

validity. Overall, despite a general lack of evidence, letters of recommendation and background checks likely possess some utility.⁵⁰

Initial Interview

The initial interview occurs very early in the initial assessment process and is often the applicant's first personal contact with the organization and its staffing system. At this point, applicants are relatively undifferentiated to the organization in terms of KSAs. The initial interview begins the process of necessary differentiation, a sort of "rough cut."

The purpose of the initial interview is, and should be, to screen out the most obvious cases of person/job mismatches. To do this, the interview should focus on an assessment of KSAs that are absolute requirements for the applicant. Examples of such minimum levels of qualifications for the job include certification and licensure requirements and necessary (not just preferred) training and experience requirements.

These assessments may be made from information gathered from written means (e.g., application blank or résumé) and from the interview. Care should be taken to ensure that the interviewer focuses only on this information as a basis for decision making. Evaluations of personal characteristics of the applicant (e.g., race or sex), as well as judgments about an applicant's personality (e.g., "She seems very outgoing and just right for this job"), are to be avoided. However, that may be easier said than done. One study found that applicants with facial stigmas were rated lower by interviewers, who were distracted by the stigma and recalled fewer details about the interview compared to applicants without a facial stigma.⁵¹ Indeed, to avoid evaluations of personal characteristics, some organizations (e.g., civil service agencies) have eliminated the initial interview altogether and make the initial assessment from the written information provided by the applicant.

One of the limitations of the initial interview is that it is perhaps the most expensive method of initial assessment. One way to reduce costs dramatically is to conduct video or computer interviews, which we cover next.

Video and Computer Interviews

With the growth of videoconferencing software, it is increasingly easy—and inexpensive—to conduct initial screening interviews from any two locations with Internet access. As long as both parties have their computers connected to the Internet, the conversation is free. Skype, which has more than 500 million registered accounts, has become a common platform for conducting computer-based initial interviews.

Larger companies often use a more customized platform to conduct initial interviews. HireVue, a Salt Lake City online video interview company, counts Dish Network, CDW, and Oracle among its customers. The advantage of providers such as HireVue, or competitors such as GreenJobInterview.com, is that they