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Selection Strategies

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"When you hire people that are smarter than you are, you prove you are smarter than they are." R.H. Grant

Taking the time to select the best candidates for a job is useful in reducing turnover. When organizations have great difficulty finding applicants, however, they may be tempted to hire anyone who is willing to take the job. This phenomenon is sometimes called the "warm body syndrome" and can have the negative effect of lowering expectations of employees, creating a perception that anything goes among current employees, and lowering the image and status of direct support professionals (DSPs). Hiring just anyone for an open position also exacerbates turnover problems in the long run because a person who is a poor match for the job is more likely to quit or be fired due to performance or attendance problems. The term *selection* as used in this chapter refers specifically to the process of selecting from among all qualified applicants the person who will most likely best meet the needs of the organization for a specific position.

Many techniques are available to assist an organization in this process. This chapter reviews several of these techniques, with a special emphasis on structured interviews.

TARGETED FRONT-LINE SUPERVISOR COMPETENCIES

Competent front-line supervisors (FLSs) use several personnel management skills in the selection process. Key competencies include the following.

Primary Skills

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FLSs schedule and complete interviews with potential new staff in collaboration with existing DSPs and supported individuals and their family members.

FLSs seek input from other staff and from individuals receiving support and their family members in making hiring decisions.

FLSs arrange for criminal background checks and (if driving is an essential job function of the position) driver's license reviews for newly hired personnel.

FLSs assess potential staff's functional ability and capacity; ensure that health physicals are completed (if required); and address any identified modifications or accommodations for employees, as dictated by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990 (PL 101-336).

FLSs can articulate the difference between recruitment and selection and the importance of both.

UNDERSTANDING THE PROBLEM

The hiring process is often one of the most time-consuming parts of a supervisor's job. With a turnover rate of 50%, for example, an FLS would need to hire an average of one new person for every two positions during the course of a year. In addition to having to replace employees who leave their jobs, supervisors also have to hire individuals to meet increased needs or service expansion opportunities and to fill any vacancies remaining from previous years. Because employees are the most important resource in a human services organization, the hiring decisions that are made have a large impact on the quality of the services that are delivered. The challenge for supervisors and managers in the selection process is to select the person from among all of the possible candidates who is the best match for the job, the people he or she will be supporting, and the organization. Valid and reliable selection practices can help organizations to reduce turnover and improve performance (Thomas & Brull, 1993).

There are also several other reasons to use good selection practices. Management journals and newsletters often publish stories about large lawsuits against organizations that hire individuals who later hurt someone (e.g., Greengard, 1995). Avoidance of legal problems caused by negligent hiring, supervision, and promotion and lack of due diligence are cited as key reasons to screen applicants carefully before making a hiring decision.

RESEARCH SUPPORT FOR SOLUTIONS

The career management and consulting firm Drake Beam Morin estimated that according to research, nearly 80% of turnover is due to hiring mistakes ("How to Increase Retention," 1998). Thus, if better selection and hiring practices were used, many problems related to turnover could be reduced. A well-designed selection process ensures that, to the extent possible, the candidates who are hired are able to do the job and are good matches for the organization's culture. Such a process is a powerful tool for FLSs and human resources managers.

Many selection strategies and tools are available. They vary both in terms of how effective they are and how difficult, complex, or time consuming they are to use. One challenge for supervisors is to balance the speed and simplicity of the hiring process (so that good applicants do not choose another job while waiting for a job offer) with the use of strategies that are good indicators of whether an applicant will do a good job.

The research about selection is expansive and complex. Many studies focus on the extent to which various selection strategies are valid. Validity is a measure of the ex-

tent to which scores on the selection measure correspond with overall performance or tenure of employees. Validity coefficients range from 0 to 1.0. A coefficient of 0 means that scores on the selection measure do not have any correspondence to job performance or tenure (meaning that the selection measure is no better at choosing applicants than a random drawing of applicants' names from a hat would be). A coefficient of 1.0 means there is a perfect correspondence between 1) the strategy and 2) job performance or tenure. As a point of reference, the correspondence between age and grade in school for children is .88. This chapter points out highlights of the research on the validity of selection strategies that can be used to guide hiring practices in community human services settings.

Several comprehensive reviews discuss the relative merits of various selection strategies. Hermelin and Robertson (2001) reviewed nine different meta-analyses that examined many different studies of the validity of selection strategies (see Table 4.1). Hermelin and Robertson classified each of the strategies as having high (.45 or higher), medium (.25 to .45) or low (0 to .25) validity. Higher predictive validity scores mean that there is a higher correspondence between high scores and excellent performance and between low scores and poor performance. Using strategies with high predictive validity increases the chances of selecting candidates who will be good performers and rejecting candidates who will be poor performers. Table 4.1 describes each strategy, lists the validity category for each, and lists the range of validity coefficients from the studies reviewed.

The findings reported in Table 4.1 are supported by several other studies. Buckley and Russell (1999) reported meta-analysis results showing that the predictive validity of structured interviews was .57, compared with .30 to .40 for cognitive ability tests, biographical data inventories, and assessment centers and .20 for unstructured interviews. Another study reported that structured interviews were more effective than assessments of cognitive ability and conscientiousness (Cortina, Goldstein, Payne, Davison, & Gilliland, 2000). Clearly, structured interviews are one of the most effective, if not the most effective, selection strategies available.

Interestingly, one study found that although cognitive tests were used by 27% of service companies with more than 200 employees and that weighted application blanks (in which responses meeting certain criteria are given particular numeric scores) were used by 23% of such companies, structured interviews were used by only 18% of those companies (Terpstra & Rozell, 1993). When used, however, these selection strategies were significantly correlated with annual profit, profit growth, sales growth, and overall company performance. An on-line survey of businesses revealed that the five most commonly used selection methods are standard applications with verifiable information such as education and experience, reference checks, behavior-based interviewing, manual résumé screening, and situational interviews (Burton & Warner, 2001).

An important consideration in designing selection practices is whether a technique results in illegal discrimination against protected groups of people. Illegal discrimination occurs when people are unfairly turned down for employment or are treated less favorably or more favorably during the hiring process based on age; race; ethnicity; gender; disability status; religion; sexual orientation; or other characteristics

Table 4.1. Comparison of the validity of common selection strategies

Strategy	Basic description	Effectiveness (predictive validity)
Structured interviews	Structured interviews use the same questions for every applicant and score responses using a standardized scoring guide. Two major types are structured behavioral interviews and situational interviews. Both are based on a job analysis and assess skills critical to successful job performance.	High (.48 to .67)
Cognitive ability tests	Standardized tests assess the intelligence or cognitive ability of the candidates. Candidates whose scores most closely match those of successful employees are given preference in hiring.	High overall (.44 to .47) High for very complex jobs (.60) Low for the least complex jobs (.24)
Biographical data (weighted application blanks)	Past work history, education, honors and awards, extracurricular and community service activities, and other social or life experiences are scored, with points awarded for experiences or activities that predict future employment success.	Medium (.36)
Personality and integrity tests	Personality tests assess the personality attributes of candidates. Integrity tests assess attitudes toward counterproductive behaviors or aspects of personality believed to be related to counterproductive behaviors (Hermelin & Robertson, 2001).	Medium (.31 to .37)
Work sample tests or assessment centers	Work sample tests examine an applicant's skill on a work-related task through direct assessment (e.g., a typing test for a clerical applicant). Assessment centers are a behaviorally based managerial selection procedure that incorporates multiple assessments and multiple ratings by trained managers of behaviors related to the job (e.g., in-basket, leaderless group discussion, business games; Cascio, 1987)	Low to medium (.24 to .43)
Unstructured interviews	Unstructured interviews have no constraints on the questions asked and result in only a global assessment of the candidate (Buckley & Russell, 1999)	Low to medium (.23 to .37)
The "big five" personality traits	Tests examining the "big five" personality traits: conscientiousness, emotional stability, extraversion, agreeableness, and openness to experiences. (Of these traits, conscientiousness had the highest predictive validity, .10 to .15)	Low (.00 to .15)

Sources: Nine meta-analyses that included 20 estimates of validity (Hermelin & Robertson, 2001).

that federal, state, or local laws say cannot be the basis for hiring decisions (Roehling, Campion, & Arvey, 1999). Failure to make reasonable accommodations for disabilities (under the ADA) or for religious beliefs and practices can also be the basis for a discrimination charge. Careful review of federal, state, and local laws and consultation with human resources professionals and legal advisors are important to protect against engaging in these illegal practices. Organizational personnel who are involved in recruitment and selection processes should receive training to ensure compliance with relevant established laws.

