IDENTIFICATION OF VARIABLES MOST INFLUENTIAL IN DETERMINING INTERVIEWERS' EVALUATIONS OF APPLICANTS IN A COLLEGE PLACEMENT CENTER

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Summary.—170 applicants being interviewed by representatives of 17 different industrial and academic agencies participated. Interviewers evaluated applicants on three dimensions: over-all general impression, personal liking, and chances of further consideration. Information about the applicants was obtained from their application forms and used to predict the interviewers' evaluations. Stepwise multiple regression indicated that the best combination of predictors across all three evaluations were undergraduate grade point average, membership in a fraternity or sorority, and membership in professional societies. Slight differences were found between industrial and academic interviewers in that the former were more influenced by honors received and membership in a fraternity or sorority, while the latter were more influenced by membership in professional societies and undergraduate grade point average. Relevance of findings to previous research on interviewing is discussed.

Early research focused on the reliability and validity of the selection interview and generally found the results not encouraging (Mayfield, 1964; Ulrich & Trumbo, 1965; Wagner, 1949; Webster, 1964). One of the primary recommendations of these early reviewers was that the interview should be regarded as a decision-making process. In a more recent review Schmitt (1976) concurs with earlier reviewers in arguing that it would be profitable to learn what interviewers actually weighted in reaching their decisions. Schmitt suggests that research can be best conducted with the cooperation of personnel interviewers. The present study is a small step in this recommended direction. The purpose of the present study is to identify some of the variables which seem influential in determining interviewers' evaluations of applicants in a college placement center.

METHOD

The subjects participating in this study were 17 representatives interviewing a total of 170 applicants in the placement center of a large midwestern university. The interviewers represented a variety of industrial and academic organizations, with 11 interviewing for industrial positions and 6 interviewing for academic positions. Each interviewer saw from 3 to 24 applicants, with a mean of 10. The applicants were 76% male and had a mean age of 23 yr.

Each interviewer made three evaluations of each applicant he interviewed.

These evaluations were: (1) What is your over-all general impression of this applicant as a person? (2) How much did you personally like this applicant? and (3) What are the chances that this applicant will be given further consideration by your organization? Evaluations were made on 9-point rating scales with appropriate anchor points suggested by Bass, Cascio, and O'Connor (1974).

The applicants' information used to predict these interviewers' evaluations was taken exclusively from the personal information contained on the placement center application form. These forms were used as a data base because they could be obtained unobtrusively from the placement center and they were the only type of information we were guaranteed was present in every interview. The decision was made to score the application forms on dichotomous dimensions to avoid the subjective nature of ratings that may limit generalizability. The following represent the independent variables employed in this study: (1) sex (male scored positive), (2) academic major (scored positive if congruent with position applied for), (3) involvement in college sports (any mention scored positive), (4) membership in a fraternity or sorority (scored positive), (5) reception of any honor or scholarship or other special award (any mention scored positive), (6) membership in college clubs or committees or other organizations besides a fraternity or sorority (scored positive), (7) held office in any college organization (scored positive), (8) membership in professional societies or any other organization outside college (scored positive), and (9) undergraduate grade-point average (scored continuously). It should be noted that previous work experience was not scored since an adequate scoring system that could be used for every applicant could not be developed.

The interviewers' evaluations of each applicant were made at the end of each interview. Application forms were obtained from the placement office after the interviews were conducted.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The average intercorrelation between the three evaluations made by the interviewers of the applicants was .79, indicating a substantial degree of common variance.

Due to the fact that there were too few applicants per interviewer to analyze each interviewer separately, all interviewers were combined and analyzed together. Table 1 shows the single-order correlations between the nine predictor variables and the three evaluations. As can be seen, the correlations tend to be consistent in sign and magnitude across all three evaluations. Undergraduate grade point average, fraternity or sorority membership, membership in professional societies, offices held, and honors appear to be positively and significantly related to interviewers' evaluations, while sex and involvement in

TABLE 1
SINGLE-ORDER CORRELATIONS BETWEEN INTERVIEWERS' EVALUATIONS AND APPLICANT PREDICTOR VARIABLES

Applicant Predictor Variables	Interviewers' Evaluations		
	Over-all General Impression	Personal Liking	Chances of Further Consideration
Sex	−.23†	−.21†	−.20†
Academic Major	.05	.07	.15*
Sports	−.14*	−.13*	−.17†
Frat./Sor. Membership	.13*	.20†	.25†
Honors	.10	.12*	.13*
College Clubs	.11	.11	.06
Held Office	.13*	.12*	.15*
Membership in Prof. Soc.	.16*	.16*	.13*
Undergraduate GPA	.33†	.25†	.24†

Note.—$n = 170$.
*$p < .05$. †$p < .01$.

sports appear to be negatively and significantly related to interviewers' evaluations. The only variable that was insignificant across all three evaluations was membership in college clubs.

Forward stepwise regression (Nie, Hull, Jenkins, Steinbrenner, & Bent, 1975) was used to identify combinations of applicants' characteristics that best predicted the interviewers' evaluations. Only those variables were included in the final equation which contributed significantly to the multiple R ($p < .10$). Table 2 shows the results of the multiple regression by listing, in order, the variables that entered the equations, their contribution to the variance explained, and the incremental F ratios.

