The Utter Uselessness of Job Interviews

Opinion piece by
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New York Times
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Partly based on
Belief in the unstructured interview: The persistence of an illusion
Judgment and Decision Making, Vol. 8, No. 5, September 2013, pp. 512–520

An Aapo Tea Talk
9 Jan 2018

Funny story to begin with

- Author's friend goes to a job interview
- Due to mix-up in scheduling, she is 30min late, but does not realise that at all
- She gets the job
- Panel impressed by her composure in spite of being late

Interviews do not give useful information for recruitment

- In 1979, a Medical School was required to admit more students

- School admitted students who initially failed the interview

- Their study performance the same as with the initially admitted students

- "People who study personnel psychology have long understood this"

- Especially a problem with "unstructured" interviews
  - Interviewers ask anything they see fit

Even worse: Interviews can mislead decision-makers

- Author's research (Dana et al) indicates that interviews lead to *worse* decisions

- Experiment 1: subjects predicted students' GPA

  - Prediction based on either:

    - Past GPA and course schedule

      or

    - Past GPA and course schedule *and* interview

  - Result: Prediction was better without interview

- Experiment 2: random yes/no answers in interview

  - Interviewers failed to notice randomness

  - Interviewers rated they "got to know" the interviewees better with random answers

Discussion

- Theoretical explanations:
  - Dilution: "Tendency for available but non-diagnostic information to weaken the predictive value of quality information"
  - Sense-making: "ability for interviewers to make sense of virtually anything the interviewee says"
  - Overconfidence: Interviewers think they get more reliable information than they actually do
- Authors' suggestions:
  - Ask same questions to all applicants
  - test job-related skills
- Yet another result on suboptimal decision-making in humans
  - Make better decisions by AI ???