STRATEGIES FOR RESPONDING TO THE PROBLEM

The hiring process is complex and involves several phases. Before applicants are selected the process involves 1) identifying the knowledge, skills, and attitudes (KSAs) required of people who will accomplish the work (job analysis, see Chapter 6); 2) describing the working conditions, pay, opportunities for promotion, and job training that will be provided; 3) crafting a job description for the specific position to be filled; 4) marketing specific positions to potential applicants (see Chapter 2); and 5) helping applicants make an informed decision about whether a particular position is of interest to them (e.g., through a realistic job preview [RJP; see Chapter 3]). Once these steps are completed and the organization has one or more applicants for a position, the selection process begins. As mentioned previously, *selection* is the process of deciding which applicant best meets the needs of the organization. The selection process includes initial screening of applicants, choosing and implementing one or more techniques to gather additional information about applicants, and using this information to make a final hiring decision.

Given its needs, the organization should decide which strategies make the most sense. Mornell (1998) suggested that each organization or hiring unit develop a flowchart describing its selection process. Figure 4.1 presents one possible example. The remainder of this chapter describes the various steps listed in Figure 4.1, with the exception of RJPs, which are covered in Chapter 3.

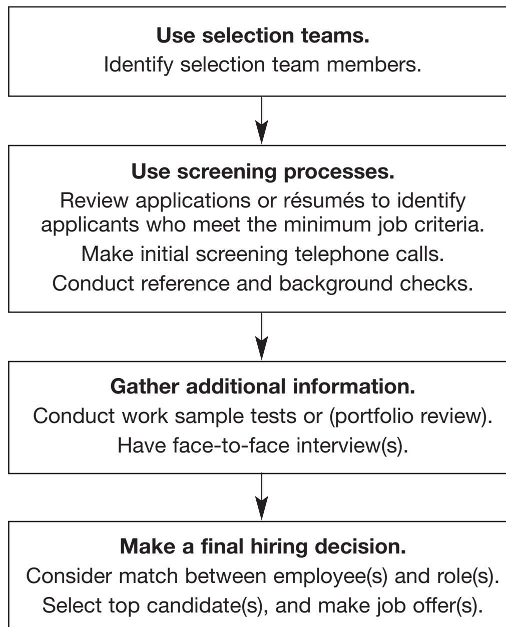

Figure 4.1. Selection process (from application to job offer). (*Source:* Mornell, 1998.)

Use Selection Teams

The selection process can be conducted by one person or by a team of people in conjunction with human resources specialists. Since differences in interview skills and experience can affect success in choosing applicants who will do a good job, pairing skilled interviewers with inexperienced or less skilled interviewers can help to reduce the number of hiring mistakes made (Dipboye & Jackson, 1999; Graves & Karren, 1999). Using a panel or at least a pair of interviewers can also help interviewers reduce or eliminate irrelevant inferences about the candidate that are not job related, eliminate idiosyncratic biases among interviewers, and increase the range of information and judgments on which decisions are based (Tullar & Kaiser, 1999). Selection teams may be involved in only one phase of the selection process (e.g., the structured interview) or may participate from beginning to end. Teams can include two or more supervisors or administrators but also could include DSPs and/or individuals receiving supports and/or their families.

Including DSPs in the selection process can empower them and can lead to greater acceptance of hiring decisions by others (Harris & Eder, 1999). Also, including individuals receiving supports and/or their families in the selection process is important because they have key information about which candidate might be the best fit for supporting their needs. Individuals who receive in-home supports may have strong preferences about the characteristics of people who will provide those supports. Similarly, individuals who receive supports may have specific needs and interests that they would like to address in the selection process. For example, a person with Tourette syndrome whose tics are offensive to some people may want to ask candidates about their responses to tics (or may want see how candidates react if a tic occurs during an interview). People receiving supports and their family members can also be helpful in deciding whether the applicants have the right attitude for the job. They may place a different priority on factors such as having a positive attitude, being flexible, having a sense of humor, or envisioning what is possible than others on the hiring team do. When people receiving supports and their families are excluded from the selection process, they may not get along with the person selected or may not be confident about the person's abilities. This may in turn cause conflicts that increase stress and burnout for staff members.

Use Screening Processes

Application or Résumé Reviews

Before reviewing applications or résumés, the selection team should have a clear idea of the minimum job requirements. Team members can list key minimum skills or characteristics a person must have to perform the essential job functions (e.g., is at least 18 years old; reads and writes English proficiently enough that required documentation can be completed; is willing to submit to criminal background check if required by organization or state; has a driver's license, if driving supported individuals is a DSP job requirement at the organization). The selection team should discard ap-

plicants who do not meet the minimum job requirements. The team should also eliminate applicants who have had many different jobs in a short period of time. Previous job behavior is a good predictor of future behavior. A person who has moved from job to job quickly (in a period of months rather than years) in the past is more likely to do so in the future than a person who has stayed with each job for at least a year before moving to the next one. Other characteristics of good performers (e.g., is a team player; respects others; manages time well; demonstrates compassion, empathy, commitment, and cooperation; communicates clearly and listens closely) should be assessed throughout the hiring process.

Screening Interviews

Screening can be done when a person asks for an application. It can also be done after applications have been received, to assist in deciding which candidates to interview. Screening often takes the form of a brief telephone call designed to help the organization find out if the prospective employee meets the minimum job qualifications. Screening activities can include basic RJP information such as pay scale and benefits, general responsibilities and requirements of the job, and hours or locations of the job. The screening process should be consistent for each applicant. Using a checklist and specific set of questions can help in maintaining consistency. Questions that may be helpful in a screening telephone call include the following:

- What experience do you have supporting people with disabilities?
- What is your understanding of the broad responsibilities of a DSP?
- How did you hear about this job?

In addition to general questions like these, this telephone call can be used to confirm or clarify information on the application and whether the applicant is willing and able to work the hours and days the position requires. The organization should come to consensus about what information should be gathered from applicants and shared with applicants at this point. Screening can quickly eliminate people who are not eligible for employment; applicants who are completely unfamiliar with the type of work and, upon learning basic information about the job, decide it is not a good match for them; and applicants whom the organization deems are not a good match for the job because of the location, hours, or other characteristics of the position. A screening telephone call can be used to assess, among other things, how easy it is to reach the candidate, whether the candidate returns the call at the time suggested, and whether the person is an articulate communicator (Mornell, 1998). The advantage of using screening calls is that they can save time by reducing the number of applicants who are interviewed face to face and permit RJP information to be streamlined. Screening may seem like an extra step, but it can greatly reduce the number of no-shows to the interview.

At the end of the screening, one of three decisions is made. Either the applicant is not qualified for the job (in which case a staff member thanks the applicant for his or her time and indicates that the organization does not intend to invite the applicant for an interview), the organization is not sure (in which case a staff member may tell the applicant that it is uncertain whether he or she will be included in the interview and asks for additional information needed), or the applicant is a viable candidate

(Yate, 1994). For applicants who are qualified to continue the application process, Yate suggested communicating the following ground rules for future contacts:

- We expect all interview appointments to be kept punctually.
- We expect to be informed if for any reason the applicant cannot make a meeting.
- We expect application forms to be filled out accurately and completely.
- We intend to check references and conduct all required background checks.
- We will treat any and all information shared with us as confidential.

Using ground rules helps set expectations. Observing whether candidates comply with the expectations can help assess whether the candidates will follow guidelines such as these should they be hired. Adhering to these guidelines can help the organization to avoid making exceptions that lower the organization's expectations of new hires.

