*CHAPTER 7*

*Aligning Selection Strategies*

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# EL 1: Case: Selecting an HR manager (Background information)

The Human Resource Manager has recently retired and the two remaining HR coordinators, who have both been in their positions for less than two years, are probably not ready for the job. While technically competent, both coordinators are having difficulty managing the workload, responding in a timely manner, and staying on top of issues.

The HR department is not well received by its client group of managers. While they are personally collegial, on a professional basis their respective client groups have not generally accepted them and tend to work around them or involve them at a late stage of an issue. The result is that there are a significant number and type of employee issues, including an 85 percent increase in the number of grievances.

The Human Resources Department is heading into a period of great stress and change with the implementation of a new performance management program, an organization-wide succession plan, and preparation for an upcoming round of bargaining with support staff. Finding the right person to come in and ‘hit the ground running’ has become a critical need for the department.

The current selection model for the Human Resource Manager, which has been in use for nine years, consists of a panel interview and reference checks. The current interview structure is focused on tasks and knowledge of human resources, and candidates are graded on a set of criteria developed for each question. There is a question on each functional area of human resources, including labour relations, compensation, classification, occupational safety and health, and recruitment and retention.

**Tasks**

Your tasks are to (i) develop an interview guide for selecting an HR managers (ii) plan how you would answer questions in a job interview, and (iii) participate in a selection interview.

**Step 1: Develop an interview guide for selecting an HR manager (60 minutes)**

The class should be assigned to groups. **[[1]](#endnote-1)**

Review the job description below to gain more information on the job, types of questions you might use and other information relevant to the case. You are asked to develop an interview guide that includes examples of behavioural, situational and other questions for selecting a Human Resource manager. For this exercise, focus on three competencies (you would identify many more competencies in a real world interview guide). You are encouraged to include one positive and one not-so-positive behavioural description, one or two situational questions and another type of question for at least three competencies.

Job Description of Human Resource Manager

General job duties

-Plan, organize, direct, control and evaluate the operations of human resources or personnel departments.

-Co-ordinate internal and external training and recruitment activities.

-Develop and implement labour relations policies and procedures and negotiate collective agreements.

-Administer employee development, language training and health and safety programs.

-Advise and assist other departmental managers on interpretation and administration of personnel policies and programs.

-Oversee the classification and rating of occupations.

-Organize and conduct employee information meetings on employment policy, benefits and compensation and participate actively on various joint committees.

-Direct the organization's quality management program.

-Ensure compliance with legislation such as the Pay Equity Act.

Employment requirements

A bachelor's degree in a field related to personnel management, such as business administration, industrial relations, commerce or psychology.   
or  
Completion of a professional development program in personnel administration is required.

Several years of experience as a personnel officer or human resource specialist are required.

Additional information

-Progression to senior management positions is possible with experience.

-Other joint committees led by human resources managers may focus on issues such as alcohol or drug addiction[[2]](#endnote-2)

The guide should include behavioural description questions in addition to other questions for different competency areas. The structure for your guide might be:

1. MEETING, GREETINGS, & SEATING
2. SMALL TALK
   * Avoid topics of low content (Hobbies, Tangents, Last weekend…)
   * Safe topics might include gathering information on applicant’s background and interest in the position
3. INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

* Questions should relate to relevant competencies
  + 5 -7 Sub questions
    - General
    - Behavioural (positive and not-so-positive, ideas on this???)
    - Situational (1-2)
    - Other (1 question relating to Goals/ Attitudes/Philosophy, or Personal Values and Beliefs, Likes & Dislikes; Strengths & Weaknesses)

1. MEETING BUSINESS OBJECTIVES

* Same structure as above – you mean for #3?

1. BUILDING AND LEADING A TEAM
   * Same structure as above same as #4
2. CONCLUDING (THANKING, NEXT STEPS)

You might develop questions for three of the following six competencies: 1) interpersonal relations, 2) meeting business objectives, 3) building and leading a team, 4) ability to change or adapt during a transition, 5) integrity, and 6) planning and organizing. You may wish to use different competencies than those listed. The first four of these competencies are described in the article: *Why executives derail: perspectives across time and cultures* by Van Velsor & Leslie (1995). [[3]](#endnote-3)

## Alternatively, you might identify competencies based on Cool Aid’s strategy map in EL 2 in Chapter 2. Cool Aid’s HR department identified four strategic themes to assist line managers with their organization’s strategic themes.

