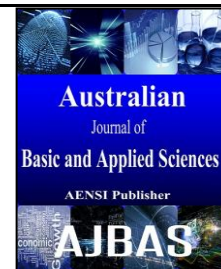




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The Effects of Situational Interview (SI) and Patterned Behavior Description Interview (PBDI) on Applicant Reactions

¹Masyitah Mahadi, ²Alizi Alias, PhD and ³Isma Suhaila Ismail

^{1,3} Learning Institute for Empowerment, Multimedia University, Jalan Ayer Keroh Lama, 75450 Melaka, Malaysia.

² Department of Psychology, International Islamic University Malaysia, P. O. Box 10, 50728 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

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ABSTRACT

Background: Using interview as one of the selection methods for recruitment, organizations not only aim to select the best candidates for the job but also want to attract them to work in their organizations. This suggests applicants' reactions to job interview do matter. **Objective:** This study sought to examine applicant reactions to different types of structured interview content by comparing between Situational Interview (SI) and Patterned Behavior Description Interview (PBDI). **Method:** Forty-six job incumbents, as samples, were given transcripts of interview content for SI and PBDI which were counterbalanced in the order of their presentation. After completing them, the participants were asked to answer a short questionnaire on applicant reactions to the two types of structured interview content. **Results:** The results demonstrated a significant effect of structured interview content on applicants' fairness or procedural justice perception, with the mean for PBDI is significantly greater than the mean for SI. **Conclusion:** The findings showed that using interview transcript, job incumbents reacted more positively to PBDI than SI, which indicated that participants regarded PBDI to have a higher perceived procedural justice or perceived fairness than SI. These findings have contributed better understanding to the contradicting findings in earlier empirical researches.

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INTRODUCTION

It is important for organizations to choose the proper recruitment and selection tools, so that talented people will be interested in working for such organizations (Bauer, Truxillo and Paronto, 2004; Rynes, Barber and Varma, 2000). Interview for instance, as one of the selection methods, does not only aim for selecting the best candidate for the job but also specifically serve a dual purpose: selection and recruitment (Posthuma, Morgeson and Campion, 2002; Rynes, 1989). In other words, the aim of a job interview is not only to select job candidates, but also to attract them to work in an organization. This suggests applicants' reactions to job interview do matter, and it has been taken into consideration by organizations and organizational researchers (Bauer *et al.*, 2004). Iles and Robertson (1992), in their review article about the impact of personnel selection procedures on candidates, define applicant reactions as the psychological impact on applicants towards selection procedures. Despite the topic still in its infancy and relatively theoretical (Rynes *et al.*, 2000), most researches that do make use of theory

had utilized Organizational Justice theory (Gilliland, 1993). This theory defines applicant reactions as the extent to which the applicants perceive the selection process as fair. If applicants react negatively to interviews, they may drop out of the selection process early, reject job offers, or possibly file lawsuits based on perceived unfairness or lack of job-relatedness (Rynes, Bretz and Gerhart, 1991), and considerable overall utility may be lost from the interview process which caused high losses to organizations (Murphy, 1986). Overall, applicant reactions are important elements to the success of the selection methods.

Looking at interview as a selection and recruitment process, Posthuma *et al.* (2002) suggested some elements that improve validity (e.g. interview structure) that may also result in more negative applicant reactions and recommended research that can identify aspects of interview structure that can simultaneously improve both validity and applicant reactions. Two popular types of information asked in structured interview are questions that inquire about future behavior and questions that ask about past behavior, SI and PBDI

Corresponding Author: Isma Suhaila Ismail, Learning Institute for Empowerment (LiFE), Multimedia University, Jalan Ayer Keroh Lama, 75450 Melaka, Malaysia.
Tel: 0060136131287; E-mail: suhaila@mmu.edu.my

respectively. The Situational Interview (SI) is grounded in goal-setting theory (Locke and Latham, 1990) and based on the belief that intentions or goals are the immediate precursor of a person's behavior. Conversely, Patterned Behaviour Description Interview (PBDI) is based on the empirical truism that the behavior of the past is a predictor for the behavior of the future (Janz, 1982). All questions in SI and PBDI are standardized but in PBDI, probing, or asking more detailed questions to the standardized questions is allowed.