Reference Checks

Reference checks involve contacting former employers, academic institutions, and others mentioned on the application or résumé to confirm the accuracy of the information provided and to assess the fitness of the applicant for the position. Reference checks and recommendations can be used to obtain four types of information about applicants: 1) education and employment history (e.g., confirmation of degrees, diplomas, and dates of employment); 2) evaluation of the applicant's character, personality, and interpersonal competence; 3) evaluation of the applicant's past job performance; and 4) whether the person is eligible to be rehired by the organization (Cascio, 1987). Rosen (2001) suggested that before reference checks are conducted, the organization could ask the applicant, "When we contact past employers, pursuant to the release you have signed, would any of them tell us you were terminated, disciplined, or not eligible for rehire?" It may also be helpful to ask the applicant what positive and negative comments a reference might make about him or her (Mornell, 1998).

Potential questions to ask when conducting a telephone reference check include the following (Curzon, 1995; Deems, 1994; Mornell, 1998):

1. *Background:* In what capacity and for how long did you know the applicant? What was his or her specific work assignment? What were the circumstances surrounding his or her leaving?
2. *Technical competence:* Is the applicant competent in communicating with and supporting individuals whom our organization supports? How would you rate his or her overall performance, work habits, problem-solving skills, and ability to work independently? Did this person follow through on assignments? What are the applicant's strengths? What is one skill this person needs to work on?
3. *People skills:* How well does the applicant get along with peers, supervisors, interdisciplinary team members, and individuals supported and their family members?
4. *Motivation:* What motivates this person to do a good job?
5. *Other:* Is there anything I have not asked that I should know about?

Using this as a guide, the organization can develop its own list of questions to use when checking references.

It is important to understand the legal and ethical considerations regarding reference checks. An article on ethical hiring practices suggested the following practices, among others, for conducting reference and other background checks:

- Do not get information without first getting [the] applicant's consent.
- Allow applicants to name sources they do not want contacted and to explain why not.
- Put requests for information from references in writing.
- Tell information sources (e.g., former employers) that all information sought will be made available to applicants.
- Never ask references for opinions (e.g., ask the factual basis for applicants leaving their former employment, not whether their former employers would ever rehire them).
- Verify information given by [references] whenever possible.
- Assess all applicants for the same job or kind of work [in] the same way (Brumback, 1996, pp. 275–276).

One challenge in conducting reference checks is that some people are reluctant or are not permitted by their company's policy to answer questions due to potential legal liability. One strategy that may be helpful is to call the list of people given as references at times they are unlikely to be near their telephone (e.g., at lunchtime, very early in the day). Leave a phone number and a message that says "X person is a candidate for such-and-such position at our company. Your name was given as a reference. Please call me back at your convenience." Most people will return your call if the person is an excellent or outstanding applicant but will not call back if they have significant reservations about the person (Mornell, 1998). It may also be important to check references that are not job related. For example, a person who knows the candidate from volunteer work may have observed the person completing tasks or working on a project.

Biographical Data Verification

Biographical data can be reviewed in several ways. Among the simplest is a verification of the data on the application form or résumé provided by the applicant. Checking information about education, employment, and other job qualifications provides a check of the integrity of the applicant and confirms that the person meets the minimum qualifications for employment (e.g., high school diploma or GED; valid driver's license, if driving supported individuals is a DSP job requirement at the organization). Weighted application blanks can help improve the accuracy of the selection process. These score work history, education, community service activities, and other data based on how well those activities predict performance or tenure.

Background Checks

Many but not all states require applicants for human services jobs to submit to a criminal background study as a condition of employment. People with criminal convictions for certain offenses (e.g., murder, rape, felony assault) are typically disqualified from employment in human services organizations. Some states maintain registries of people who are disqualified from employment due to past abuse or neglect. Other background checks may include a driver's license check (if driving is an essential job function) or a verification of professional licensure (e.g., for a certified nursing assistant). In most cases these checks are pass/fail and determine whether a candidate is eligible for employment. Even in states where background studies are not required, organizations may want to consider them for individuals who will be working with people who are vulnerable to physical, emotional, or financial exploitation. Many tools are available for this purpose. For example, a Social Security trace can verify previous addresses, and a motor vehicle records check shows any violations, convictions, and re-

strictions for a candidate applying for a job that requires use of a motor vehicle. A credit history review when hiring FLSs and others who manage finances for the organization can show how individuals have handled money and whether they have any judgments or liens against them (Greengard, 1995). Since credit reports often contain errors, an organization using credit reports should give the candidate an opportunity to explain any adverse information before using it to make an employment decision (Mornell, 1998). Whether conducting state-required criminal background or certification checks, reviewing educational transcripts, or checking employment history, the organization should be clear with applicants that a background check will be conducted and should obtain written consent when required (an organization's human resources department or an attorney can provide details). A statement to this effect should be posted on the organization's web site, on job application forms, and in classified ads.

Gather Additional Information

Once applicants have been screened so that the pool includes only those who meet the minimum qualifications for the job, the next step is to gather more in-depth information about the remaining applicants. By doing so, the organization can identify the applicant who best matches the job and the organization. The selection of interview questions or topics for investigation should include at least the following steps (Harris & Eder, 1999):

- Using the job analysis results (described in Chapter 6), identify the most important tasks to be performed in the job (consider the relative frequency of the task, the impact of an error, and the significance to the organization).
- List the knowledge, skills, and attitudes (KSAs) and other requirements (e.g., licensure) necessary for successful performance.
- List work requirements, such as attendance rules and policies on overtime and holiday work, that are important for success in the job.
- List the major motivators for employees in the role (including intrinsic motivators related to the nature of the task and extrinsic rewards offered by the organization) that may match applicant preferences or that may be unique to the organization.
- Identify the top four or five unique values that are held by the organization or that are present in the work environment that can be compared with applicant preferences and values.

The purposes of this phase of the selection process include assessing personal qualities, organizational fit, job competence, and values (Bartram, Lindley, Marshall, & Foster, 1995).

Work Sample Tests

Work sample tests provide an applicant with an opportunity to demonstrate his or her skills in job-related tasks before hire. Using such tests provide at least two advantages to an employer. First, the tests offer an opportunity to observe applicants doing tasks that are required on the job. Applicants who score well on such tests may be more likely to perform well on the job after hire (e.g., Cascio, 1987). Second, work sample tests provide applicants an opportunity to experience a bit of the job before hire. In a sense, a work sample test functions as an RJP (see Chapter 3). One of the more help-

ful work sample tests for DSPs may be conducted simultaneously with an RJP. Such tests might assess applicants' skill in observing and communicating with individuals who have disabilities and their skill in documenting observations. Setting up a work sample test for these two skills involves two parts. First, an applicant participates in an RJP or an interview that involves interacting with an individual supported in the potential job setting. This interaction could be participating in a meal, viewing an RJP photograph album or scrapbook, or asking or answering questions during an interview with a person with a disability. The following skills could be assessed through such an activity:

- Use of effective, sensitive communication skills to build rapport and open channels of communication by recognizing and adapting to individual communication styles
- Use of augmentative and alternative communication devices to interact with individuals
- Interaction with and support of individuals using active listening skills, acknowledgment of individuals' ideas and concerns, and responding in an appropriate and respectful manner
- Communication in a manner that is culturally sensitive and appropriate

These skills are drawn from the residential DSP competencies identified by Hewitt (1998b).

Another part of the work sample test paired with an RJP involves asking the applicant to complete a structured observation worksheet (see Chapter 3) to describe his or her observations during an RJP. The applicant is asked to turn in the worksheet for evaluation. The following competencies could be assessed (Hewitt, 1998b):

- Reading and completion of daily logging, program charting, and health care notes as needed, using approved abbreviations and objective language
- Maintenance of standards of confidentiality and ethical practice in documentation and communications (e.g., free of bias or judgment)

This part of the combined work sample test and RJP could also be used to assess whether the applicant has adequate written English skills to successfully complete his or her job duties. This particular work sample test brings with it the added benefit of providing a tool to help the supervisor and the applicant discuss any questions or concerns about the job or the applicant's observations. See the end of Chapter 3 for examples of questions to use in a structured observation.

