

THE JOB INTERVIEW: THE PSYCHOLOGICAL ASPECTS

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Abstract: *Over the years, the importance of the interview tool within organizations has grown steadily. The epistemological change that has brought organizations to focus on the human side of its components defined no longer as "workers" but as "resources", could only see in the conversation the main form of communication between the various levels present in an organization. This cultural revolution in the world of work has thus brought out of psychotherapy studies a very powerful communication and personal growth tool, which for too many years had been the exclusive prerogative of clinical psychology. Since the discovery of the Hawthorne effect [Landsberger, 1958] onwards, it has in fact been clear that work, like most human activities, is essentially based on relationships with the environment and with the individuals present within it. It is therefore clear that a successful organization cannot ignore having internal communication that achieves its objectives and relaxes the organizational climate.*

This chapter will examine two fundamental moments of corporate life, the evaluation of a resource and its management over time. In fact, both moments are fundamental both for the organization which must select and develop a resource in the best way to allow continuous development of its corporate structure, and for the resource itself which, if enabled to be able to express itself at its best himself and his potential, will certainly face a career full of satisfactions.

The evaluation interview

With a view to better personnel management, the assessment and inventory of skills and potential within your organization allows you to place both new and existing collaborators in the right perspective. It also allows the control of various motivational aspects such as relationships between people, hierarchies, remuneration, turnover and any personal and professional development intervention, as well as, obviously, the possible corporate structures and objectives. In this paragraph we will try to provide

clear indications and methodologies to be applied to the evaluation interviews both in the personnel selection phase and in the collaborator evaluation phases. Psychological assessment also involves the use of so-called indirect techniques, such as tests and personality or psychometric tests in the Assessment Centres. The evaluation role of the company is generally a source of anxiety and criticism from those who will have to be evaluated. The most common are linked to the fact that the results of the evaluation process serve to covertly make decisions about the future of candidates or employees, or to the fact that the already proven collaboration implies an in-depth knowledge between those who are called upon to evaluate and their candidates. On the other side of the fence, the lack of enthusiasm of those in charge of evaluating is justified by the lack of time to carry out these operations or the lack of skills necessary to be as objective as possible in identifying the skills and potential of collaborators. It is therefore useful to suggest some ways to address and resolve these criticisms.

First of all, we recommend keeping in mind that, as we mentioned at the beginning, assessment is the first step in setting up a career development process that involves the individual both internally (development of professional and personal skills and motivation) and externally (career, salary or goals). Second, it is important to create the right environment, preparing all the documentation useful for conducting the interview, and to interpret the roles of evaluator and evaluated always in terms of analysis of behaviour, activities and results achieved.

What, then, are the qualities expected in an evaluator? There is a lot of talk on forums and social networks of job interviews in which the recruiter, or the boss, has behaved incorrectly towards the candidate or his collaborator. Questions that are too direct or inappropriate, unclear or absent communication, both before the meeting and in the feedback session, poor knowledge of the objectives of the interview or of the candidate's history, are among the most common mistakes that evaluators or selectors make, making the 'encountered a situation to say the least, frustrating. It is therefore appropriate for the evaluator to have a number of aspects clear for the success of the selection or evaluation process [Moulinier et al, 2005]:

1. Availability: use the time needed, giving the perception that the evaluated or candidate is not wasting our time, to analyze, as objectively as possible, the various aspects that a job requires. We will see later the

phases of an evaluation interview, and for each the various paths in which to guide the conversation.

2. Professionalism: provide yourself with a working method composed of specific criteria that facilitate a detailed analysis and return organized feedback.

3. Knowledge of the job in question: whether it is an IT job, or as a skilled worker, the evaluator needs to be based on facts commenting on circumstances and attitudes in relation to the work environment of the appraisee or the future employment of the candidate.

4. Orientation: the management style of the recruiter or manager must lead to an improvement in the current condition of the appraisee. During the interview it is essential to assume a dual attitude: demanding as regards the analysis of skills and the setting of company objectives, accommodating in orienting the individual and thinking about possible paths keeping in mind everything concerning the personal sphere (needs, limits and expectations).

5. Making judgments: the winning factor of a good evaluation is its objectivity. We need to clear our minds and not be influenced by prejudices and labels that are linked to experiences, definitions or events of the last period, but to place any deviation from the norm in a broader context.