Literature Review:

Past studies on applicant reactions to SI and PBDI (e.g. Abdullah, 2009; Alias, 2007; Conway and Peneno, 1999; Latham and Finnegan, 1993) had produced mixed findings. The different findings might be due to different sample characteristics (students or job incumbents), different interview media (face-to-face, interview description, or interview transcript), and different constructs of applicant reactions being measured (practicality, perceived predictive validity, perceived face validity, affective reactions, procedural justice, willingness to recommend the employer to other potential applicants, perceived content validity, perceived predictive validity, perceived procedural justice, and reactions to organizations). Latham and Finnegan (1993), using students as sample and using interview descriptions as the interview medium, found more positive applicant reactions of PBDI to SI in terms of their practicality but no significant difference in applicant reactions was found between SI and PBDI in a sample of job incumbents. On the other hand, Conway and Peneno (1999), when using students as samples and face-to-face interview medium, found more positive applicant reactions of SI to PBDI in terms of perceived face validity. Meanwhile, Alias (2007), using students as samples, found more positive applicant reactions to SI when using face-to-face interview and more positive reactions to PBDI when using interview transcript in terms of perceived procedural justice. Finally, Abdullah (2009), using students as samples and interview transcript as interview medium, found no significant difference in applicant reactions between SI and PBDI in terms of perceived procedural justice.

Since past researches produced mixed findings, this research further examined the effect of different structured interview content, namely SI and PBDI, on applicant reactions in order to provide more evidence and support for the research development of applicant reactions for both types of interviews. The operational definition of applicant reactions is the applicants' global scores obtained in the adapted Truxillo and Bauer's Process Fairness Scale (Bauer *et al.*, 2004) which is given to the applicants after each interview session. The adapted scale includes three items that are based on the Organizational Justice theory which are as follows: (1) perception

about the fairness of the interview process, (2) positive feeling about the ways the interview process works, and (3) the fairness of the interview process to job applicants. Meanwhile, the operational definition of interview content in the present research is the presentation of SI and PBDI using interview transcript. Due to mixed findings of previous researches, this research has one main non-directional hypothesis which is the applicants will give different reactions to SI and PBDI.

Method:

Forty-six job incumbents holding the post of foundation teacher from the Centre for Foundation Studies in International Islamic University Malaysia were conveniently selected to participate in the experiment. The materials that were used in the present study consisted of (a) Questions during the interview, the SI and PBDI, and (b) Questionnaires which consisted of applicant reactions based on Organizational Justice theory.

The Development of the SI and PBDI:

According to Latham (1989), the questions for PBDI and SI are developed based on job analysis. For the present research, the researcher has referred to the job description developed through job analysis for the post of foundation teacher in IIUM. From the job description, the researcher identified six job dimensions for the assistant lecturer: (a) teaching, (b) preparing, (c) assessing, (d) managing classroom, (e) invigilating, and (f) managing administrative matters. The researcher had referred to three subject matter experts (SMEs) to decide on which job dimension/s to be assessed through employment interview. They had decided that interview questions should assess tasks under teaching dimension. This was particularly because tasks under this duty could be assessed before in-job whereas other task statements under other duties were rather measurable once in job such as in performance appraisal interview. The SI had six questions and PBDI had six questions too.

