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Interviewing at Different Types of Companies

You have been exploring the interview process in IT Automation. No two companies are alike, so you will need to research each company with which you interview. As part of your research, you should learn the size of the company and how long it has been in business. This is because the interview process at larger, more-established companies can differ greatly from that of smaller companies and start-ups. In this reading, we will discuss the common differences between interviews at these types of companies. Knowing these differences can help you prepare and know what to expect, which can ultimately help you make a great impression.

Who conducts the interview

Established companies often have well-developed human resources (HR) departments. Interviews at these companies are likely to be designed or conducted by experienced HR professionals. The application process might involve a series of interviews—from a preliminary interview with an HR associate to interviews with potential teammates to an interview with the actual manager you would work for if you were hired.

Startups and smaller companies, however, may not have an HR department at all. Applicants are likely to be interviewed by someone high up in the company, such as senior leadership or the CEO. Startups are also unlikely to require as many rounds of interviews as larger companies due to limited resources and time constraints.

Structure of the interview

Interviewers at established companies will usually ask questions that relate to your technical skills and competence level. These companies want to determine if you will fit well into the available position. The interviewers will generally ask you a series of common interview questions about your experience, training, and how your past roles have prepared you for a position in a company of their size.

At startups and smaller companies, on the other hand, the interviewer may ask a few questions and then allow you to steer the interview’s direction. Interviewers at smaller companies may also pay more attention to your ability to fit into the company culture. Additionally, since these businesses often require that people perform their jobs with less supervision than at more established companies, they tend to seek employees who are independent and proactive. Being able to actively drive the conversation with your own ideas can help display these qualities.

Expectations for the role

The interviewer’s expectations for the role might differ based on the company’s size, and you will need to emphasize different competencies based on these expectations. At a small company, for example, you may be expected to take on many roles—perhaps acting as the entire marketing department. At a larger company, you might be asked to mostly perform one task that you do exceptionally well on many projects.

At a larger company, there may be more established processes to follow, and you may often need to get approval from stakeholders to move forward on tasks. At a smaller company, you might have fewer approvals processes to navigate, but you will need to be able to execute tasks with little guidance.

One way you can demonstrate these different competencies is in the way you respond to **behavioral interview questions**. These are types of questions that require you to share a time when you were faced with a particular situation or had to use a certain skill. In an upcoming activity, you will practice a strategy for responding to these types of questions.

Length of the process

Established organizations may require you to go through several interviews before making you a job offer. They do this because they can generally afford to take time to find the best fit for the role. These companies may take three weeks or more to screen and interview applicants.

Startups tend to have a much quicker interview-to-hire process—generally around two weeks. Because people higher up in the company conduct the interviews and make the hiring decisions, not as many rounds of interviews are typically required. Additionally, since smaller companies and startups may have fewer employees available to get the work done, they often aim to fill open positions quickly.

Level of formality

Interviews at established companies tend to be more formal and structured than interviews at startups. Since the interviewers generally want to assess all the applicants on the same basic criteria, the process can seem somewhat conventional. Your behavior, dress, and the language you use is generally expected to be more formal in interviews at these companies.

Interviews at startups tend to be more casual. The structure of the interview is looser, and the dress, behavior, and language you are expected to use may be less formal, as well.

Key takeaways

The norms discussed in this reading can vary from industry to industry and company to company, so be sure to research the specific company you are interviewing for ahead of time to learn what to expect. This will prepare you for the different aspects of the interview, such as what to wear and the kind of questions you may be asked. But regardless of the company’s size or how long they have been in business, you should always be prepared to share your qualifications and skills, convey what you know about the company and the role, and describe why you would be an excellent fit for the position.