Now let's see how to prepare for conducting an interview for the diagnosis of potential and which phases it is good to keep in mind so that the results are satisfactory for both parties involved. First of all, both in the case of the selection and the evaluation of a collaborator, it will be necessary to clarify which are the target skills, i.e. that set of characteristics, typical of an ideal job profile, of which we will detect the degree of possession of the evaluated. Among the characteristics of a profile we distinguish between technical-specialist skills (linked to the specificity of each job, e.g. knowledge of programming languages, economic or engineering calculation, etc.) and transversal ones which will be the subject of this paragraph. To draw a profile (or Job Profile in English) we will list a variable number of skills which, in accordance with the company and its organizational model, best describe the qualities of the role.

The number of skills will generally be greater the higher the level of profile required, but we advise not to be excessive in order not to confuse the assessment results. We will assign a score to each of these skills which we will use during the interview to assess the presence and frequency of

the behaviour. We now propose an exemplary table of scores for the survey.

Value used	Evaluative meaning
1	Competence is assessed absent
2	Competence is present to a low extent
3	Competence is present but discontinuous
4	The competence is present in average measure and frequency
5	The competence is present continuously
6	Competence is evaluated as a strength of the subject
7	Competence is assessed as a strong point of the subject with particular continuity
8	Competence is assessed as a strength of the subject at levels of excellence

A somewhat shared subdivision of soft skills [Rotondi 2006] suggests distinguishing them into four areas:

1. **COGNITIVE** skills area: this area generally includes those skills that are expressed during the interview through the organization of speech.

- a. Analyses
- b. Synthesis
- c. Overview
- d. Method
- e. Innovation

During the interview, therefore, we will observe how much the narrative methods manifest synthetic or analytical, systematic or digressive, rational or intuitive tendencies.

2. **REALIZATION** skills area: in this area we find those realization skills that express the tendency to set realistic goals, to influence events, to accept failures and stressful situations, to project oneself into the future and to accept risks. Also included are those managerial skills that refer to the management of collaborators, the definition, management and verification of operational plans that allow the achievement of results.

- a. Initiative and proactivity
- b. Determination / striving for results
- c. Decision
- d. Contributor guidance and development
- e. Planning, organization and monitoring
- f. Resource optimization

During the interview it is useful to be told about one's own study and professional background and how it is perceived by managers and collaborators

3. RELATIONAL skills area: to this area belong those skills which during the interview are manifested through the behavior of the evaluated person in relating with the interlocutor, in the vision of himself and of others, in participation in the interview and in the propensity to tune in on the objectives and timing of the interviewer. Furthermore, the communication style, the emergence of open or suspicious tones, the relationship with any work experiences, the emergence of particular emotional tones and the way of managing the relationship must be taken into consideration.

- a. Interpersonal sensitivity
- b. Communication and impact
- c. Leadership
- d. Integration and teamwork
- e. Social intelligence

Phrases such as "I speak too quickly" denote the attention of the evaluated person to the relationship and to the effectiveness of his communication.

4. META-CAPACITIES area: the exploration of this area in the interview represents the most delicate phase for the analysis of skills. It will be important to focus on the tone of the story, on the ability to grasp the situation and on one's own needs, on reactions to "uncomfortable" questions, on ideas relating to one's past history and the future, on emotion and self-perception.

- a. Power
- b. Flexibility
- c. Positive vision

- d. Management of anxiety and uncertainty
- e . Motivation and ambition
- f. Learning
- g. Openness to change

In recent years, an international consulting firm [Korn Ferry, 2010] has given greater prominence to some skills than others, especially in being predictive of organizational success, in terms of both productivity and managerial skills. This set of skills, which they synthesize into a single competence called Learning Agility, they declare is able to "identify high potential and specific development plans for new leaders. It can also be used to evaluate external candidates for leadership positions". The definition of this new competency is "the willingness and ability to learn from experience and to apply this learning to perform better in new and challenging situations". Research carried out by Korn Ferry in 2011 on Sales Managers establishes that people who have achieved higher ranks in the last 10 years, have a higher Learning Agility. A longitudinal study in AT&T and Pepsi shows that the managers who have climbed the most in the hierarchy are those who have more often changed their behavior, exhibited flexibility and learned from mistakes. In essence, Learning Agility consists of 5 skills:

1. Agility in results: producing results in new and challenging situations.
2. Mental agility: ability to analyze problems in a unique and unusual way.
3. Agility with people: the ability to work with and manage different types of people.
4. Agility in change: pleasure in experimenting and leaving the comfort zone.
5. Self-knowledge: The extent to which an individual knows his true strengths and weaknesses.