## 1. Providing a positive work environment for managers and employees

## 2. Delivering Effective HR processes

## 3. Providing Policy Guidance to Managers

## 4. Providing Clear HR information and procedures

5. Increasing community and client volunteer participation

In responding to these themes, Cool Aid identified the following competencies for HR managers to support their managers:

* Human Resource Expertise: knowledge of HR principles, practices, and functions in providing HR Services.
* Relationship Management: ability to engage with managers and staff in identifying and responding to their needs; listening effectively to potential issues before providing solutions.
* Facilitation: coaching, project management, ability to provide guidance, and problem solving.
* Team leadership: ability to build a team and work with other managers as part of a team; foster collaboration.
* Cultural sensitivity and awareness: sensitivity to other cultures and values and backgrounds; demonstrating a non-judgmental respect for others.
* Communication: engaging stakeholders; providing clear, concise information in engaging staff, managers and the general public; demonstration of verbal, written, electronic, and other communication formats.

For each of the three competencies you choose, include:

* A behavioural description question asking for an example of a positive incident, where things went well. Probes (2-4 further questions that encourage a more detailed answer) should follow this question.
* A behavioural description question asking for an example of a not-so-positive incident, where things did not go well, followed by probes.
* One or two situational questions and probes.
* Other relevant questions (for example, it might be appropriate to ask a question relating to goals/attitudes/philosophy, or personal values and beliefs, likes & dislikes; strengths & weaknesses).

As a suggestion, the following phrases might be used as ways to begin behavioural description questions:

* Describe a situation in which …..
* Tell me about a time when …..
* What was the   
   toughest …..  
   most exciting …..  
   most difficult …..  
   most interesting …..
* How have you assisted in …..
* What roles have you played in organizations that …..
* Give me an example of …..

In the traditional interview format, the majority of questions (approximately 50%) ask for your opinions and thoughts about how you would handle a problem or situation. You are likely to be asked a number of questions on your credentials (15%), experiences (30%), and examples of behaviours descriptions (5%).

In carrying out interviews, the interview guide might consist of 50% behavioural description questions, 25% opinions and thoughts as behavioural situational questions, 20% on experiences, and 5% related to credentials.

Examples of Interview questions (for the competency: relationship management)

2: We would now like to you ask you some questions about how you work with others.

2.1: Could you tell us the details of an average day at your current or last job. In particular, how do you organize your day?

Probes

-What objectives and projects do you work on?

-How did you prioritize your deadlines and objectives?

-What is your role in implementing these projects?

2.2: In organizations, work can often be dependent on either another team member or even another department providing you with their completed work. Could you provide us an example of team experience which you initiated that really went well for you.

Probes

-Why did it go well?

-What were the obstacles and how did you overcome them?

-Tell me about the team and its dynamics and what made it work well?

-What are the principles you learned from this?

-Are there other examples of similar experiences which have gone well?

2.3: There are times when things don’t go so well. Could you provide us an example of when your work has been held up by someone else?

-How did you respond on this occasion?

-Did you have your own deadline to meet? Were you able to meet it?

-Was this a regular occurrence with this person/department?

-How did you account for this occurrence in keeping up with your own work?

-What did you learn from this?

2.4: Describe a time when your boss or a client, either internal or external, presented you with an urgent situation which interfered with your deadlines. How did you balance this with the rest of your workload?

-Were other priorities compromised by this?

-What steps did you take?

-Is this something that happens often to you?

-What principles guide you when these things happen?

2.5: At certain times, such as in the last scenario, all jobs are presented with conflicting priorities. Can you provide a specific example of when conflicting priorities caused you to miss a deadline?

-What were the conflicts/oppositions? Who was involved?

-How did you approach the situation?

-What were the repercussions of this?

-Did this impact the work of anyone else? How did you handle this?

-What actions did you take to prevent this occurring again in the future?

-If you are given another chance, how would you approach the

Situation differently?

**Step 2: Develop sample responses for different questions (15 minutes)**

Prepare answers for behavioural, situational and other types of questions. Before beginning the role play, prepare answers to questions you might be asked in an interview. As a first step, how would you answer the questions you prepared? You might also prepare answers to conventional questions about your strengths and weaknesses and goals. Also, review some of the questions in EL 2 as well as the questions you have in your interview guide. How would you answer them? As a working rule, I try to write down some things I would say. I might think of examples for each of the question areas and write down my answers.

**Step 3: Participate in role play interview (30 minutes)**

Each individual in the group should interview one person in another group. Then, switch roles so that each person gets the chance to be an interviewer and a job applicant.