Another type of work sample test, portfolios, is becoming more common as postsecondary education opportunities for DSPs expand. Portfolios are samples of a candidate's work in various competency areas. Portfolios are being used in some states to credential DSPs or to provide access to wage increments. Because portfolios involve a significant amount of work, they are most commonly developed for courses that offer postsecondary or continuing education credits. Although most applicants for DSP positions today do not have a portfolio, it is good practice for organizations to begin asking for portfolios or work samples that could be included in portfolios to encourage the use of portfolios during selection and hiring. For example, a DSP who will be responsible for writing skill development or behavior change interventions may be asked to provide a sample of a program that he or she has previously developed, with an example of how progress was documented.

For any work sample test, the scoring criteria should be determined before the test, and the same criteria should be used for each applicant. Those criteria should be based on the standards used by the organization to differentiate between excellent and poor performance for current employees. A good way to evaluate the test before implementing it for new hires is to try it on yourself and a few excellent performers to ensure that it measures what you think it does (Mornell, 1998).

Structured Interviews

Structured interviewing ensures that the information gathered during the interview yields accurate information about the skills a person has related to the job tasks of the position for which they are interviewing. Elements of structure include asking all applicants the same job-related questions and establishing clear criteria for evaluating responses to the questions (Gilliland & Steiner, 1999). Effective structured interviews pose questions that relate to job requirements as measured by a critical incident job analysis (see Janz, Hellervik, & Gilmore, 1986, for specific instructions on how to use this type of job analysis). Briefly, critical incident job analysis involves collecting examples of both excellent and poor job performance. For example, top-performing DSPs and FLSs may be asked to describe the best and worst examples of DSPs' responses to a certain crisis. Details about what excellent and poor performers did in the situation are gathered until patterns of behavior common to excellent and poor performance in this situation can be discerned. Those patterns form the basis for assessing responses to the structured interview questions. Structured interviews use a behaviorally anchored scoring guide (which gives specific examples of answers that qualify for a particular score) to evaluate the answer to each question in terms of what constitutes an excellent, an acceptable, or an unacceptable answer in a particular organizational setting (Maurer, Sue-Chan, & Latham, 1999).

Developing Questions

Several formats can be used in structured interviewing. The two most common forms are the behavior description interview and the situational interview. Behavior description interviews are based on the premise that the best predictor of future behavior is past behavior in similar circumstances (Janz et al., 1986). Past behavior that occurred recently or that is part of a longstanding pattern of behavior have greater predictive power than behavior that is less recent or that occurred only once. Behavior description questions ask candidates to describe situations they faced, what the candidates did, and what happened as a result. The most effective behavior description questions ask about greatest extent or degree of a situation or job feature using terms such as *most/least*, *best/worst*, or *hardest/easiest* (Janz et al., 1986). Effective questions may also ask about the first or last time something happened or about a person's most significant accomplishments (Brull, 1996).

Situational interviews are based on goal-setting theory, which suggests that intentions are related to actual behavior. They are developed from critical incidents identified in job analyses and ask future-oriented, hypothetical questions (Gilliland & Steiner, 1999). A key characteristic of situational interviews is that they pose situational dilemmas in which the applicant is forced to choose between two or more

equally desirable or undesirable courses of action (Maurer et al., 1999). The consistency of interview scores across raters can be increased if questions are based on a job analysis and are closely related to the job, if answers are rated on a question-by-question basis, if the interviewer takes notes during the interview, if an interview panel rather than a single rater is used to evaluate candidate responses, and if a scoring guide for each question is used (Janz et al., 1986; Maurer et al., 1999).

There remains a fair amount of debate about whether questions about past behavior or questions about future intentions are the most valid and best type of questions to use in an interview (Motowidlo, 1999). Studies have found empirical and theoretical support for both types of questions. It is possible that interviews using either type of question can help identify the best candidates if the questions are based on a job analysis; if all candidates are asked the same set of questions; and if responses are scored with behaviorally anchored scoring guides, and, preferably, are used in panel rather than one-to-one interviews. At the end of this chapter is a set of behavior-based questions based on the DSP competencies in the *Community Support Skill Standards* (CSSS; Taylor, Bradley, & Warren, 1996; see also Chapter 6). Table 4.2 shows an example of a structured behavioral interview question, with scoring criteria to assess responses.

Since structured interview questions are based on critical situations that distinguish the behavior of excellent and poor performers, the process of developing a structured interview must include a means to identify critical incidents that define excellent and poor behavior. Fortunately, the CSSS (Taylor et al., 1996) and *The Minnesota Frontline Supervisor Competencies and Performance Indicators* (Hewitt, Larson, O'Nell, Sauer, & Sedlezky, 1998; see also the Introduction and Chapter 1) outline key areas in which competent performance is required. Those standards can be used to identify critical incidents by topical area. Developing a scoring guide for behavioral questions involves convening a meeting of experienced and high-performing experts within the

Table 4.2. Sample structured behavioral interview question and scoring guidelines

Content	
Competency area	Community Living Skills and Supports: Household Management
Competency statement	Direct support professionals (DSPs) assist individuals in completing household routines (e.g., cleaning, laundry, pet care) and are respectful of individuals' rights and ownership of their home.
Interview question	Describe the household chore or duty you like least. How do you ensure that the chore or duty is completed?
Probe questions	How often is that task completed? Who actually does the task? If someone other than you does the task, describe how you communicate with that person about the task.
Scoring examples	
Excellent (5 points)	I negotiate with my roommate or spouse to do a task they strongly dislike in exchange for them helping me with or completing the task I strongly dislike doing. This way the task is completed when needed and is done well. I do it right away to get it out of the way before I do more preferred tasks.
Average (3 points)	I do the task as infrequently as possible. I hire someone else to do the task for me.
Poor (1 point)	I yell at my kids, my spouse, or my roommate until they complete the task. I just don't do it.

organization (both DSPs and FLSs or managers) to reach consensus about excellent (5), average (3), and poor (1) answers to each question (Maurer et al., 1999). This can be as simple as asking experts to think of the best, the average, and the poorest performers they have observed in that situation and to report what those performers did. At the end of an interview, applicants' total scores are used for ranking purposes.

Before interviewing candidates, it may be also helpful to prepare a single-page chart listing 10 most critical job skills and qualifications on which each candidate will be scored. Some skills and qualifications will be scored based on a single interview question; others will be based on an overall assessment of the applicant's performance during the interview or application process (e.g., verbal communication skills), on information provided by references, or on background materials or work samples provided by the applicant (e.g., writing skills). This chart of key job skills can be used to easily compare applicants.

Structured interviews may also include factual questions regarding a person's work history or education or questions to clarify information gathered through other selection strategies. These questions can help to verify information, clarify questions that arose during application review and reference checking, address omissions in the application, and assist the organization in making a final decision about the candidate who is the best match for the job (Harris & Eder, 1999). Common types of such questions and their purposes are listed in Table 4.3.

In evaluating the responses to these additional questions, the organization should consider the following factors (Bruce & Moore, 1989):

- Does the information provided in the interview match or conflict with data on the application or from other sources?
- Did the candidate show discomfort in discussing certain facets of his or her background?
- Did the candidate provide vague or general answers that do not document accomplishments or otherwise answer the question?

The interviewers may want to note whether the applicant was on time and prepared for the interview. This factor, along with responses to structured interview questions about showing up for work on time, can be used to predict whether promptness is likely to be a problem if the person is hired.

