



PREPARING THE “UNPREPARED”: UNSTRUCTURED INTERVIEW

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Unstructured interviews are the most common approach for candidates' interview process. Despite being the most popular approach to interviewing candidates, unstructured interviews have been largely recognized primarily for their weaknesses, which are, but not limited to: **lack of consistency across candidates, lack of advanced planning, and increased possibility of discriminatory behavior.** This writing will cover the common use and merits of unstructured interviews, and the next advanced strategies used to alleviate this popular yet commonly overlooked interviewing technique.

Unstructured interviews impose minimal restraints on questions asked during the interview process and often occur in a conversation-like manner between the interviewer and the candidate. The interviewer would review the available information about a candidate and ask questions on topics they're interested in learning more about or that organically come up. Each candidate may be asked different questions in a different order. Unstructured interviews can be used to gather job-relevant information such as identifying candidates' personalities and interpersonal skills, and the overall more qualified candidates from the less thanks to the strategic use of “probing” and “follow-ups”.

Important Circumstances to Note

Before we continue, there is an important point I need to address. The use of unstructured interviews could yield optimized results only and if only used by experienced interviewers. The “natural” and “free-flow” nature of the unstructured interview technique required the prowess to create constant interview content, which can only be achieved by experienced interviewers with previous successful interview sessions.

There are 4 factors that make unstructured interviews unique. **Format-wise**, unstructured interviews are more fluid. An unstructured interview

PT HEADHUNTER INDONESIA

HEAD OFFICE

MENARA PALMA, 12TH FLOOR
JL HR RASUNA SAID KAV X-2 NO.6
JAKARTA 12950 - INDONESIA
TEL: +62 21 2939 1284
FAX: +62 21 2939 1222

SURABAYA OFFICE

PAKUWON CENTER, 23RD FLOOR
JL EMBONG MALANG NO.1-5
SURABAYA 60261 - INDONESIA
TEL: +62 31 6000 3367
FAX: +62 31 6000 3105

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flows more like an everyday conversation, with both parties speaking or listening according to how the conversation unfolds. **Length-wise**, unstructured interviews often go 'as long as it takes,' with some candidate conversations lasting longer than others. **The formality of unstructured** interviews is a bit more casual, thanks to the free-flow nature of the technique. Last but not least, **Flexibility**, unstructured interviews offer much more "wiggle" room, allowing interviewers to meander from one topic to the next.

Unstructured interviews can be **useful** during the **early stages of knowledge acquisition**, which is 'the process of extracting domain-specific problem-solving expertise from a knowledge source'. The use of **strategic open-ended questions** may allow the interviewer to observe the interviewee's level of breadth and knowledge about a variety of domains. Open-ended questions are generally not utilized in structured interviews as they allow for a wide variety of responses and their effectiveness remains largely unexplored in empirical research. However, open-ended questions may allow for valuable information about a candidate in a short amount of time, leading to an overall consensus of the candidates' qualifications and positional fit.

Furthermore, if an interviewer has relevant experience related to the job, they may be able to generate additional relevant probes/probing. Unstructured interviews also allow spontaneous creation of interview content, which may lead to a more customized interviewer experience. Specifically, the unstructured interview allows for interviewers to express qualities such as warmth, acceptance, and social responsiveness better than structured interviews. It is worth noting that the unstructured interviews may benefit from some follow-up questions to clarify specific parts of given answers. From all the given information, we may recognize that unstructured interviews are partially useful for a couple of criteria, which are, and not limited to **(a) informal assessments of candidate personality, interpersonal skills, Person-Organization and Person-Job fit, and (b) if time pressure is present.**

Informal Assessments of Candidate Personality, Interpersonal skills, P-O and P-J fit

The opportunity to ask candidates anything during an unstructured interview may allow the interviewer to directly observe the interviewee's genuine personality and interpersonal skills. It can be achieved through short interaction and observation of behavioral cues from the candidates. For example, experienced recruiters can ask a candidate's perspectives regarding their past working experience, ideal workplace environment, and hands-on experience on their past work-related projects. Person-organization (P-O) and Person-job (P-J) fit are also important owing to their relationship with several desirable outcomes including positive employee attitudes, job satisfaction, commitment, organizational citizenship, retention rates, and performance. P-O fit refers to the match between an individual and their organization in terms of values and culture. P-J fit refers to the compatibility between the job requirements of a position and the

qualifications of the individual.

If Time Pressure is Present

Unstructured interviews have the potential to be considerably faster in terms of quickly and efficiently screening applicants as they require less planning. Under certain circumstances, such as when there is a vacant position that needs to be filled as soon as possible or when the applicant pool is large, the luxury of having additional time to collect and interpret data gathered from assessment measures may not be practical. Considering that unstructured interviews require less planning, they may be ideal for such crisis situations.

After we recognize what is unstructured interview and a couple of ideal criteria to utilize it, we can alleviate the use of unstructured interviews by **merging the use of unstructured and structured interviews**. We need to acknowledge that, to increase the quality of an interview, we are required to integrate the elements of an unstructured and structured interview, which is often described as a **semi-structured interview**. We can prepare our important questions by listing the questions according to the job requirements, job description, and other relevant information regarding the job opening and after the interview starts, we can improvise our questions depending on the information we need to acquire.

By integrating both of the aforementioned techniques in an interview session, we can, at the same time, practice our ability to drive the flow of an interview and practice the ability to probe, or the ability to gather more information based on our previously asked questions to the candidates.

Conclusion

Unstructured interviews, though often overlooked due to their "conversation-like" and "free-flow nature", can be highly effective when used correctly. They allow for informal assessments of important factors in the recruitment process and are a perfect choice of interviewing technique when time is limited. Combining structured and unstructured methods, known as semi-structured interviews, can enhance the effectiveness of our interviewing technique.

WRITTEN BY SULTHAN NAUFAL RABBANI
DESIGNED BY SHABRINA SEPTIANDINI



SULTHAN NAUFAL RABBANI

*Researcher
PT Headhunter Indonesia*