

CHAPTER 8

Interviews



OBJECTIVES

You should study the chapter to know

- the importance of interviews as a psychological tool
- the various objectives, types, and modes of interviews
- the factors responsible for failure at interviews
- how to prepare for and participate in job interviews successfully
- about the various types of résumés and how to design them
- what media interviews and press conferences are and how to handle them

Introduction

An interview is a psychological and sociological instrument. It is an interaction between two or more persons for a specific purpose, in which the interviewer asks the interviewee specific questions in order to assess his/her suitability for recruitment, admission, or promotion. It can also be a meeting in which a journalist asks somebody questions to determine their opinions. It is a systematized method of contact with a person to know his/her views and is regarded as the most important method of data collection. In addition, interviewing a person gives an idea of how effectively the person can perform a particular task.

We may have to face interviews at different times in our life. If we consider an interview just as an interaction between two or more people, we may not feel nervous to face the panel members of an interview. However, the thought 'I am being observed and assessed by each member' often makes one nervous.

Although the nature of interviews may be different for different organizations, several rules are common for all. For example, for any job interview, one needs to prepare or update one's résumé, know the profile of the company, prepare answers for commonly asked questions, etc. This chapter throws light on how you can achieve success by adopting certain strategies before, during, and after an interview, especially a job interview.

Objectives of Interviews

Interviews may be conducted for various reasons. Generally, interviews are conducted to achieve some of the following objectives:

- To select a person for a specific task
- To monitor performance
- To collect information
- To exchange information
- To counsel

Types of Interviews

Depending on the objective and nature, interviews can be categorized into the following types:

- Job
- Persuasive
- Evaluation
- Conflict resolution
- Termination
- Information
- Exit
- Counselling
- Disciplinary
- Media

Each of the above types has a slightly different approach. For example, in a job interview *you* may have to convince the interviewer that you are the best person for the job, whereas in a termination interview your *employer* may have to convince you that your services have been terminated for reasons that are specific, accurate, and verifiable.

Comparing the involvement and contribution of the interviewer and the interviewee, an interview can be divided into three types: *telling*, *telling and listening*, and *problem solving*.

Telling In a telling interview, the flow of communication is almost entirely one way—downwards. It is used most effectively in a directing, time-constrained situation; but it can cause hostility and defensive behaviour when the employee does not have the opportunity to participate.

Telling and listening In a telling and listening interview, more feedback from the subordinate is allowed, but the interviewer still maintains control over the flow of communication.

Problem-solving In a problem-solving interview the flow of communication is two-way. The bulk of communication is upwards, a genuine rapport is established, ideas are pooled, and exchange facilitated.

Job interviews

In job interviews, the employer wants to learn about the applicant's abilities and experiences, and the candidate wants to learn about the position on offer and the organization. Both the candidate and the employer hope to make a good impression and to establish rapport. In the initial round, job interviews are usually formal and structured. But later, interviews may be relatively spontaneous as the interviewer explores the candidate's responses.

Information interviews

The interviewer seeks facts that bear on a decision or contribute to basic understanding. Information flows mainly in one direction: one person asks a list of questions that must be covered and listens to the answers supplied by the other person, e.g., doctor–patient, boss–subordinate, etc.

Persuasive interviews

One person tells another about a new idea, product, or service and explains why the other should act on his/her recommendations. Persuasive interviews are often associated with, but are certainly not limited to, selling. The persuader asks about the other person's needs and shows how the product or concept is able to meet those needs. Persuasive interviewers require skill in drawing out and listening to others as well as the ability to impart suitable information, adapted to the situation and the sensitivities of the interviewee.

Exit interviews

In exit interviews, the interviewer tries to understand why the interviewee is leaving the organization or transferring to another department or division. A departing employee can often provide insight into whether

the business and human resource is being handled efficiently or whether there is a considerable scope for improvement. The interviewer tends to ask all the questions while the interviewee provides answers. Encouraging the employee to focus on events and processes rather than on personal gripes will elicit more useful information for the organization.

Evaluation interviews

A supervisor periodically gives an employee feedback on his/her performance. The supervisor and the employee discuss progress towards predetermined standards or goals and evaluate areas that require improvement. They may also discuss goals for the coming year, as well as the employee's long-term aspirations and general concerns.