Conducting and Scoring the Interview

When the interview is conducted, several prompts can be helpful in eliciting more complete information from applicants who do not elaborate sufficiently for the interviewers to assess their skill in the area. Common types of prompts include the following (Maddux, 1994):

- Clarifying questions (e.g., "What do you mean by . . . . ?")
- Seeking new information to build on a previous statement (e.g., "Could you tell me more about . . . . ?")
- Repeating a question that was asked but not answered
- Clarifying what has been said that seems to be inconsistent
- Summarizing key ideas

Table 4.3. Factual and other examples of various types of interview questions and their advantages and disadvantages

Experience and activity descriptions

Purpose: Putting candidate at ease, providing overview of past experience, and setting stage for other questions

Advantages

- These descriptions are easy for the person to provide.
- They establish rapport.
- They give a shy applicant an opportunity to warm up to the interview.

Disadvantages

- These descriptions put candidates with no previous relevant experience at a disadvantage.
- The descriptions may falsely imply that if a candidate has done a task before, he or she can perform it well.

Examples

- "Please describe your primary duties in your last job."[a]
- "Describe the most important responsibilities you had in your last position."[a]
- "What do you typically do when you have a difference of opinion with your boss?"
- "Describe a typical day in your most recent position."

Technical knowledge questions

Purpose: Testing an applicant's knowledge

Advantages

- Technical knowledge questions can provide direct information about whether the applicant has the knowledge, skills, and attitudes (KSAs) needed in the position.

Disadvantages

- It is difficult to construct questions that are valid (that measure what you think they measure) and reliable (that yield the same result when asked on different occasions or under different circumstances).
- Tests using these questions can raise employment law issues if the tests unfairly discriminate based on protected characteristics not related to actual performance of the job (e.g., age, race, gender, disability).
- Some candidates are intimidated by these types of questions or do not test well but are actually good employees.

Consideration

- It is difficult to craft questions with the right degree of relevancy and difficulty.

Examples

- "Please give an example of positive reinforcement."
- "Describe the most complex work task you have used a computer to complete."

Questions about biographical facts, credentials, and achievements

Purpose: Obtaining information about a person's education, employment history, and past achievements that is verifiable using other sources

Advantages

- Biographical questions are usually easy for the applicant to answer.
- They help establish the applicants' past experience and achievements.

Disadvantages

- These questions require verification as some applicants lie or exaggerate their credentials.
- These questions may falsely imply that people with certain education or achievements will be better employees.

Examples

- "What licenses or certificates do you hold in this state?"
- "What special recognition have you received?"[a]
- "What postsecondary degrees have you earned?"
- "Describe the most recent job you had that is related to this position."

(continued)

Table 4.3. *(continued)*

Self-evaluation opinion questions

Purpose: Asking what the applicant thinks about a topic

Advantages

Self-evaluation questions reveal areas for probing.

The questions provide information the applicant thinks is important.

Disadvantages

These questions invite the applicant to say what he or she thinks you want to hear.

They make a candidate who thinks quickly and speaks fluently seem very competent.

The questions do not provide any evidence about what the candidate has done.

These kinds of questions may falsely imply that if a candidate likes a task, he or she can perform it.

Types of questions[a]

Likes and dislikes

Strengths and weaknesses

Statements of goals, attitudes, and philosophies

Hypothetical or speculative statements

Examples

"What did you like best about your last job?"[a]

"What are your biggest weaknesses?"

"Why did you apply for this job?"

[a]*Source:* Janz, Hellervik, & Gilmore, 1986.

Negative balance questions can be helpful when the applicant seems too good to be true or gives few or no examples of struggles. The interviewer can ask a negative balance question as a follow-up to a structured interview question (Yate, 1994), for example, by saying, "That is very impressive. Now, will you describe a situation that did not work out quite so well?"

Interviewers should be careful to avoid the following common errors in scoring interviews:

- Leniency—giving high scores to all applicants
- Halo effect—giving applicants who score highly on one question higher scores on other questions than are warranted
- Central tendency—clustering scores around the average rather than giving reasonable numbers of the highest or lowest scores (e.g., not giving any 1s or 5s on a 5-point scale).
- Range restriction—using only a small subset of possible scores to rate candidates instead of using the whole range (e.g., giving all applicants 4s or 5s on a 5-point scale).

Other biases, such as being influenced by physical attractiveness, should also be checked. Table 4.4 lists several other suggestions to improve the overall interview process (Brull, 1996; Curzon, 1995; Deems, 1994; Harris & Eder, 1999; Maddux, 1994; Mornell, 1998).

During the final round of interviews, it can be helpful to end each interview by asking the candidate to call back in a couple of days (set a specific time and date). During that call, ask if the candidate has any new questions or thoughts about the job. The point of this is to put another test of reliability in the process. Approximately 15% of final candidates miss this call (Mornell, 1998). Using this strategy can help screen out people who will not reliably complete assigned tasks.

Table 4.4. Suggestions for improving the interview process

The interview should promote goodwill between the candidate and your organization regardless of whether the candidate is offered employment.

Having too many questions will frustrate both the interviewer and the person being interviewed. In a 1-hour interview, only 8–12 questions can be comfortably covered. Shorter interviews should include fewer questions.

Warmly greet and introduce yourself to the applicant; ask the applicant what name he or she prefers.

Begin the interview with small talk.

Listen more than you talk.

Start with the assumption that the candidate has no skills and allow him or her to demonstrate capabilities.

Share the purpose of the interview and explain that the applicant will have a chance to ask questions about the job.

Begin with relatively familiar topics, such as previous work or education, to help the applicant become comfortable with talking.

Use silence to prompt more complete answers.

Maintain occasional eye contact and a pleasant facial expression.

Do not assume that people are better at the things they like to do than at the things they do not like to do.

Do not take information on strengths and weaknesses at face value. Probe for examples; check with references.

Avoid asking questions that can be answered by a single word such as *yes* or *no.*

Keep in mind that statements of attitude and philosophies are poor predictors of people's actual behaviors.

Be sure to spend time giving the applicant information about the position, but do not do this until near the end of the interview. Incorporating a realistic job preview (RJP) can be a very effective strategy to do this.

Give a 5-minute warning before the interview ends to provide the applicant a chance to mention any important information that has been missed.

End the interview on a pleasant note.

Tell the applicant what to expect next in the process.

Sources: Brull, 1996; Curzon, 1995; Deems, 1994; Harris & Eder, 1999; Maddux, 1994; Mornell, 1998.

Formal Assessments

Persuasive arguments have been made in the research literature (cited earlier in this chapter and summarized in Table 4.1) that job performance is strongly predicted by general intellectual ability. Researchers have argued that this is true for almost all types of jobs (Behling, 1998). The reality, however, is that few community human services organizations have the capacity to directly assess cognitive ability through, for example, intelligence tests. In the absence of such tests, organizations interested in this trait for potential employees may look to other information gathered through the selection process. For example, grades in school and completion of postsecondary education correlate (although not perfectly) with general intelligence, which in turn is associated with better job performance, job knowledge, and success in on-the-job training (Behling, 1998). Other indicators of cognitive ability include vocabulary and problem-solving success, which may be assessed in interviews. Although cognitive ability may be highly related to job performance, however, job performance is not the only factor to consider when selecting DSPs. Retention, or stability of employees, is just as important as or more important than performance. In that context, it is critical

to remember that studies of DSPs (e.g., Larson, Lakin, & Bruininks, 1998) have repeatedly shown no correlation between education and the length of time a person remains on the job. Another argument against the broad use of cognitive ability testing is that applicants may not see how the test is relevant to the job and may take offense to having to take the test (Janz et al., 1986).

It is relatively uncommon but not unheard of for community human services organizations to use formal testing of prospective employees. One intriguing test may have practical relevance for community human services settings. This test measures the extent to which the applicant's values match those of the organization (Brumback, 1996). The exercise is crafted by having the organization first identify its top five values that guide its activities (e.g., assisting the people the organization supports to direct the course of their own lives). Then the organization identifies 15 other values that are either of no or of low importance to the organization. Each of the 20 values is written on a separate index card. Each applicant is asked to sort the cards into four piles, each containing 5 cards according to how important the applicant feels the values to be a significant part of the organization's culture. Applicants are given one point for each card in the *most important* pile that matches the organization's top five values.