As argued by Pulakos and Schmitt (1995), and Alias (2007), when making comparison, each question in SI should ask about the same incident as in PBDI to increase the internal validity. The present research conformed to this suggestion. For instance, if the question in SI asked about future behavior of 'consulting students' during consultation hours, the PBDI also asked about 'consulting students' but in terms of past experience. However, since the interview was presented in a transcript, the unique feature of PBDI, i.e. probing, could not be done. One advantage is that this can lead to the standardization of question format between SI and PBDI, so that it is easier to compare between the two, in which the present research can really measure applicant reactions to future-oriented questions and past-oriented questions.

The measure on applicant reactions:

The reactions of applicants that were investigated in the present research dealt with procedural justice which refers to the perceived fairness of the methods used (the structured interview content) to make organizational decisions (Folger and Greenberg, 1985). In order to measure the perceived procedural justice, the present study has adapted the Process Fairness Scale by Truxillo and Bauer in their second study in 1999 (Bauer *et al.*, 2004). The present study changed the word 'banding' in the original questions of this scale to the word 'interview' to suit to the present study's hypothesis. Compared to other scales, this scale showed the highest reliability which was .96 and was considered as a global scale for perceived procedural justice, in which Chan and Schmitt (2004) argued that a global score of applicant reactions could produce a better prediction of applicant reactions.

For the questionnaire of applicant reactions, there were three questions asked: (a) Overall, I believe that the interview process is fair, (b) I feel good about the way the interview process works, and (c) the interview process is fair to job applicants. This questionnaire was based on a 5-point Likert Scale that needs answer from 1 (strongly disagree) to

5 (strongly agree). A higher mean score indicated more positive reactions while a lower mean score indicated more negative reactions.

The present research employed within-subject (repeated-measure) design. The independent variable (structured interview content) was manipulated at two levels: (a) SI, and (b) PBDI. All the 46 subjects of experiment were randomly assigned to the possible orders of experimental conditions following counterbalancing techniques - AB and BA - to balance the practice effect across conditions. They were informed that the purpose of the study was to compare between the two structured interview contents. They read the interview transcripts of SI and PBDI, answered each of them, and were asked to write their response on the applicant reactions questionnaire after reading and answering each interview transcript.

Results:

The descriptive statistics and t-test on the applicant reactions to the two types of structured interview content, SI and PBDI, were presented in a table form (see Table 1). In this table, the mean, the standard deviation and the t-test score were presented.

Table 1: Mean, standard deviation, and t-test score for SI and PBDI.

SI vs. PBDI	Mean	SD	t
SI	11.78	1.09	-6.25**
PBDI	13.61	1.57	

Note: N = 46; **p < .01

The descriptive statistics in Table 1 showed that there was a significant difference between SI and PBDI in terms of applicant reactions with the mean for PBDI (M = 13.61; SD = 1.57) was significantly greater than the mean for SI (M = 11.78; SD 1.09), $t(46) = -6.25$; $p < .01$. Since procedural justice refers to the perceived fairness of the methods used (the structured interview contents) to make organizational decisions (Folger and Greenberg, 1985), this shows that applicants perceived PBDI as having a fairer method than SI.

Discussion:

By using interview transcript, the results of the present study showed job incumbents reacted more positively to PBDI than SI. This means that structured interview content does affect applicant reactions, hence supporting the hypothesis. Meanwhile, the results also showed that participants highly rated PBDI and SI, where the means were 13.61 and 11.78 respectively, in which the ratings are above average ratings (based on the average ratings of 7.5 where the total maximum ratings for the three questions in the scale is 15). Based on the previous researches which produced mixed findings, several issues could be highlighted in order to understand the effects of structured interview contents on applicant reactions. The highlighted issues were (1) whether

the sample consisted of students, job incumbents or real applicants, (2) whether the interview was conducted face-to-face or through interview description or transcript, and (3) how applicant reaction was conceptually and operationally being measured. In order to discuss the findings of the present research, they are best to be discussed based on each of those issues.