Counselling interviews

A supervisor talks with an employee about personal problems that are interfering with work performance. The interviewer is concerned with the welfare of both the employee and the organization. The goal is to establish the facts, convey the company's concern, and steer the person towards a source of help. Only a trained professional should offer advice on problems such as substance abuse, marital tension, and financial trouble.

Conflict-resolution interviews

In conflict-resolution interviews, two competing people or groups of people with opposing points of view, such as Smith versus Jones, day shift versus night shift, General Motors versus the United Auto Workers, explore their problems and attitudes. The goal is to bring the two parties closer together, cause adjustments in perceptions and attitudes, and create a more productive climate.

Disciplinary interviews

In disciplinary interviews, a supervisor tries to correct the behaviour of an employee who has ignored the organization's rules and regulations. The interviewer tries to get the employee to see the reason for the rules and to agree to comply. The interviewer also reviews the facts and explores the person's attitude. Because of the emotional reaction that is likely, neutral observations are more effective than critical comments.

Termination interviews

A supervisor informs an employee of the reasons for the termination of the latter's job. The interviewer tries to avoid involving the company in legal action and tries to maintain a positive relationship with the employee. To accomplish these goals, the interviewer gives reasons that are specific, accurate, and verifiable.

Media interviews

Most of us might have watched programmes such as *Walk the Talk*, *Meet the Entrepreneur*, etc., as well as press conferences organized by the government/businesses/industries on television. Many a time, reporters call up over the phone the head of an educational institution, an important person in the government, or the chief executive officer (CEO) of a company to ask about their success stories or their alarming anomalies. We might have watched the interview given by Mr Ratan Tata, Chairman of Tata Group, during the release of Tata Nano or the one given by Mr Shashi Tharoor, the former Minister of State for External Affairs, during the IPL Kochi Franchisee controversy. All these are media interviews, which are generally conducted to disseminate information to the public on the lifestyle and achievements of an individual/business or on

the new policies introduced by the government. When there is an emergency, such as a terrorist attack, internal disturbances, etc., the media conducts interviews with the people in power and also with the experts in order to get their views, interpretations, and more information on the steps taken by the government. At times, we may give some news and the media may interview us over the phone to confirm some part of the message or to get more information on some issue. Thus, media interviews can help viewers to get quick updates on the issue.

In our professions, we may come across most of the types of interviews mentioned above. However, in this chapter, we will focus mainly on job interviews and résumés, and later on provide some tips for taking control in media interviews and press conferences. In the following section, we will discuss the various aspects of job interviews such as employer's expectations, certain critical success and failure factors, preparation, process, follow-up, and guidelines.

Job Interviews

Job interviews can be classified into four major categories as depicted in Figure 8.1.

Campus interviews

Campus interviews are the interviews conducted at the campuses of colleges. The companies inform the students well in advance through the placement department of the college that they would be visiting their campus to select students for jobs. Once the companies arrive at the campus they would deliver a presentation (known as *Pre-placement Talk*) to the interested students about themselves, the type of projects they carry out, the selection mode (aptitude test/group task/case study/technical interview/HR interview), etc., and also answer the students' queries if any. As a company has to conduct several rounds of interview in a limited time, it may be able to spend only a little time with students. Hence, these interviews will be brief and to the point.