Make a Final Hiring Decision

At the end of the hiring process, if two or more qualified applicants remain, the organization has to decide which of those candidates to hire. Hopefully, the selection process has effectively narrowed the field to just a few excellent candidates. Using multiple hurdles to get to this point can improve hiring success. For example, to get to the reference check stage of the process, the applicant must have the required education and experience. To get to the interview, the applicant must have a positive reference check. To get to a work sample test, the applicant must pass the interview. This approach does not necessarily require that an extended amount of time pass between the various steps, but it does require that the organization use very specific criteria about who is eligible to continue to the next stage. Often, these important steps are forgotten or exceptions to the rule are routinely made in the interest of filling positions. It is important to stay with the process that has been developed. Doing so will save much trouble later on and will ensure that all candidates are evaluated on the same criteria.

There are several factors to consider when deciding among the top candidates for the job. Candidates can be evaluated on how they score on the various selection strategies identified previously. One approach is to simply hire the candidate who scores highest on the interview. Other possibilities include picking the top two or three candidates based on the selection procedures and then evaluating factors such as the personality match of the candidate with the job, the candidate's interest in the job, the behavior of the applicant during the selection process (e.g., on time, neatly and appropriately dressed, polite, friendly). Remember that skills can be developed but that attitudes rarely change (Curzon, 1995). It may be better to hire someone with fewer skills whose values and attitudes are a good match for the organization than to select a highly skilled person who has a negative attitude.

Job Carving

Job carving is a strategy to examine the total skills required to provide supports in a particular work site and to craft job descriptions for an individual employee based on the strength of the employee. Rather than requiring all DSPs to develop expertise in all skill areas, specialist roles are created based on the skills each DSP brings to the job. The full array of skills is available by combining the skills of the team of employees. Job carving may be a helpful strategy when many otherwise qualified individuals are not hired because they cannot or will not meet certain skill requirements. For example, a current job description may require all DSPs to cook, drive a car, and dispense medications. Individuals who cannot do all of these things are often not considered for employment. An organization that uses job carving may be able to reserve some of its positions for people who do not meet one of these skill requirements by ensuring that others who work similar hours at the location do.

When there are fewer applicants than there are jobs, employers may need to be more flexible with respect to prerequisite skill requirements to maintain a full complement of staff. Job carving does not mean hiring people who are incompetent. Instead, it means looking more closely at the minimum job requirements to see if there are ways to get the job done without requiring each employee to be able to do all components of the job.

Job carving may also be useful in the performance review and retention process. Organizations that lose employees because of burnout or because employees strongly dislike certain job tasks may find that redefining job roles for excellent performers may help. In this case the team of employees could negotiate to reallocate tasks among team members. One member may prefer to dispense medications while another may want to take responsibility for program writing or charting.

An alternative approach to job carving for a specific position might be to combine recruitment and selection activities across multiple work sites. Under this scenario, an organization documents the essential job functions in each of the sites and matches applicants to sites based on their strengths and skill needs. For example, a man who could not provide personal care to women could work at a site where the individuals supported are independent in their personal care, or he could work at a site supporting only men. A person who does not have a driver's license could work at a site where most community activities are within walking distance or can be reached by bus.

Matching Employees

A final stage in the selection process is to make sure that the candidates selected are a good match for the specific role they will work in. This means working hard to match new employees with individuals receiving supports based on individual characteristics and interests. Placing a new employee who hates rock music in a home where he will be supporting young men whose passion in life is to attend rock concerts may not be the best match. This also means looking at geography so that commutes can be minimized and so that people who take public transportation are not unduly burdened.

Making the Decision and Extending a Job Offer

The next phase in the hiring process is deciding based on all of the information gathered which candidate will be the best match for the position. Success in selecting the best candidate is enhanced if the selection process has been thorough and unbiased and provides the organization the information needed to identify the best candidate. Once a candidate has been selected, the person should be notified, preferably by telephone with an offer. The offer should include the name of the position, the name of the supervisor, the salary and benefits being offered, and a deadline for getting a decision from the applicant. The person making this call should know whether the salary and benefits are negotiable and within what parameters in case the candidate asks.

Candidates who were excluded during the hiring process as not eligible for employment or not suitable for a position can be notified (usually in writing) as soon as such a determination has been made. If more than one finalist for the position could potentially fill the job, however, these people should be informed of their finalist status but should not be sent a rejection letter until the job offer has been accepted by the top candidate. This makes it possible to offer the job to another candidate if the organization's first choice is no longer available or turns down the offer.

The selection process is not over when an offer has been extended and accepted. The hiring authority still must document that all applicants were fairly evaluated and that the decision to hire or not to hire a person was based on legal criteria. It is important to keep a simple list or form naming each candidate; whether a job offer was extended to the person; whether a job offer was accepted; and, if an offer was not extended, the reason for that decision. Common reasons for rejecting candidates include the following: The person does not meet the minimum job specifications, the person meets minimum specifications but is not the best qualified, the applicant has no prior related experience, the person has less prior experience than other candidates, the candidate cannot meet physical standards for essential job functions of the position (e.g., lifting), the person has fewer skills than the person selected, the candidate has less direct training or experience than the person selected, the applicant cannot work the schedule or hours required, and the applicant withdrew from consideration (Maddux, 1994).

When the position is filled, unsuccessful candidates should be notified as soon as possible. Candidates who were interviewed should be contacted by telephone and sent a follow-up letter, whereas candidates who are not interviewed can be notified by mail or e-mail. One common way to notify unsuccessful candidates is to say that the candidate whose qualifications best fit the job specifications was selected (Maddux, 1994).

In the Spotlight: Franciscan Health System Skilled Nursing Facility

A skilled nursing facility operated by the Franciscan Health System reduced turnover from 146% to 51% in 2 years by introducing a 90-minute assessment prior to hire (see Thomas & Brull, 1993, for a complete description of this intervention). The organization assessed cognitive skills (e.g., understanding directions), administrative skills (e.g., being organized), interpersonal skills (e.g., likeability, cooperation, compassion, consideration), motivation (e.g., personal pride, quality orientation, enthusiasm, commitment), and ad-

justment (e.g., reliability, responsibility). The assessment used three separate tests: the Personnel Decisions Inc. Employment Inventory (Personnel Decisions, Inc., n.d.-a), the Guilford-Zimmerman Temperament Survey (Guilford & Zimmerman, n.d.), and the Personnel Decisions Inc. Job Preferences Inventory (Personnel Decisions, Inc., n.d.-b). The organization also used a structured interview process to assess applicants' behavior and values to find a match to the organization's values. Applicants were divided into three groups according to score. Applicants with scores in the top third were considered green-light candidates and were hired immediately. People scoring in the bottom third were given a red-light score and were not hired. People in the middle third were considered yellow-light candidates. The organization tried to hire only green-light employees but also hired yellow-light employees when there were too few green-light candidates or when there was an urgency to fill a certain position. This process resulted in substantial cost savings due to increased productivity and reduced turnover and in FLS reports that the quality of nursing assistants had improved substantially.

OVERCOMING IMPLEMENTATION BARRIERS

Although structured interviews (both situational interviews and behavioral interviews) have considerable research support, they are relatively uncommon in human services settings. There are several barriers to implementation of these techniques. First, the interview protocol requires scoring of each response as the interview progresses. Although this enhances the accuracy of the process, it can be tedious for the interviewer. Second, situational interview questions can frustrate less-qualified applicants. Third, the process requires time to conduct a job analysis, identify critical situations, develop questions, and create a scoring guide (Maurer et al., 1999). Like all of the research-based techniques described in this book, this intervention is not a quick fix. Time and effort are required to do it well. The advantage of using a well-defined strategy such as structured interviewing is that solid research evidence suggests that the payoff is increased success in hiring candidates who can actually perform the job well.

Considerations for Developing and Using Selection Strategies

It is important to involve DSPs throughout the process of developing and using selection strategies. They can provide valuable assistance in identifying critical incidents that define excellent and poor performance. In addition, by testing interview questions with current excellent performers, the organization is able to gauge whether the criteria established for good versus poor answers are realistic.