The present research used job incumbents (playing the role of job applicants) as samples of the experiment, and found that they produced more positive reaction to PBDI than SI. Comparing to previous researches, it seems that students and job incumbents tend to give different reactions to structured interview content. Students tend to prefer SI over PBDI (Alias's first experiment, 2007; Conway and Peneno, 1999), can also prefer PBDI over SI (Alias's second experiment, 2007; Latham and Finnegan, 1993), and have neutral reactions (Abdullah, 2009) which depend on interview medium and framework of applicant reactions measured. Meanwhile, in terms of practicality, job incumbents showed neutral reactions (Latham and Finnegan, 1993). Taken together, from the findings of the present research which used job incumbents as samples, it can be suggested that if organizations want to interview experienced workers, they can use PBDI instead of SI. Job incumbents may prefer to be

assessed through their past experience instead of what they will do in future. They may feel proud of sharing their past experience with others to prove that they are and can be good workers.

The present research used interview transcript as the interview medium and found job incumbents to prefer PBDI over SI. The findings are similar to Alias's second experiment (2007) which also used interview transcripts, and Latham and Finnegan (1993) who used interview description among students. However, they found neutral reactions among job incumbents (Latham and Finnegan, 1993). Meanwhile, Abdullah's experiment (2009) which used interview transcripts did not support the present study's findings where he found neutral reactions between SI and PBDI among students. For the other studies (Alias's first experiment, 2007; Conway and Peneno, 1999) which used face-to-face interview medium, it was shown that applicants tend to prefer SI more than PBDI. This means that if organizations want to use interview transcripts for the interview (in order to cut cost or to save time) such as chat-like interview using computer or paper-and-pencil interview, they should use PBDI instead of SI. Perhaps, applicants feel comfortable to share their experience through writing it on paper, hence leading to positive reaction. Meanwhile, if it is face-to-face interview, perhaps it is more suitable and better for organizations to use SI instead of PBDI.

In the present research, applicant reactions were measured as perceived fairness under the framework of Organizational Justice theory using the adapted Process Fairness Scale by Truxillo and Bauer in their second study in 1999 (Bauer *et al.*, 2004). The current findings showed that participants significantly perceived PBDI as having a fairer method compared to SI. The findings supported a few studies (Alias, 2007; Latham and Finnegan, 1993) despite different constructs being measured, and at the same time contradicted other findings (Abdullah, 2009; Conway and Peneno, 1997). Abdullah (2009), using the same construct as in the present study but with students as samples, found neutral reactions while Conway and Peneno (1997), also using students, found SI as having higher perceived face validity compared to PBDI, and neutral reactions in terms of procedural justice.

Taken together, the present findings illustrate that upon interviewing experienced job applicants through interview transcripts, the job applicants perceived PBDI as having a fairer method than SI. This further indicates that if they are asked about their past experience as compared to their future intention about the job, they would be more attracted to the organizations and would have a higher chance to accept the job offer. Though both SI and PBDI show positive reactions, choosing PBDI over SI in a particular context described above may give more benefits to the organizations.

Conclusion:

Summary:

Interview is the most widely used tool in selection processes and recently the understanding of interview as both selection and recruitment tools leads to a new paradigm of looking at interview from the applicant perspective. The way applicants react to interview will influence their motivation to answer the interview questions, the decision to accept the job offer, the perception on organizations and the possibility of taking legal actions, which in overall may then influence the validity and utility of the interview itself. Based on the high validity found in structured interview compared to unstructured interview, the present study aimed to find factors (contents) in structured interview that can lead to positive applicant reactions. The present study examined the effects of different structured interview content, SI and PBDI, on applicant perceived procedural justice or perceived fairness. The present study used job incumbents as samples and interview transcript as interview medium. The findings of the present study showed that participants perceived PBDI as having a higher perceived procedural justice or perceived fairness than SI. These findings then contributed better understanding to the contradicting findings in earlier empirical researches.

