



Merit Systems Protection Board

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MSPB CALLS FOR USE OF STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS TO ASSESS CANDIDATES FOR FEDERAL JOBS

Agencies are advised to use structured interviews to assess candidates for Federal jobs, according to a report released today by the Merit Systems Protection Board (MSPB or the Board). The report, "The Federal Selection Interview: Unrealized Potential," states that structured interviews are twice as effective as unstructured interviews in predicting on-the-job performance.

In a structured interview, all questions are related to the job to be filled, and the same questions are asked of each candidate for the job. There is a pre-determined system for evaluating interview responses, and interviewers are trained in conducting and evaluating structured interviews. In contrast, an unstructured interview is informal, and questions are not necessarily job-related. The questions may vary for different candidates, there is no objective evaluation system, and interviewers may be untrained.

"Selecting the wrong person for a Federal job can be an expensive mistake," said Board Chairman Susanne T. Marshall. "According to research cited in our report, the costs can vary from \$5,000 for an entry-level employee to \$300,000 for an employee who makes a \$100,000 salary. These estimates take into account such factors as wasted salary, benefits, severance pay, training costs, and the value of time spent in the hiring process. It is obvious, then, that agencies should use the best available tools when selecting a new employee."

According to an earlier MSPB survey, 95 percent of Federal supervisors say they rely on an interview to a “great” or “moderate” extent when making a selection. The new report concludes that, because selection interviews are widely used and influential, it is important that they be used effectively.

The report recommends that agencies decide in advance what purpose an interview is to serve and then design and conduct the interview accordingly. If the purpose is to use the interview as a recruitment tool, for example, an unstructured interview will suffice. A structured interview will be more effective, however, if the purpose is to screen or rank candidates, or make a final selection. The report also recommends that agencies invest the resources needed to add structure to their selection interviews and that they evaluate their interview practices for effectiveness and possible improvement.

Order copies of the report from the Merit Systems Protection Board, Office of Policy and Evaluation, 1615 M Street, NW, Washington, DC, 20419; telephone (202) 653-6772, extension 1350; V/TDD 1-800-877-8339; or e-mail to studies@mspb.gov. The report may also be downloaded from the “Studies” area on the Board’s website, <http://www.mspb.gov>.

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