Evaluating Selection Success

The key element in evaluating selection success is assessing whether the people who got high scores on the selection criteria actually turn out to be excellent performers who stay in their positions. To assess success, the organization can keep a record for each employee of his or her hire date, termination date, scores on the selection criteria, and reason for leaving. One important point to consider is the percentage of people who leave the organization who were terminated involuntarily. A related consideration is the percentage of people hired in the previous year who were terminated. One study that followed new hires in more than 80 organizations found that 15% of

new hires were terminated within a year of starting (Larson, Lakin, & Bruininks, 1998). That termination rate is quite high and probably means that many people were hired who should have been screened out in the selection process. It is very costly in terms of hiring costs, exposure to risk, unemployment costs, and so forth, to use involuntary terminations to "fix" a selection error. Organizations that terminate large numbers of new employees may want to reevaluate selection practices to screen out applicants who are a poor match with the organization or the job.

Another more sophisticated approach to assessing the success of the organization's selection process involves measuring performance indicators for new hires. For example, the organization can track the scores new hires got on selection criteria, divide those new hires into high- and low-scoring groups, and then check whether the average performance ratings are higher for the high-scoring employees than for the low-scoring employees. For more technical information about this topic, consult a textbook on personnel management (e.g., Cascio, 1997).

QUESTIONS TO PONDER

1. Are there components of the selection process that your organization is skipping? How could they be better addressed?
2. Has your organization succumbed to the "warm body syndrome," hiring all applicants just to fill vacancies? If yes, what steps could your organization take to change this?
3. What specific changes can your organization make to improve the questions it asks in the interview process? Does your organization use structured behavioral interview questions? Why or why not?
4. What changes are needed in your interviewing practices to make them conform more closely to the structured interview techniques described in this chapter? What will you do first?
5. Has your organization developed set selection criteria for all applicants? Are these criteria used consistently across applicants and across different parts of the organization?
6. Is job carving a strategy your organization could use? Why or why not?
7. What proportion of staff members who leave your organization are involuntarily terminated? What selection strategies can reduce that proportion?

CONCLUSION

This chapter reviews the components of an effective selection process. The literature suggests that strategies such as structured interviews can be very useful in selection. Each organization should review its policies and practices regarding selection to decide whether those practices are consistent with what research suggests is best practice and to identify ways to improve success in selection and hiring. Selection is hard work, but it is a necessary part of the recruitment and retention process. If it is done poorly, the selection process can cause even the best recruitment, retention, or training intervention to fail; if done well, the selection process can substantially improve success with recruitment and retention.

RESOURCES

Curzon, S.C. (1995). *Managing the interview: A how-to manual for hiring staff.* New York: Neal-Schuman Publishers.

Curzon's book provides specific suggestions and easy-to-understand examples about how to improve selection practices, categorized into the following sections: preparing for the interview, creating questions, using a group or panel interview process, conducting the interview, extending the interview process, choosing the candidate, offering the job, and wrapping up.

Deems, R.S. (1994). *Interviewing: More than a gut feeling* [Videotape and handbook]. West Des Moines, IA: American Media.

This videotape and handbook provide a good overview of the interviewing and selection process. It provides specific instructions on each phase, specific examples to illustrate the main points, and exercises that allow users to apply the new learning. Topics covered include identifying needed job skills, preparing questions, conducting the interview, evaluating candidates, handling difficult interview situations, and implementing behavior-based interviewing.

Eder, R.W., & Harris, M.W. (Eds.). (1999). *The employment interview handbook.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

This textbook contains 21 high-quality literature reviews about the employment interview process. One of this book's goals is for readers to become informed consumers of employment interview research. Its target audience is researchers and graduate students, instructors in industrial/organizational psychology and human resources management, and experienced supervisors and administrators.

Janz, T., Hellervik, L., & Gilmore, D.C. (1986). *Behavior description interviewing: New, accurate, cost effective.* Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

This classic text reviews the reasons for using behavioral interviewing, explains how to analyze a position and create appropriate structured interview questions, describes how to move through the interview, contains several job aids such as checklists for improving interviewing skills, and gives many examples of structured interviewing questions.

Mornell, P. (1998). *45 effective ways for hiring smart: How to predict winners and losers in the incredibly expensive people reading game.* Berkeley, CA: Ten Speed Press.

This book provides concrete information about effective selection strategies, in an expanded list format. Sections include the following: pre-interview strategies, strategies during the interview, strategies after the interview, reference-checking strategies, and final strategies. The book has a helpful summary chart of the 45 strategies and their benefits and also includes helpful examples of various forms needed during the selection process.

Sample Interview Questions for Direct Support Professionals

Following are sample interview questions for organizations supporting individuals with disabilities. This list includes both behavior description questions and situational interview questions. The questions are based on direct support professional (DSP) competencies in the *Community Support Skill Standards* (CSSS; Taylor, Bradley, & Warren, 1996; see Chapter 6 for more information on the CSSS). We recommend that the organization choose questions that suit its needs and the needs of the people to be interviewed. The organization should ask the same set of questions of all applicants for a particular position.

Competency Area 1: Participant Empowerment

1. Describe a situation in which you assisted an individual to recognize that he or she had several choices in how to handle a difficult problem. What was the situation, what did you do, and what was the final outcome?
2. A participant at the group home in which you work has told you she thinks she might be a lesbian and would like to meet other women in the gay community. What steps would you take to empower her?
3. Describe a situation in which you have encouraged someone to advocate for him- or herself. What was the situation, what did you do, and what was the result?
4. You and a person with disabilities you support are at a local restaurant. The server taking your order looks and speaks only to you. The person you are with can give his or her own order. What would you do?

Competency Area 2: Communication

1. Describe ways in which you have communicated with a person who does not communicate verbally.
2. Your new co-worker, Mohamed, is Muslim. During Ramadan he fasts during the day and has asked you to change duties with him for the month so that he will not have to cook for the people who live in the group home. You cook a great deal already, and do not want to take on the extra duties for him. How do you respond to him?
3. Your co-worker has a habit of interrupting you at staff meetings. In the past you have waited for her to finish and bring up your point again, only to have her interrupt once more. As a result, you often leave staff meetings feeling frustrated because your ideas were not discussed. How do you address this issue?
4. Describe a situation in which your attempts to communicate with someone were ineffective. What was the situation, what did you do, and what happened as a result?
5. Describe the worst misunderstanding you were involved in at your last job. What was the situation, what did you do, and what happened as a result?

Competency Area 3: Assessment

1. Sally's mother expresses concern to you that Sally, whom you support, may be hard of hearing and tends to ignore her when she is talking. You have noticed this but have also found that when Sally is around friends or watching television, her hearing appears to be fine. You suspect that Sally is choosing to not listen to her mother. Sally's mother recently told you she wants her daughter's hearing tested and asks you for your thoughts. How might you share your assessment of the situation with Sally's mother?
2. Tell us about a time when someone whom you supported was injured and you had to make an immediate judgment about what needed to be done to help the person. Describe the injury and your steps in making the assessment.
3. Describe a situation in the past in which you participated in a team assessment process. What was your role? What was the outcome?
4. Tell me about the last time you solved a problem that required a lot of hard thinking and analysis. What difficulties did you encounter, how did you overcome them, and what was the result?

(continued)

Funding for the development of these questions was provided by the Partnerships for Success Grant funded by the U.S. Department of Labor (Grant No. N-7596-9-00-87-60). The opinions and assertions contained herein are the opinions of the authors and are not to be construed as official or reflecting the view of the U.S. Department of Labor.

Interview questions were developed by Talley Sjonberg, Karen Pederson, Amy S. Hewitt, and Sheryl A. Larson (University of Minnesota, Institute on Community Integration, Research and Training Center on Community Living) and have been adapted by permission. Other sources of questions include Julie Stocker (Hiawatha Homes, Rochester, Minnesota) and Homberger (1990).