In order to research, analyze and value people who are "agile to learn" during the interview, it will therefore be useful to understand whether the evaluated:

- continuously look for new challenges,
- solicit direct feedback,
- reflect on themselves and on others,

- complete tasks in an ingenious and resourceful way,
- see unique patterns and patterns,
- always build new connections,
- work well with all types of people.

Once the skills and their degree of possession that belong to the specific position have been defined, together with the organization, we will be able to use an interview technique that will allow us to evaluate their presence and frequency of use. The so-called Behavioral Event Interview or BEI is a technique based on the principle that the past behavior of a person in a given situation is an important predictor of the behavior that the same person will have in similar situations. The EIB consists of four phases:

1. Introduction
2. Job role description
3. Analysis of the episodes
4. Conclusion.

The technique focuses on the centrality of critical facts or episodes, such as, for example, the STAR, another widely used technique, where four fundamental elements are analysed:

1. the situation (Situation), i.e. the context of the narrated episode,
2. the responsibilities (Tasks) that led the candidate to implement certain skills,
3. the action (Action) i.e. the sequence of choices made and specific actions undertaken by the evaluated
4. the result (Result), i.e. the changes obtained as a result of the actions taken

The first two phases serve to clarify the objectives of the interview and to provide (in case of selection) and receive (in case of evaluation) a description of the interviewee's role. During the third phase, the evaluator will invite his interlocutor to identify and tell 4 professional episodes experienced in order to collect not so much the interviewee's reflections or considerations, but instead the facts that occurred and the motivations and emotions underlying the behaviors implemented. During the narration of the events, the evaluator will have the task of asking questions (previously constructed on the basis of the skills to be analysed) to ensure that the

subject always speaks in the first person, avoiding vague statements ("it is important for me that .. ."), generic statements ("in general I behave in this way..."), in the third person or plural ("in these moments it is appropriate to act...", "so we did, we decided...") or hypothetical statements ("I would have done/said...").

The interviewer will have to ask a large number of questions so as not to leave out any element of the episode (how it started, who had the idea, then what she did, said, how she reacted, how she organized the work, etc.) eliminating for as much as possible false episodes (ie generic facts that did not happen to the person) and generalizations (eg I generally behave like this).

The management interview

Characteristics of the management interview

The term "management interview" refers to the set of different types of interviews carried out at various times in a person's professional life. The thesis advanced in this chapter is that the effective conduct of these interviews influences results, innovation processes, professional development, but above all individual and organizational well-being.

The fundamental characteristic of these conversations is that the conductor is in a direct hierarchical-functional relationship, and is therefore the interlocutor's boss. In this type of interview, the communicative interaction mode between boss and employee is entirely aimed at enhancing performance and professional development. [Gallo, 2011]

The main situations in which the interview between the boss and the collaborator is used are:

- Reception and insertion;
- Training;
- Assignment of an organizational role;
- Goal and task assignments;
- Assignment of a specific project;
- Performance evaluation;
- Praise and reproach;
- Rewards and punishments;

- Mobility and transfers;
- Resignation.

The 5 steps of the interview

It is possible to divide the organization of an interview into 5 fundamental moments:

1- Identification of the purpose and objectives of the interview.

In this phase the interview leader must collect ideas in order to have a clear idea of the purpose and main objectives of the interview. Identifying a purpose means asking yourself what business need is being fulfilled by resorting to the interview. If the purpose of an interview is single, the objectives can often be multiple. By objective we mean the particular target that we want to reach and hit at a certain moment of the interview.