Limitations:

There are several limitations in the present study. First, it neglects to acknowledge other elements of applicant reactions other than perceived fairness. Such elements may include perception to organizational attractiveness which can be explained by Job Signal theory by Rynes (1991). According to Job Signal theory, during interview, applicants will use the information they get about the interviewer and the interview process as a signal or indicator to the applied job and hiring organization. As Rynes *et al.* (2000) noted, "in an environment of intense competition for the best and the brightest, it seems possible that merely aiming for fairness may fall short of what is required to attract the best applicants" (p.272). Anderson, Born and Cunningham-Snell (2001) and Ryan and Ployhart (2000) also argued that applicant reactions to selection can have an effect on organizational attractiveness and applicant decision making, so future research should consider long-term studies in real organizations rather than experimental manipulations in order to know whether reactions affect applicants' decision making, motivation or organization commitment in the longer term.

The second limitation is that the present study used an interview transcript and not the face-to-face interview like in the real context. This will reduce the ecological validity or realism of the findings. Nevertheless, since there is also a possibility of organizations to really use interview transcript as interview medium, such as paper-and-pencil

interview or computerized textual interview, the present study's findings somehow can contribute to ecological validity. This is especially so when organizations want to reduce the cost and the time duration of interview; having interview transcript is just another practical option. In addition, since the previous researches still have contradicting findings which is based on the mediums of interview (face-to-face or transcript), it is hoped that the present study, with its uniqueness on job incumbents as samples, will contribute more understanding to previous findings that also used interview transcript.

The third limitation of the present study is the samples used. Instead of using real job applicants, this study used job incumbents as samples which may decrease the external validity of the findings. Nevertheless, it is challenging to study the real job applicants because in real job interview, applicants may fake the response due to socially desirable responding tendencies (Ryan and Ployhart, 2000).

Suggestions and Recommendations:

There are some suggestions and recommendations can be outlined for future research. If future researches use laboratory experimentation, it is suggested that other types of applicant reactions in Organizational Justice theory (Gilliland, 1993) are examined such as the perceived distributive justice, which is measured after selection decision is made, as well as perception to organizational attractiveness which can be explained by Job Signal theory by Rynes (1991). Other aspects of applicant reactions can also be measured such as whether the structured interview content is perceived as impressive, challenging, ethical, comfortable, or even fun (Munk, 1998).

Furthermore, it is also suggested that the structured interview content can be expanded to other types of structured interview, other than SI or PBDI, for instance Comprehensive Structured Interview devised by Michael Campion in the USA (Campion, Pursell and Brown, 1988), Multimodal Interview devised by Heinz Schuler in Germany (Schuler and Moser, 1995), and Empirical Interview devised by Frank Schmidt in the USA (Schmidt and Rader, 1999).

Another recommendation for future research is to compare the face-to-face interview with interview transcript in one study due to the mixed findings of previous studies. In addition, other interview mediums can also be studied such as interview using the telephone and video conference (Anderson, 2003).

It is also recommended to study applicant reactions using field experiment where real applicants are studied. However, this depends on whether the organization agrees to conduct the interview as needed in the research, on the number of applicants who agree to participate, and the

necessary steps to be taken to overcome socially desirable responding tendencies in them.

Last but not least, future research may also consider using qualitative method to study applicant reactions. Employing a qualitative approach requires the researcher to explore the area of study without a preconceived theory about the variables to study, their interrelationships and expected outcomes. Rather, the theory is allowed to emerge from the rich data collected which better described the reality of phenomena under study (Strauss and Corbin, 1998).

Conclusion:

In conclusion, the findings of the present study showed that participants perceived PBDI as having a higher perceived procedural justice or perceived fairness than SI. These findings have contributed better understanding to the contradicting findings in earlier empirical researches. However, future researches need to conduct more studies that may involve examining other types of applicant reactions, using other types of structured interview content, using real job applicants as samples, utilizing other types of interview mediums, and finally, employing qualitative studies to collect more new data about applicant reactions.

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