# EL 2: Preparing for an interview

How do you land a job in the new environment of interviewing? The trick is to research the organization and practise with different types of questions and in different interview settings (e.g. telephone interviews). One assumption you might make is that you might likely experience different types of questions (behavioural, situational, traditional). Good preparation involves reviewing the types of questions you might get asked and preparing sample answers. Review the follow principles and questions you might be asked.

**Principles for answering questions**

*(i) Principle 1: Prepare for traditional questions by sharing examples of your experience.* Even though traditional questions are not in vogue in the selection process, some interviewers might still use them. They may ask you questions such as, ‘What are your strengths?’

1. Weaker answer: You might list several strengths showing you are prepared.
2. Stronger answer: Instead of answering this by saying, ‘I'm organized,’ or ‘I work well in teams,’ provide examples that illustrate a competency. You could say, ‘I'd like to give you some examples of where I used these competencies and illustrate more specifically how this is important to the skills you are seeking.’ Then have your examples ready.

*(ii) Prepare for behavioural interview questions by reviewing examples of your experiences*. Behavioural questions are increasingly being used. Some standby favourites are ‘Tell me about a time you were very successful in dealing with a difficult problem’ or ‘Give me an example of a time when you got something accomplished with a person who was difficult to get along with and tell me about some of the things that you did to make it work.’ There is only one correct answer to this question and that is what really happened – remember that a referee could be asked to substantiate your answer. The best preparation is to consider answers for behavioural description questions that are likely to arise.

You might say that you, as a student, don’t have a lot of experience to draw upon. Most interviewers will disagree with this as they will suggest you have probably worked in teams (in school, sports) and confronted many of the dynamics that are common in organizational teams. This is true about almost everything you might be asked. So, the best preparation is to recognize the broad experiences you have and build upon them.

*(iii) Prepare for situational questions by recognizing good practices.* ‘Imagine your spouse is away on a business trip and you are aiming to be at work for 7:00 a.m. in preparation for a 9:00 a.m. presentation to a team of managers. Whoops! Your ailing parent from across town phones and tells you they really feel ill. What do you do?

* Weaker answer: ‘I'll look after my parent because that is my first priority.’ This could be a weaker answer because the question might be based on punctuality and communicating to the supervisor, rather than parenting priorities’.
* Good answer: You could say, ‘I'll call my brother or friend and ask him to check in with my parent’ and you head off to work. Or you could say that you wait a bit and advise your supervisor that you might be late.

*(iv) Prepare for the unorthodox questions by recognizing how to answer different questions.* ‘How many human resource professionals are there in Germany?

* Weak answer: Don't say ‘I don't know.’
* Strong answer: You could say, ‘There are probably good sources to answer this. For example, I could check Human Resource Professional Associations. Or, I could make estimates but would first have to define what you mean by a Human Resource Professional.’ This answer illustrates the way you solve problems.

**Task: Review examples of questions you might be asked**

Prepare answers for behavioural, situational and other types of questions that you might get in an interview. In preparing an answer, identify an example where you were successful in using the competency and a time when you were not successful. In identifying each example, you might think of (i) describing the example by identifying the situation, any problem you were experiencing and the steps you took. Then, review what happened and the advantages and disadvantages (or positives and not-so-positive) outcomes or learnings. The general principle is to be able to describe the experience and review it analytically. In preparing answers, focus on 3-5 questions in each area below.

***Behavioural description interview questions.***

1. Time management. Can you describe a time when you were unable to meet a deadline? What did you do? What were the repercussions? What did you learn?

2. Team management. Could you please describe one of your team experiences? We would like you to describe a time when your co-workers or classmates did not work well together (because they disliked each other or there was competition). How did you respond to this? What was the outcome?

3. Conflict management. Can you describe a time when you had conflict with a fellow student or co-worker. What happened? What was the outcome? How did you handle this? In hindsight, what would you do differently?

4. Problem solving (or decision making). Could you please describe the last time you had a tough problem to solve (or had to make a tough decision)? What was the situation? How did you handle it? How did things turn out? What did you learn that you would do differently?

5. Research/written communication skills. Describe a situation in which you had to carry out a research project where you interviewed people and wrote up a report (or carried out a research report where you had to use reference material). What happened? What was the sequence of events that you followed? What was the outcome? In hindsight, what would you do differently?

6. Oral Communication Skills. Can you please describe the last time you had to make an oral presentation with a co-worker or classmate and where you were criticized for what you presented? What was the situation? How did you handle it? How did things turn out?

