managers	Mock interviews
7. O'Leary (2004)	7	135	Police officers	Promotion to sergeant
8. Roth, Van Iddekinge, Huffcutt, Eidson, and Schmit (2005)	8(1)	164	Sales associates	Experiment
	8(2)	435	Applicants	Customer service manager
9. Schuler (1989)	9(1)	307	Applicants	Bank clerk apprentice
	9(2)	69	Students	Experiment
10. Sue-Chan and Latham (2004)	10	75	Executive MBAs	Mock interviews
11. Van Iddekinge, Raymark, Eidson, and Attenweiler (2004)	11	427	Applicants	Customer service manager
12. Van Iddekinge et al. (2005)	12	143	Students	Experiment

Study #	Key interview dimensions (Total number of dimensions)
1	Citizenships behaviors (1)
2(I)	Motivation for seeking job, expectations from the job, apprehensions (3)
2(II)	Role modeling, programming, helping, relationships, community development (8)
3 (1)	Two general leadership, two administrative and two interpersonal dimensions (6)
3(2)	Four action, three leadership and three interpersonal dimensions (10)
4(1)	Leadership, systematic planning, information management, cooperation (4)
4(2)	Leadership, systematic planning, cooperation (3)
5	Organizing, coaching, results orientation, willingness to learn, team orientation and oral communication (6)
6(1–3)	Leadership, assertiveness, flexibility, sensitivity, organization, thoroughness, resourcefulness, drive and communication skills (9)
6(4)	Persuasiveness, tact, service orientation, strategic skills and communication (5)
7	Oral communication, problem analysis, supervisory ability (3)
8(1)	Details not provided (10)
8(2)	No information available
9(1–2)	Information behavior, conscientiousness, verbal expression, initiative, support giving, coping with, errors, coping with complaints, calmness and sociability (9)
10	Teamwork behavior in MBA program (1)
11	Interpersonal behavior, conscientiousness, stress management (3)[c]
12	Altruism, self-discipline, vulnerability (3)

Study #	Question type	Question details	No. of questions	Rating key details (type)	Rating assignment
1	PBDI and SI	None	9	No (not clear)	Discuss and assign[d]
2(I)	General	Examples	8	Example (BARS)	Average of all ratings
2(II)	PBDI and SI	Examples	7,7 = 14[e]	Example (BARS)	Average of all ratings
3 (1)	PBDI and SI	None	6,6 = 12 [e]	None (not clear)	Average of all ratings
3(2)	PBDI and SI	None	10,10 = 20[e]	None (not clear)	Average of all ratings
4(1)	PBDI and SI	Examples	12,12 = 24[e]	Example (BARS)	Discuss and assign[f]
4(2)	PBDI and SI	None	12,12 = 25[e]	None (BARS)	Discuss and assign[f]
5	PBDI and SI	None	2@6 = 12[e]	None (BARS)	Average of all ratings
6(1)	PBDI	None	7	None (BARS)	Only one interviewer
6(2)	PBDI	None	7	None (BARS)	Only one interviewer
6(3)	PBDI	None	7	None (BARS)	Only one interviewer
6(4)	PBDI	None	7	None (BARS)	Only one interviewer
7	SI	Examples	3	Example (BARS)	Discuss and assign[f]
8(1)	SI	Brief labels	6	None (BARS)	Not clear
8(2)	PBDI	Brief labels	2@7 = 14[g]	None (BARS)	Consensus
9(1)	3 other and SI	None	1,6,9,9 = 25[e]	None (BARS)	Not clear
9(2)	2 other and SI	None	1,18,19 = 38[e]	None (BARS)	Average of all ratings
10	SI	Examples	6	Example (BARS)	Average of all ratings
11	PBDI	None	2@7 = 14[g]	None (BARS)	Average of all ratings
12	PBDI or SI	None	9	None (BARS)	Average of all ratings