



## Bringing Science & Technology to Hospital HR

*Frederick P. Morgeson, Ph.D, Michigan State University*

Reprinted with permission of National Association of Healthcare Recruiters Directions Volume 35 Issue no. 4 2011

From an increasing focus on customer satisfaction and the quality of care to unrelenting technological advances and the continuous pressure to do more with less, the healthcare environment is as challenging as it has ever been. Hospital administrators, human resource professionals, and hiring managers all recognize that key to meeting these challenges is hiring the right talent – Individuals who are highly skilled and fit the organization’s culture.

The costs of hiring mistakes are potentially enormous. The investments made in people can easily exceed a million dollars over the course of a worker’s career when salary, benefits, and training costs are considered. Beyond this financial investment, hiring the wrong kinds of people can prevent your organization from achieving its mission – delivering quality health care to the people who

depend upon you. For these reasons, it is essential that every hiring decision be as accurate as possible.

The consequences of poor selection decisions are frustrating at-best, and disastrous at worst. In addition to clear hiring mistakes, “average” hires present perhaps a greater long-term problem and expense, in part because of the missed opportunity in term of “what might have been.” The difference between “average” and “excellent” is reflected throughout the organization at all levels. HCAHPS scores, customer satisfaction scores, team morale, and productivity are all impacted (positively or negatively) based on the kinds of people you hire and the behaviors exhibited in the workplace.

Yet, most hiring managers have experienced a situation in which they’ve hired someone, then wondered a short

time later, “Who is this person and what happened to the person I interviewed?!” Unfortunately, too many organizations rely on traditional, unstructured interviews as part of their hiring process. Such interviews are simply unable to systematically and consistently identify the best applicants and have little relationship to on the job performance.

However, there is good news. There is a better way...in fact, a MUCH better way to make selection decisions. Accumulated research evidence is clear and unequivocal: Using a structured, behavioral-based interview process predicts on-the-job performance, and you can use this information about applicants prior to making a hiring decision.

Four best-practice methodologies will have a significant positive impact on your selection process:

1. Behavior-based interview questions
2. Multiple interviewers
3. Following a standardized process
4. Leverage helpful technology

### **Behavior-based Interview Questions**

Behavior-based interview questions ask applicants about key past job-related behaviors. These behaviors may have been exhibited in variety of past situations, including work and school. Such questions are based on the premise that the best predictor of future behavior and performance is past behavior and performance in similar situations. Applicant responses to these questions are rich with examples of how they actually performed or behaved in similar job

related situations. This behavioral description format has an excellent track record in terms of predicting job performance. It is probably safe to say that these questions are the basis for most of the best in practice interviewing at hospitals around the nation. Behavior-based questions are most useful when they probe for specific details about how an applicant behaved in previous situations.

The key to eliciting in-depth information about the applicant is advance preparation on the part of the interviewer. Two elements of this preparation are critical. First, the interviewer must have a clear understanding of the attributes that he/she is attempting to measure. In other words, the interviewer should identify the key competencies essential for successful job performance. Second, the interviewer must have thought through how he/she can best extract information about these competencies from the applicant.

Pre-developed questions and follow-up questions help the interviewer focus the discussion and obtain job-relevant information. Such questions and follow-up probes should be sure to avoid closed-ended questions (i.e., yes/no) and questions that might inadvertently communicate the correct answer to the applicant.

### **SAMPLE BEHAVIOR-BASED INTERVIEW QUESTION for Caring or Compassion:**

**“Please describe a time when you went “beyond the call of duty” to help someone else.”**

- What was the situation?

- Exactly what did you do?
- What motivated you to do this?
- What was the outcome of your efforts?

### **Multiple Interviewers**

One of the difficulties associated with traditional interviews is that often only a single individual (e.g., the hiring manager) interviews an applicant. Such an approach is potentially problematic because it increases the possibility of individual interviewer biases and often produces idiosyncratic and unreliable hiring decisions. To reduce rater bias and maximize the reliability of results, many organizations are now utilizing multiple interviewers, which typically include a mix of people already in the job (e.g., future peers) and supervisors of the job or similar jobs. Including peers in the selection process instills ownership among the team and support for the individual once hired. This reinforces new-hire retention and positive teamwork.

The interviewer team should ideally consist of between three and five individuals. Using at least three interviewers maximizes the reliability of the process and ensures a balanced perspective. Interviewers should be knowledgeable concerning the target position and bring different points of view to the interview process.

Ideally, varying perspectives should reflect differences in age, gender, and race. Not only will this help protect against interviewer errors and bias, it will ensure a fair and objective process for the applicant, in part because these individuals have the most direct knowledge of what it takes to be successful in the job.

The use of multiple interviewers can be accomplished sequentially or in a panel setting. Sequential interviews occur when the applicant is literally “passed” from one interviewer to another throughout the day and then each interviewer provides their own judgments concerning the applicant. Panel interviews occur when all interviewers are together and interview the applicant at the same time. Although the use of multiple interviews is a more time-consuming and costly interview process, it pays-off in terms of better hiring decisions and greater buy-in from workers on the selection decision.

### **Following a Standardized Process**

Most every recruiter could fill a book with “crazy interview stories” that reflect the unusual behaviors and experiences they have had with applicants. Often such stories result from the use of unstandardized, unstructured interview processes. A basic principle of measurement is consistency of measurement over time. In other words, measure the same thing in the same way every time. Imagine if you followed a different protocol and testing methodology every time you checked someone’s blood pressure. The results would be highly variable and you could not be certain what the correct number is!

The key of any structured interview process is to standardize as many elements of the process as possible. This can include asking the same questions for each applicant, using behavior-based questions, using a consistent set of interviewers, and evaluating the answers according to the same standards. When interviews are standardized in such a way, interviews increase in reliability and validity.

Unfortunately, many hiring managers conduct interviews in such a haphazard manner that not only are their judgments unreliable and invalid, but they lose good applicants that “select-out” of the process. An applicant’s impression of the organization begins with the interview. It is important to remember that the interviewer represents the Hospital and applicants should be treated as guests. Every time you interview someone, it is an opportunity to present the organization in the best possible light. Beyond these “applicant reactions,” it is also the case that the potential for litigation increases significantly when an interviewer is ill prepared. Providing a structured, behavioral process increases the likelihood of obtaining job-relevant information and maintaining a fair, objective process.

### **Leverage Helpful Technology**

Managing a steady stream of candidates is a complicated and time-consuming process. To best standardize that process and ensure its effective execution—hospitals would be wise to leverage available technologies and software systems that can streamline the hiring process. Software supporting behavioral assessments, structured interviewing, and the ability to archive and share test results and input from multiple decision makers can help to build organizational consensus and identify better candidates. Other solutions, such as software for remote video interviewing, can improve efficiencies and provide more structure and consistency to the interview process.

---

*Frederick P. Morgeson, Ph.D. is Professor of Management and Valade Research Scholar at the The Eli Broad Graduate School of Management of Michigan State University. Dr. Morgeson is also Scientific Advisor to HealthcareSource, a NAHCR Business Partner, and provider of talent management software for healthcare organizations, including TestSource Healthcare Selection Inventory (HSI) – a behavioral assessment solution for healthcare.*