BEING THERE: WRITING THE HIGHLY CITED ARTICLE

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The Most Frequently Cited Article of the 1980s

The Employment Interview:
A Summary and Review of Recent Research

After a quick recapulation of previous reviews of the employment interview, recent research from about 1975 is reviewed and summarized. Research dealing with the reliability and validity of the interview, methodological issues, decision making, interviewee characteristics, and interviewee training is summarized. Trends and directions are noted, suggestions for further research extended, and a discussion of why persistence in the use of interview exists is presented.

Some time ago in 1985, when Marvin Dunnette gave his acceptance speech for the Distinguished Scientific Achievement award at the Society of Industrial and Organizational Psychology annual conference, he described his achievements largely as a part of simply "being there," that is, being in a situation where the intellectual, empirical, and theoretical forces were such that he was able to capitalize on the confluence of these dynamics. It is perhaps fitting that we take a similar perspective on the success of our article "The employment interview: A summary and review of recent research" (Arvey & Campion, 1982), especially in light of the fact that Marv was an especially important person in our lives—he was Arvey's dissertation co-chair (along with John Cambell), and he served as the chair for Campion.

Our perspective is that this particular article was successful (at least highly cited) because of the convergence of several dynamic forces. These include the following:

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First, our reading of the prior research on the employment interview suggested that judgments made as a result of this decision-making process were unreliable, inaccurate, and fraught with error, leading some professionals to suggest that the interview should possibly be dropped from the hiring process. To us, this pronouncement seemed to diverge from practice—most, if not all, employers used the employment interview for hiring purposes. This puzzled us, and our curiosity about the divergence between research and practice became one of the driving factors behind our review. Thus, one motive for writing the review was intellectual in nature and a possible reason for the popularity of this article is simply our calling attention to this discrepancy.

Second, the employment interview was (and still is) under professional and legal attack largely due to the claim that the interview involves a relatively greater amount of "subjectivity" in reaching hiring decisions than "other" decision tools (e.g., employment tests) and was therefore biased (e.g., Arvey, 1979). Our article dealt directly with this topic; we were perhaps among the first to notice that the structured interview (and the use of multiple decision makers) might mitigate against this "excess subjectivity" and bias claim. The legal and political climate was such that our article might have struck a chord within professionals and scholars dealing with these issues.

Third, this article followed in a long and distinguished tradition of prior reviews dealing with the interview (e.g., Schmitt, 1976; Ulrich & Trumbo, 1965; Wright, 1969). We followed in the footsteps of "giants," as the saying goes. In fact, we might be in need of a more contemporary review right now.

Fourth, the timing was excellent. It turns out that others were writing a similar review piece. Paul Sackett and George Dreher had almost completed a review of the interview and submitted it just after our article had been accepted. So, we got to the journal sooner.

Fifth, the resources and intellectual climate were in place. The environment at the University of Houston (UH) during this period had been sponsoring an Interviewing Institute which delivered public workshops on employment interview. This institute had been founded by two psychology professors (McNaughton and Wilson) and been operational since 1952. At the time we wrote our review, the interview workshops were being conducted on site in the offices of the Department of Psychology (we would, with some regularity, need to give up our offices for a day or two for training purposes). Thus, interviewing was a very salient activity to everyone. The director of the program then, and now, was Jim Campion. Importantly, there were a number of colleagues at UH conducting research on the interview (several UH colleagues doing work on the employment interview were included in our review—Howard &

Daily, 1979; Osburn, Timerick, & Bigby, 1981; Rozelle & Baxter, 1982). Therefore, we did not have to engage in a *de novo* research round-up; it was almost all there.

Finally, there was a little luck involved. One of us (Arvey) had been invited to write a review piece a short time earlier. Once this earlier chapter had been written and in press, we realized that the article might make a larger contribution if expanded. We went ahead with a larger review (of course, we acknowledged the earlier chapter in our final product).

What kind of advise can we offer to others about how to write a "highly cited" article? We offer the following ideas:

1. Read and understand the research literature. It would have been impossible for us to write such a piece if we did not have a good feeling and understanding of the research that had historically been conducted around the interview. We were very familiar with the current research.

2. Try to anticipate when there is a "need" for a particular article, be it an empirical, theoretical, or a review piece. We are not sure that this is something that can be easily taught, but might come with a deep understanding of a particular content domain.

3. Be aware of what is going in the practitioner world. When the research tells us something very different from what is going on in practice, something is typically wrong, and our experience is that the research and scholarship is delivering inaccurate information.

4. Write well. You can have the best idea, best set of empirical results, and best theoretical model, but unless you can organize and package it right, you won't get published. We believe that one reason for the success of our article is simply that it is well written and organized.

5. Be reader-friendly. Perhaps this overlaps with writing well, but we made a clear effort to make the article more readable through providing an extensive summary (10 pages) of earlier reviews to place our work in its historical context. We made a deliberate effort to systematically summarize as the end of each section. We used a model and a graphic to portray the variables and processes involved. Although not reflected in the citation index, authors of five text books have requested permission to include this figure in their presentations of the employment interview (actually, this figure was modified, with permission of course, from an earlier article by Neal Schmitt in his review of the interview [Schmitt, 1976]).

6. Point out research needs as clearly and frequently as possible. In a review, one is expected to identify a number of areas where more work is needed. It has been extremely gratifying to see that scholars have been, indeed, attracted to these ideas and pursued them. When we reviewed the abstracts for articles citing our 1982 review (via DIALOG),

we found that over 60% of the citations (where DIALOG provided the abstracts, 1992-1996) were from articles reporting empirical studies. It was particularly satisfying that 75% of these included at least one facet of a field study (i.e., real interviewer/interviewee/job). One of our stronger recommendations was that future interview research should focus on capturing more real or actual behavioral and evaluation processes. The most popular research area addressed by articles wherein we were cited involved the topic of fair employment. Although we noted a "pressing need" for more research in this area, as we have noted above, both these later articles and our own review might have been partially motivated due to the macro forces at large.

We hope these ideas and comments have been helpful. Perhaps the ideas, if followed, will allow you to "be there" too. Good luck.

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