Competency Area 4: Community and Service Networking

1. A person you support tells you that when he was a child, his family went regularly to a Catholic church and that he would like to become active in the faith again. How do you support him in this goal?
2. Michele is quiet and doesn't leave the house. She is not involved in any activities and has no personal relationships. Michele claims she has no areas of interest and seems unhappy with her life. How might you assist Michele in recognizing and developing areas of interest?
3. Please describe some community resources in your neighborhood. How might a person with a disability use those resources?
4. Think about the last time you moved to a new community. What strategies did you use to find places to engage in your favorite leisure activities? How did you go about meeting people with interests similar to yours? John recently moved from a large institution to a supported living setting. How might you assist John to learn about and become part of his new community?
5. Describe the most embarrassing situation you have experienced when you were with a person with a disability. What was the situation, what did you do, and what happened as a result? What, if anything, would you do anything differently if you were in a similar situation in the future?

Competency Area 5: Facilitation of Services

1. Tell me about a time when you had to practice professional confidentiality. What was the situation? What did you do? What was the outcome?
2. Think about the closest working relationship you have had with a person with developmental disabilities. What did you do to make that relationship work?
3. A few weeks after developing her support plan, Rachel changes her mind about wanting to get a job. What are the first two things you would say or do to respond?
4. Describe a situation in which you helped a person set a goal and then supported the person to achieve that goal. What was the goal, and how did you help?
5. Describe a situation in which you or someone you know needed a medical, psychological, or other support service but was having trouble getting it. What was the situation, what did you do, and what was the result?

Competency Area 6: Community Living Skills and Supports

1. Describe the best meal you have ever prepared for a group of people.
2. Describe the household chore or duty you like least. How do you ensure that the chore or duty is completed?
3. Describe the household chore or duty you like most. What strategies do you use to ensure that the chore or duty is completed?
4. What actions would you take if you recognized a person showing signs of having an allergic reaction (e.g., hives)?
5. Kamol, a resident in the group home where you work, was raised in a Thai community. Lately, he has expressed how much he misses his mother's cooking and talks about Thai dishes he loved as a child. How might you respond to this situation?
6. Describe a time when you were required to provide medical assistance or treatment to another person. What was the situation, what did you do, and what happened as a result?
7. If you were in a store and the person you were supporting sat down and refused to move, what would you do?

Competency Area 7: Education, Training, and Self-Development

1. How have you kept up on relevant resources and information about a topic of interest to you?
2. What else besides your education and job experience qualifies you for this job?
3. Describe the last thing you did for self-improvement.
4. Tell me about the best class you have ever taken. What was the class? Why was it good?
5. What is the next thing you want to learn how to do or how to do better? What is your plan for accomplishing this?

Competency Area 8: Advocacy

1. What advocacy organizations and services are available in this community that might assist people with disabilities?
2. Tell me about a situation in which you have advocated on behalf of another person or a time when someone else has advocated on your behalf. What made that advocacy successful or unsuccessful?
3. Describe a time when you witnessed a person with disabilities being teased by a co-worker or other person. What did you do? What could you have done to assist that person?

(continued)

Competency Area 9: Vocational, Educational, and Career Support

1. Mali would like to join a Hmong quilting group, but she has no method of transportation other than the bus, which is a long and confusing ride. What could you to do as her DSP to support her in gaining access to this program?
2. Describe a time when you have supported another person in a vocational or education program or with his or her career development. What did you do, and what was the result?
3. Describe the things you have done in the last couple of years to advance your career. What supports did you receive? What was the most helpful assistance you got?
4. Describe the first job you ever had. What would you do to adapt that job so that it could be performed by someone who could not walk (or talk, see, or hear)?
5. Wilma has been attending a traditional day training center for 15 years. She works only 2 hours each week and earns less than $1 every 2 weeks. Wilma expresses an interest in finding a real job. What are the most important things you will do in the next 2 weeks to help Wilma?

Competency Area 10: Crisis Intervention

1. Betty, a person living in the home where you work, is sensitive to loud noises. One afternoon, the maintenance crew comes to the house to do yard work and the sound of the riding mower sends her into a panic. She begins pacing rapidly while crying and covering her ears. She picks up a nearby object in attempt to throw through the window toward the maintenance employee. How would you handle this situation?
2. Describe the last time you became involved in a conflict or a crisis. What was the situation? What did you do? How well did it work? What would you have done to prevent the situation from occurring?
3. Describe the most difficult person you remember ever dealing with at work or at school. Describe the most difficult situation you remember encountering with that person. How did he or she react to you? How did you deal with the situation? What did you do about your own feelings? Did you ever discuss your differences with this person? If not, why not? If yes, what happened?

Competency Area 11: Organization Participation

1. Tell me about the mission of the last company you worked for. Did you agree or disagree with that mission? Explain why.
2. Describe a situation in which you played a role in making a change within your last place of employment (or place of worship, community center, or club). What was the situation, what did you do, and what was the result?
3. Describe a situation in which you had a conflict with a co-worker. What was the issue, what did you do, and what was the outcome of the conflict?
4. Describe the most memorable situation in which you had a conflict with your supervisor. What was the issue, what did you do, and what was the outcome of the conflict?
5. What was the best experience you have ever had as a member of a team? What was your role on the team? What made it a good experience?
6. Describe the worst supervisor you have ever had. What made that person a poor supervisor? How did you work with that person to complete your job duties?
7. Tell me about the last time you found yourself trying to do too many different things at the same time. How did you handle the situation?
8. Describe the co-worker whom you most appreciate. What characteristics or qualities of that person do you most appreciate?
9. What behaviors do you think are most important or most valued by team members or co-workers in the workplace? Of the behaviors you just listed, which is your strongest or most positive behavior with co-workers? Which might be a possible improvement area for you?
10. What does teamwork mean to you? Give some examples of things you have done to be a good team member or to improve teamwork.

Competency Area 12: Documentation

1. Tell me some of the reasons you think that documentation is important.
2. Describe a situation in which someone you know used words to describe a person or a group of people that showed disrespect. What, if anything, did you do in that situation?
3. Describe a situation in which you were asked to document an event. Describe what occurred, what information was documented, and why you documented the things you did.
4. What was the best thing you ever wrote? What was the topic? What made this piece the best you ever wrote?
5. Describe the most difficult writing assignment you have ever had. What was the assignment, and how did you handle it?
6. Describe the last paper or writing assignment you completed in school or at work. What was the assignment, what did you do, and what was the outcome of the assignment?

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Experience, Credentials, and Self-Evaluation Opinion Questions

1. Describe a typical day in your most recent job.
2. Please describe your present job responsibilities. Which are most difficult and why? Which are most enjoyable and why?
3. Describe any classes, experiences, or training you have received to prepare you for the job you are applying for.
4. Describe the most difficult job you have ever had. What made the job so difficult? How did you overcome the difficulties?
5. What is the most common misperception that other people have about you?
6. Most of us have more than one reason for leaving a job. What are some of yours, from past or present experience?
7. What one or two words would most or all of your previous supervisors use to describe you?
8. What part(s) of your last or present position did you like least? What did you do to try to overcome the situation? What would you think if you were to know in advance that this situation would be present in your new job?
9. What accomplishment in your present job are you most proud of? What was your best idea (whether it was implemented or not)?
10. Under what circumstances might you seek out a co-worker or peer for advice or suggestions? Provide examples of times that you did in the past.
11. Describe your ideal job. Explain your preferences, the amount and type of supervision, amount of contact and kinds of relationships with co-workers, job tasks, and freedom to work or to make decisions.
12. If you had the authority or power, what one thing would you change about your current or last position?
13. Other than money, what rewards, benefits, or work situations are most important for you?
14. How much time did you miss from work last year? The year before?
15. What suggestions has your supervisor given you for performance improvement or development?
16. We have all made mistakes on the job, some of which are bigger than others. Tell me about the biggest workplace mistake you ever made. What were the circumstances, and how did you deal with the situation? What did you learn from the experience?
17. Tell me about your schedule flexibility and your work schedule preferences.
18. If you were offered this position and you were to accept it, what one or two major contributions would you make to the organization, in the short term (in the first few weeks) and in the long term (after a year or so)?