7. Assertiveness/persuasiveness. Describe a situation in which you had to persuade a person or a group to do something they didn't want to do. Who was involved? How did you handle this? What was the sequence of events that you followed? What was the outcome? In hindsight, what would you do differently?

8. Creativity and Innovative Thinking. Can you please describe a time when you came up with an innovative solution to a problem that your group or organization was experiencing. What was the problem? How did you handle it? What was your role? How did things turn out?

9. Ability to meeting objectives. Can you describe an example of ways you work towards meeting objectives? Are there times when you have been quite successful in using objective setting as a way to organize yourself? Can you describe an example of time when you were unsuccessful in your ability to meet the objectives you set out of yourself? What did you do?

***Situational interview questions.*** You can prepare for situational interview questions in the same way that you prepared for behavioural questions. Start with the competencies being sought and then think of actual, challenging, real life situations that might happen in this job that illustrate each competency. Think of appropriate responses to these questions.

Here are some examples of general situational questions that you might receive for an entry level job:

1. Ethical Issue. What would you do in a situation where one of your co-workers began work without wearing the required safety gear?

2. Ethical Issue. What would you do if a work colleague told you in confidence that she suspects another colleague of stealing? How would you act?

3. Conflict. Imagine you’re a trainee assistant manager in a small work unit. One of the staff is extremely resentful (as they were turned down for a previous promotion) and is therefore acting in an obstructive manner. How would you handle the situation and why?

4. Initiative & Problem-solving. Imagine you’ve been asked to solve a problem in a situation you’ve never before encountered. Your manager is on vacation and there is no established procedure process for dealing with this issue. What do you do?

5. Presentation skills. In delivering a presentation to a client group you find that one audience member is disruptive and taking you off point. How would you handle it?

6. Prioritization. In a fast-paced work environment, what would you do in if you were presented with an unrealistic deadline for completing a piece of work?

7. Punctuality. One of your subordinate employees arrives late to work regularly. How would you manage this?

8. Making a Business Case. If you were asked to prepare a business case for a particular initiative that you knew little about, what steps would you take to complete this task?

9. Coping with Overload or Change. What coping strategies would you use if you felt yourself getting overwhelmed at work by the volume of change?

10. Imagine you’ve been assigned a new sales territory. On a routine sales call a customer refuses to see you because they are so unhappy with the company’s past service. What would you do?

## 11. You encounter a computer technical problem beyond your capabilities to solve on your own. What resources would you use to get help?

# EL 3: Probing and taking notes in interviews

***Probing for more details in interviews.*** Just as important as asking the correct question, probing allows the interviewer to get more details and truly understand different facets of skills, experience and competencies. For example, an interviewer might want to understand about the applicant’s ability to lead a team and might want to ask about positive and not-so-positive experiences. But, beyond examples of experiences, it might be important to probe about feelings, about actions taken, or how the applicant has learned or reflected on these experiences.

Probing allows the interviewer to systematically focus in on important subparts to each question. Applicants often need help in providing details on the question. Example of probes include

*A situation or task* – ‘What was the situation that led to the candidate’s action?’

*Actions* – ‘What did the candidate actually do or not do?’

*Results* – ‘What happened as a result of these actions?’

Details – ‘Can you tell us more?’

*Behaviours – ‘*I’m not sure I have a good sense of what you actually did in that situation.

*If the example is off track –* ‘Have you got another example where you had to work hard to keep the group together?’

*As a last resort –* ‘In this job, we are expecting that there will be teamwork and a fair amount of collaboration with colleagues. We want to know about your skills and experience in that area.’

*Too vague* – Listen for non-answers that are too vague and unspecific. Ask a follow-up (probing) question.

* Normally, I would …..→ Ask: ‘What DID you do?’
* Usually, in those situations ….. → Ask: ‘Can you give a SPECIFIC example?’
* We did …. → Ask: ‘What did YOU do?’

You can keep probing until you have a good idea of whether or not the candidate has the skills you are looking for.

Scenario or future-oriented questions can be useful to show how candidates would apply their skills to your particular circumstances, but it is also important to know whether the applicant can ‘walk their talk.’ A good follow-up question for scenario and future-oriented questions is: ‘*Can you give us an example of a time when you have actually done that?’*

**Recording interviews details**

As there is a tendency to forget many of the details of the interview shortly after, accurate recording allows the interviewer to systematically review what was said within each competency.

A useful working rule is to record the actual words of what the applicant said in an almost verbatim format. Then, afterwards, you might rate the applicant in comparison with other applicants.

