Employers should use science to optimize job interviews instead of relying on outdated misconceptions, say researchers

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Job interviews are an essential part of hiring. In Canada, interviews are the [most popular hiring tool](). However, there is a concerning gap

between the science of interviewing and [the way interviews are commonly practiced](#) in workplaces.

[Employers often hold misconceptions](#) about their ability to evaluate a job candidate accurately without the use of a structured set of interview questions and a formal scoring procedure for evaluating the candidate's answers. We put too much stock in our ability to evaluate an applicant based on [casual conversation](#). These misconceptions can lead employers to [ignore the most effective interviewing strategies](#).

At the same time, researchers need to do a better job of addressing the real-world challenges of interviewing that employers face.

As researchers in [human resource management](#) and industrial-organizational psychology, we study how to optimize interviews for employers and job seekers.

In a [recent study](#), we spoke to experienced interviewers in various fields across Canada to understand how employers plan and carry out their interviews. Our findings challenge some common assumptions about the best ways to interview.

Interviews are more than just tests

Interviews can serve multiple purposes. Employers not only use them to assess job candidates (known as selection), but also to [attract candidates to accept job offers](#) (known as recruitment) and inform candidates about the job (known as socialization).

To meet these different goals, the employers we spoke to designed their interviews differently. Some employers changed goals within a single interview, while others tried to balance multiple goals simultaneously.

Depending on an [employer](#)'s needs—to assess, attract or inform—the interview can play various roles in the staffing system. There is no single best way to interview, and success depends on the specific goals an employer aims to achieve.

We explored how employers designed their interviews to achieve their goals. From our study, it was clear that interviewers faced challenges trying to balance multiple goals in a single interview.

We identified many of these challenges, such as honestly disclosing the difficult aspects of the job while also trying to keep the applicant interested in accepting an offer. To help address these challenges, we also focused on interviewing tactics that can help interviewers achieve multiple goals.

Finally, we explored additional factors that complicate the design and use of interviews. These include characteristics about the hiring organization, interviewers' beliefs about judging job candidates and concerns about ensuring fairness in the hiring process. Understanding and addressing these factors is necessary for improving interview practices.

Conducting more effective interviews

Drawing on our research and the science of interviewing, there are three critical, but often overlooked, ways employers can improve their interview practices.

First, employers need to align their interviewing strategies with their staffing goals. Many of the interviewers in our study designed interviews based on habit, organizational norms or intuition.

Instead, interviewers should be deliberate about their hiring goals and

tailor their interviews to meet those objectives. This could involve using targeted, structured behavioral questions for assessment, building rapport for recruitment or providing a realistic overview of job expectations.

Avoid pursuing too many goals

Second, employers should resist the impulse to pursue too many goals at once. It can be tempting to try to assess and attract an applicant in the same interview, but these goals often require different strategies that can conflict. For instance, while unstructured conversations can help with recruiting, they undermine accurate assessments.

However, an assessment-focused interview doesn't have to be cold or off-putting. Interviewers can begin with a warm welcome and explain that certain procedures are in place to ensure the fairness and accuracy of the hiring process.

Similarly, informing an applicant about job details can be compatible with assessing and attracting candidates, so long as interviewers follow a standard protocol to support assessment or speak positively about their organization to support recruitment.

Employers can also conduct multiple interviews, each for a specific purpose. For example, an initial interview might focus on assessment, while a later interview might focus on recruitment once a candidate offer is being considered.

Dispelling interviewing myths

Lastly, interviewers should be aware of common interviewing myths. Some of the employers we spoke to still held outdated beliefs that scientific research has thoroughly debunked.

Some of these myths included valuing "gut feelings" over rigorous scoring procedures, trying to catch applicants "off-guard" instead of asking direct questions, and using "oddball" questions instead of job-relevant ones.

If the highest-scoring candidate is different from the one an interviewer prefers, the score is likely more accurate than the interviewer's preference. Interview training that targets these misconceptions may improve interview practices.

Interviews are a valuable hiring tool, but are often misused or under-utilized. With intentionality and evidence-based approaches, interviews can be used to make fairer, more accurate decisions while recruiting and informing candidates.

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