If the identification of the purpose and objectives of the interview is fundamental for the success of an interview, the management of the relationship with one's interlocutor is of equal importance. To this end, it is important to have a clear relational strategy to pursue in order to achieve the goal that was set. [Rollmick, 2004]

The effectiveness of a management interview is in fact directly proportional to the boss's ability to plan a coherent strategy (with the company's purpose, values and needs, and the collaborator's personality) and at the same time flexible and adaptable to the need to implement it through the use of the proper tools.

The fundamental questions that we must ask ourselves while structuring the tactics of the interview that we are going to face are:

- How do I expect to achieve the goal? (which relational tools and methods to adopt);
- What emotional notes do I want to touch? (involvement or guilt for example);
- What behaviors will I adopt in the face of reactions other than those expected? (in case of refusal of an assignment, I investigate why or make him understand that he has lost an important opportunity that others will now take advantage of).

We can therefore state that the fundamental characteristic for the success of an interview is awareness. One of the causes that most

frequently undermines the success of an interview is not so much the fact that the two actors sometimes have different objectives, but rather the fact that they are unaware of it, because neither of them has tried to clarify their purpose nor did he try to understand that of the other. In fact, it is essential to start a management conversation by punctually illustrating the objectives of the meeting to our collaborator, trying to present them to him in a way that allows him to accept and share them as much as possible. An effective interview is in fact distinguished by a high degree of overlap between the objectives of the boss and the collaborator.

2- The contents of the interview

By content we mean the elements concretely present in an interview:

- subjects;
- the item;
- the setting.

In the relationship between the subjects there are two fundamental aspects that come into play within the interview. The first includes the personality characteristics of the subjects taking part in the interview, it is in fact the individual personality which, beyond the strategies written in the manuals, pulls the strings in the relationship between two people. [Semi, 1991] If on the one hand within the managerial conversation there is a cognitive advantage on both sides given that the boss and collaborator know each other, on the other hand this knowledge has given rise to a whole series of reciprocal prejudices which will be used as a shield behind which to defend and hide.

Another aspect that can create barriers between the two interlocutors are the hierarchical differences of role and status which are obviously always in favor of the person conducting the interview who must be very careful in managing the perception that the other has of his superiority in order to that this does not cause further communication difficulties. The object consists of the argumentative contents on which the interview focuses, therefore on the areas to be explored which are a derivative of the purpose and objectives. Indeed, a fundamental aspect for the success of an interview is the definition of the contents to be transmitted and collected, i.e. the set of information that must be shared through the communication process.

The setting is made up of the environment, the situation in which the interview takes place. It is the physical space within which the relational

dynamic takes place. The place is very important, in fact there is a difference whether an interview takes place in the boss's room or in that of a collaborator or even in an office that is usually used for meetings. The choice of environment, in fact, influences the relational atmosphere of the interview.

Time is also a key element of any interview, it is usually a good idea not to have time constraints when facing a management interview; it is in fact rather difficult to predict the development of the relational dynamics within the interview. Obviously dedicating a large margin of time to an interview does not mean having no boundaries, it is in fact equally important to be able to conclude an interview when it is clear that the main information has been obtained. The support tools (forms, diagrams, outlines) can be useful devices for the success of an interview. For example, any notes regarding previous interviews are very useful, in fact often recalling a previous meeting can be an excellent way to start an interview, especially if the atmosphere was constructive.

3- The management methodology

Within each interview there are three phases: preparation, conduct and verification.

In the preparation phase it is necessary to collect and organize information on the collaborator and on the object of the meeting. For example, during an evaluation interview it is useful to collect information on: the objectives agreed at the beginning of the year, the professional behavior recorded, the notes taken during other interviews.

There are three basic phases in the management phase: initiation, development, and conclusion. The beginning is a delicate moment that generally influences the entire course of the interview, it is made up of an initial part in which the collaborator is welcomed, and a central part in which the reason for the interview is stated. During the course there are universal rules that help the handler to move better. Among these, the most important are: don't take information for granted, don't interrupt the other, don't suggest answers, don't invade each other's space and time. During the conclusion of an interview, a frame is usually given to the sense of the time spent together, the reason for meeting is summarized and things to be done are planned. In a first phase called the final decision, the person conducting the interview realizes that he has satisfactorily achieved the objectives he had set for himself and decides to move on to the actual closure phase, during which the interlocutor physically leaves. The climate

perceived during the final stages of an interview is a clear indicator of the progress of the interview itself, it is usually important that the collaborator leaves the interview with the feeling of having participated in a useful meeting.