**Rating**

**1 2 3 4 5**

***Little demonstration Expert demonstration***

***of skills of skills***

**Task: Review your interview guide in EL 1**

In the interview guide in EL 1 that you developed, go through each question and identify 3-5 probes which provide information on different facets of the question. Also, develop a form for recording information from the interview.

# EL 4: Thinking about validity

Important types of validity in selection include criterion (concurrent and predictive), content, construct and face validity. ***Criterion-related validity*** is the extent to which a selection tool predicts or significantly correlates with elements of the work that are most relevant in the job. It is the measure by which a predictor (application form, interview questions, references, speech, or test results) and the criterion variable (the outcomes such as a performance appraisal or job performance) align. The single greatest difficulty in establishing criterion-related validity is to actually choose the criterion to validate the interview questions or tests used. For selection managers, interview questions are better for understanding interpersonal qualities and might not effectively gauge performance in handling key decisions under pressure. Two strategies that can be used to demonstrate criterion-related validity are: concurrent and predictive validity.

***Concurrent validity*** is a way to illustrate that the scores on a selection tool (such as mental ability or IQ) are related to some aspect of job performance, when both are measured at the same time. To do this, a human resources expert could develop a test seeking to measure a specific characteristic, such as managerial potential. The correlation between test scores and supervisor ratings is an indication of the test's concurrent validity, as both the test and the ratings are measuring concurrently in time.

***Predictive validity*** indicates the extent to which the scores on a selection tool are correlated with some aspect of future performance. In this case, a human resource expert might give the managerial potential test to all applicants and check their performance ratings several months after they are hired. The results would indicate the test's predictive validity because the selection measure occurred before the assessment of performance.

***Content validity*** is guided by the question ‘Is the substance or content of the selection instrument a representative sample of knowledge, skills, abilities and other characteristics being measured?’ ***Construct validity*** is the extent to which a selection tool measures theoretical constructs or traits that are important in the job.

Although the validity of selection tools is important in choosing which tools to use, ***face validity*,** is also important. Selection tools should be acceptable and appear valid to applicants. For example, in a study of 259 French and American college students, face validity was the critical determinant in the students' reactions to the techniques. Face validity is the weakest form of validity in scientific terms as it does not establish that the tools are valid. However, the appearance of validity (face validity) is to be reckoned with. During interviews and work sampling, tests with high face validity are viewed more favourably amongst college students.[[4]](#endnote-4) From an applicant’s point of view, using these tests might give an applicant a more favourable impression of the organization and the selection tools it uses.

It is unrealistic to expect that all selection tools will illustrate high marks on all types of validity, especially during their initial application. Researchers often spend years collecting data to improve the validity of their survey instruments and selection tools. However, it is a useful exercise to recognize that the intention of selection tools is to predict. That is, after using the tool, we should be able to predict whether the applicant will meet the criterion or be able to perform on the basis of that competency.

**Task: Review steps you might take in enhancing validity**

In the article: *Why executives derail: perspectives across time and cultures*, Van Velsor & Leslie (1995) defined four competencies or skills which were correlated with executive derailment: 1) interpersonal relations, 2) meeting business objectives, 3) building and leading a team, and 4) ability to change or adapt during a transition. [[5]](#endnote-5) These four competencies illustrate concurrent validity.

Consider four aspects of validity (concurrent validity, predictive validity, content validity, and face validity). For the questions on the competency of relationship management (EL 1), what steps might an HR specialist consider in the future to illustrate the validity of these questions in predicting ‘managerial potential’? For example, an HR specialist might review if people who scored high on these questions were actually promoted to higher level managerial positions in later years (concurrent validity). What other steps might the HR specialist think about?

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# References

1. The class should be divided into two or four equal sized groups. Assume six groups (A, B, C, D) of 4 people each. After designing the interview guide, group A members will act as HR people interview applicants from group B. C would interview group D. After the initial interviews, B (as managers) would interview C (as applicants) and D (managers) would interview A (applicants). [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. This description is from National Occupational Classification (NOC) 2006 Human Resources and Social Development Canada, *0112 Human Resource Managers*, [cited 2008 December 31] Available from: www.hrsdc.gc.ca [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Van Velsor E., & Leslie, J.B. (1995) Why executives derail: perspectives across time and cultures. *Academy of Management Executive,* 9, 62-72. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Steiner, D., & Gilliland, S. (1996) Fairness reactions to personnel selection techniques in France and the United States, *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 81: 134-141. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Van Velsor E., & Leslie, J.B. (1995) op. cit. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)