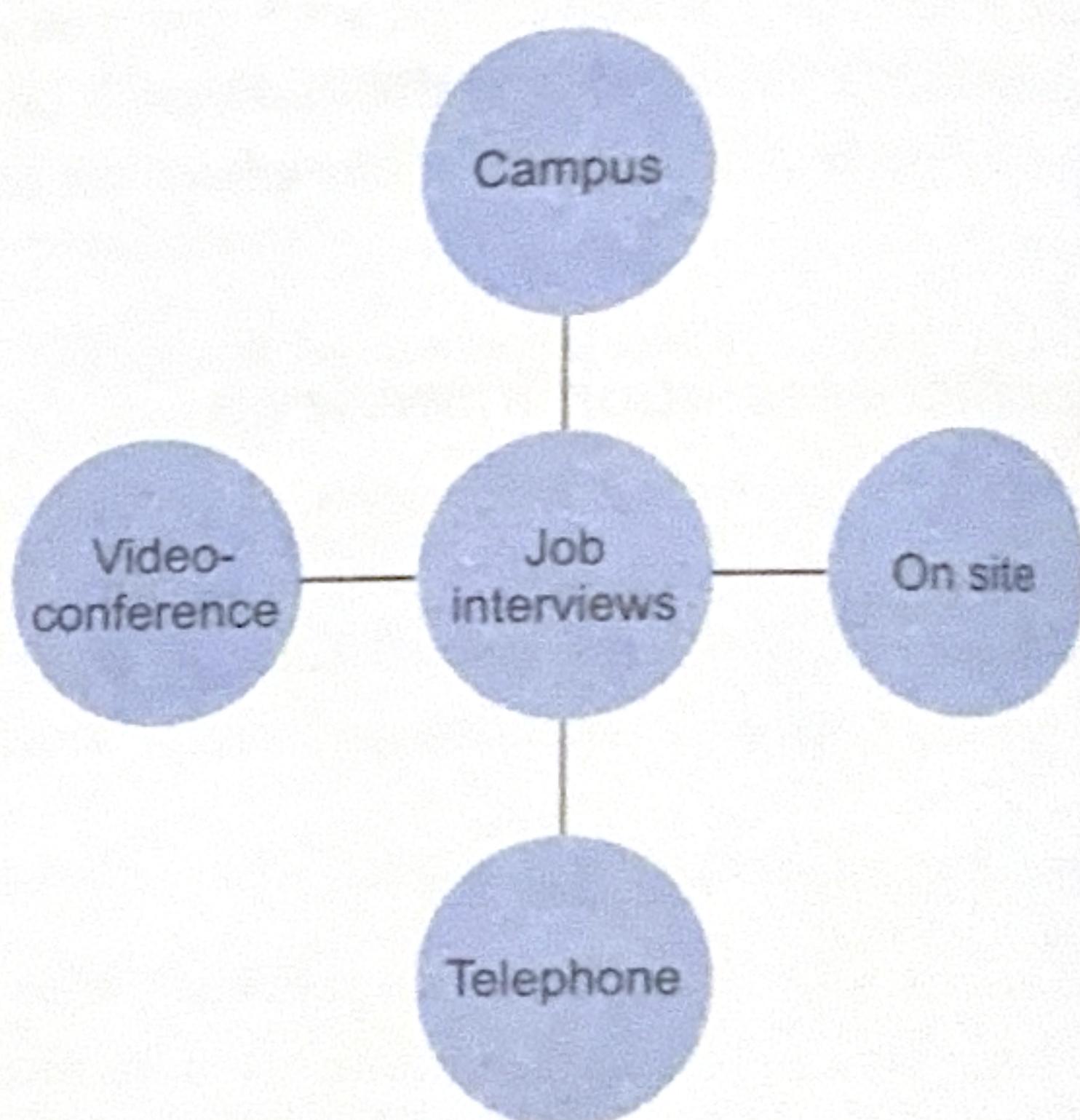


Figure 8.1 Categories of job interview

On-site interviews

On-site interviews are the interviews conducted at company premises. Many companies shortlist candidates after going through their résumés or talking to them over phone and call them to the company for a face-to-face interview (services such as www.placementindia.com, www.monsterindia.com, www.naukri.com, and www.bestjobsinindia.in give information about the job openings in various industries and forward the candidates' résumés to the companies). At times, shortlisted candidates of the campus interview may also be called for a final interview at their office. As the interviewers have more time on hand in this type of interview, they may be able to spend more time with each candidate. Hence, this type of interview may be more detailed than the campus interviews.

Telephonic interviews

Telephonic interviews are the interviews conducted by the companies over the telephone. This type of interview may be used for shortlisting the candidates by talking to them and verifying the details of the résumés that they have submitted. The interviewing company informs the candidates well before, seeks their convenience, and sends an email to confirm the date and time of the interview. Generally, a telephonic

interview will be shorter than the face-to-face interview and may not be the final interview for selecting the candidates.

Videoconferencing interview

With hiring becoming increasingly global, many companies especially multinationals conduct videoconferencing interviews to select candidates for jobs. Generally when hiring for senior positions from countries across the world, companies may use this mode of interviewing. Nevertheless, it can be used for recruiting within the same country as well. If the interviewers inform the candidates about the videoconferencing facility they have arranged in the candidates' institute or campus, they can use such facility. Otherwise, the candidates need to go to a nearby agency that provides videoconferencing facilities. In either case, they will attend the interview in a professional setting as they do in an in-person interview.