In the verification phase, the interview is initially evaluated hot and then cold. In the hot verification phase, the contents and progress of the interview are summarized and an initial evaluation is entered. In the cold evaluation part, after having allowed the first impressions to settle, the final report is drawn up.

4- Relational attentions

Any form of communication is made up of a content part and a so-called relationship part.

[Watzlawick, 1971] Thinking of establishing a fruitful conversation with someone, not taking into account these two aspects, is equivalent to making a guaranteed hole in the water. The three most important skills that the conductor of an interview must have are: knowing how to observe, knowing how to listen, knowing how to communicate.

Knowing how to observe means paying attention to all those aspects of communication that transcend the purely verbal aspect of it. Within a discourse, in addition to verbal communication, paraverbal aspects of communication (for example the tone of the voice) and non-verbal aspects (gestures) are equally present. What a person feels about a certain topic is first of all expressed with non-verbal indications (facial expression, tone of voice, etc.). For this reason it is essential, for the purposes of understanding who is in front of us, to keep in mind the totality of the levels that make up the communication of an individual. Knowing the non-verbal, in fact, allows you to better understand others and also to communicate more effectively.

Knowing how to listen is another of the skills necessary for a successful interview. There are basically three types of listening: selective listening, reactive listening and active listening.

Selective listening is the listening mode of those who pay attention to the words but not to the intentions of the speaker. This type of listening involves reduced attention and carries the risk of misunderstanding.

Reactive listening is a form of listening typical of those who occasionally get distracted during an interview and then go back to

listening. Usually our expression betrays our listening mode causing disappointment or distrust in the interlocutor.

Active listening is a very participatory form of listening, this form of listening is communicated by often reformulating what the interlocutor said, asking specific questions, or still avoiding giving personal interpretations.

Knowing how to communicate an absolutely fundamental skill in many areas of our lives. In fact, the way in which we communicate can be a source of well-being or, on the contrary, of discomfort.

Within daily life as well as in organizational life, there is a progressive impoverishment of the lexicon, often, especially at work, a standardized language is used, rich in words and phrases made. This lexical poverty prevents us from fully expressing our emotions.

In theory, a communication is effective when it manages to faithfully bring our thoughts back to the interlocutor's head. Succeeding in this task in an integral way is practically impossible, the task of a good communicator is to try to approach this type of objective by approximation.

Communicating means comparing different maps, communication is therefore a good time to try to get out of the self-confirming automatisms created by the perception we usually use.

Within this theoretical framework, it is clear that knowing how to ask questions becomes an art, those who know how to effectively use all types of questions can solve any difficult situation that arises during an interview.

The three main types of questions are: *closed questions* (the answer tends to be yes or no), *open questions* (a type of question that creates different alternative answers, induces the interlocutor to formulate an articulated answer, are essential for exploring situations, facts, intentions and opinions), *rhetorical questions* (they contain an implicit answer, they are not real questions, they look more like statements followed by question marks).

5- Possible obstacles and errors

We will now analyze some types of errors that can undermine the effectiveness of the interaction between boss and collaborator.

- Distortions of meaning. We have a problem of this type when a meaning is attributed that is not proper to a communication, producing an alteration of the content. It is a type of error that can be caused by the verbosity of a speech.

- Communication dispersion. This obstacle can occur in the exposition phase, what occurs is a loss of what one would like to say and what one is really able to communicate.
- Previous experiences. If there have been negative experiences between boss and collaborator previously, it is probable that the two will approach the interview with a series of prejudices that will undermine its success.
- Hierarchical barrier. Often an existing conflict between the hierarchical positions occupied by the two participants in the interview can distort communication. In this case whoever communicates does so through the mechanisms of power without taking the other into consideration.

In conclusion, it is clear how much, within the interview, both the boss and the collaborator are responsible for the success of the same. In the context of an interview, in fact, everyone implements their own attitude which is the result of partially conscious motivations, prejudices, objective aspects observed and analyzed subjectively. Only a deep awareness of oneself and a relational attention towards the other can lead an interview to obtain the goals that had been set in the planning phase. [Gallo, 2011]

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