TABLE 2
STEPWISE MULTIPLE REGRESSION OF INTERVIEWERS' EVALUATIONS WITH APPLICANT PREDICTOR VARIABLES

Interviewers' Evaluations	Applicant Predictors Entering Equation (in order)	R^2	ΔR^2	F	p
Over-all General Impression	1. Undergraduate GPA	.109	.109	20.50	<.01
	2. Frat. or Sor. Membership	.132	.023	4.40	<.05
	3. Sex	.144	.012	2.73	.10
	4. Membership in Prof. Soc.	.156	.012	2.75	.10
Personal Liking	1. Undergraduate GPA	.060	.060	10.85	<.01
	2. Frat. or Sor. Membership	.107	.047	8.77	<.01
	3. Membership in Prof. Soc.	.126	.019	3.43	.10
Chances of Further Consideration	1. Frat. or Sor. Membership	.080	.080	14.65	<.01
	2. Undergraduate GPA	.127	.047	9.04	<.01
	3. Academic Major	.144	.017	3.35	.10
	4. Sports	.157	.013	2.83	.10

Note.—The ΔR^2 denotes the increase in variance explained by the addition of each new variable. Degrees of freedom for incremental Fs are 1 and 168 for the first variable, 1 and 167 for the second, 1 and 166 for the third, and 1 and 165 for the fourth.

In terms of the first evaluation it can be seen that the best predictors of the interviewers' over-all general impression of the applicants were undergraduate grade point average, membership in a fraternity or sorority, sex (weighted negatively), and membership in professional societies ($R = .35$; $F = 7.63$, $df = 4/165$, $p < .001$). For the second evaluation, the best predictors of the interviewers' personal liking of the applicants were undergraduate grade point average, membership in a fraternity or sorority, and membership in professional societies ($R = .35$; $F = 7.95$, $df = 3/166$, $p < .001$). Finally the best predictors of the third evaluation, which asked about the applicant's chances of further consideration, were membership in a fraternity or sorority, undergraduate grade point average, academic major, and sports (weighted negatively) ($R = .40$; $F = 7.70$, $df = 4/165$, $p < .001$).

At this point one could reasonably ask whether there were differences between industrial and academic interviewers in terms of which applicants' characteristics best predicted their evaluations. The interviewers were divided into two groups, industrial and academic (groups of 11 and 6, respectively), and analyzed separately using the same criteria for inclusion as in the initial analysis. For the first evaluation, dealing with over-all general impression, the best predictors of the industrial interviewers' evaluations were undergraduate grade point average and sex (weighted positively) ($R = .26$; $F = 3.63$, $df = 2/103$, $p < .05$). The best predictors of the academic interviewers' evaluations were membership in professional societies, undergraduate grade point average, and sex (weighted negatively) ($R = .53$; $F = 7.90$, $df = 3/60$, $p < .001$). For the second evaluation, which assessed personal liking, the best predictors for industrial interviewers' evaluations were reception of honors or other special awards and membership in a fraternity or sorority ($R = .28$; $F = 4.41$, $df = 2/103$, $p < .05$). The best predictors for academic interviewers' evaluations were membership in professional societies and undergraduate grade point average ($R = .46$; $F = 8.20$, $df = 2/61$, $p < .001$). Finally for the third evaluation on chances of further consideration, the best predictors for industrial interviewers' evaluations were membership in a fraternity or sorority, reception of honors or other special awards, and academic major ($R = .34$; $F = 4.47$, $df = 3/102$, $p < .01$). The best predictors for academic interviewers on this evaluation were membership in professional societies and membership in a fraternity or sorority ($R = .43$; $F = 7.28$, $df = 2/61$, $p < .01$).

By way of summary, a couple of statements seem warranted. No matter whether one is looking at evaluations of over-all general impression, personal liking, or chances of further consideration, the best combination of predictors seems to be undergraduate grade point average, membership in a fraternity or sorority, and membership in professional societies. When examining industrial versus academic interviewers, the main difference seems to be that industrial

interviewers are more impressed with honors received and fraternity or sorority membership, while academic interviewers seem to be more impressed with membership in professional societies and undergraduate grade point average. Finally the influence of sex seems to depend on the position. With industrial interviewers, males seem to have an advantage; while with academic interviewers, females seem to have an advantage.

One rather surprising finding concerns the negative relationship between involvement in sports and interviewers' evaluations. At least two possible explanations can be generated. First, perhaps interviewers have a stereotype that athletic individuals for some reason are less valuable potential employees. Second, in this sample involvement in sports was negatively, although only marginally, related to academic major ($r = -.11, p = .10$) and undergraduate grade point average ($r = -.12 \ p = .10$).

It is interesting to note how the findings of the present study agree with findings of other researchers. There are three primary points of agreement. First, Hakel, Dobmeyer, and Dunnette (1970) found that interviewer decisions may be based on only one or two kinds of information. The results of the present study agree in that typically only two variables accounted for most of the explained variance. Second, Cohen and Bunker (1975) found that males and females were more likely to be recommended for traditionally role-congruent jobs although other qualifications were constant. The present results concur in that women seemed to have an advantage for academic jobs and men for industrial jobs. Finally, Ulrich and Trumbo (1965) have speculated that variables having to do with personal relations and motivation are the two areas which contribute most to interviewers' decisions. Examination of the best predictors of evaluations noted in this study show that the first two variables entering the regression equations typically include a personal relations variable, e.g., membership in a fraternity or sorority or membership in a professional society, and a variable representing motivation, e.g., undergraduate grade point average or honors received.

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