

## CHAPTER ONE: WHY BEHAVIOR DESCRIPTION INTERVIEWING?

Behavior description (BD) interviewing directly benefits everyone involved with interviewing: the line manager, the human resource specialist, and the applicant. BD interviewing is new. It is not a minor facelift for traditional interviewing techniques; it differs substantially from them. BD interviewing accuracy exceeds traditional interviewing accuracy by three to seven times, and that improved accuracy makes BD interviewing highly cost-effective. Finally, cream-of-the-crop applicants prefer BD interviews and are more willing to accept jobs with organizations that use them. In short, BD interviewing rewards, challenges, and excites, but it also demands hard work. This chapter should convince you that the hard work will pay off handsomely.

The behavior description interview proceeds from a structured pattern of questions designed to probe the applicant's past behavior in specific situations, selected for their relevance to critical job events. Whereas traditional interviews obtain BD answers less than 5 percent of the time (Janz, 1982a), BD interviews assess each applicant against behaviorally defined job dimensions and obtain BD answers over 60 percent of the time. Hiring decisions flow directly from adding up the assessments. Behavior description interviewing benefits all three actors on the interviewing stage: (1) the applicant, (2) the line manager, and (3) the human resource specialist.

### THE APPLICANT

Although each of these actors on the interviewing stage has a unique viewpoint and set of interests, they share some common interests. One of these common interests is to have job openings filled by the applicants who will make the greatest contribution to the organization once hired. We begin with the applicants because their interests seem so different from those of line managers and human resources specialists. First we will examine how accurate selection applies to an applicant's best interest. Then we will examine two related interests from the applicant's viewpoint.

#### **The Applicant's Interest in Selection Accuracy**

A devil's advocate might say that an applicant's only interest lies in being hired--that an applicant couldn't care less about his or her suitability for the job. We believe that most applicants are not so short-sighted. To examine this belief, consider the two kinds of selection errors and their impacts on the applicant.

#### ***False rejects***

The first type of selection error falsely rejects an applicant who would actually fall in the high contributing group. This person should have been hired but was overlooked because of weakness in the selection method. The psychological costs to the applicant include the acute stress of disappointment added to the chronic stress that accompanies unemployment. The psychological costs of being rejected for employment exact a heavy toll, even for correctly rejected applicants. These costs intensify for applicants whose experience and skills would place them clearly among the top contributors but who just don't "shine" in poorly structured employment interviews.

### ***False hires***

What about the second type of selection error--the false hire? Being hired meets the applicant's immediate needs; the applicant is receiving positive feedback. Surely applicants need not fear the false hire. Unfortunately, the short-term gain often leads to long-term pain. Placing an applicant in a job that is beyond his or her capacity is no favor. The likely outcome is humiliating task failures and eventual dismissal. Even worse, to solve the mess in one department, the unfortunate soul may be promoted out of the current misery into a position where that misery may be shared among undeserving subordinates. We have seen this happen in far too many cases.

In short, applicants have a clear interest in accurate selection decisions. As Chapter 2 notes, interviewers trained in patterned, behavior-based techniques produce much higher accuracy than is obtained by interviewers trained in standard techniques. Therefore, BD-trained interviewers make fewer of the kinds of mistakes that lead to unnecessary stress and failure for applicants.

### **The Applicant's Interest in Interview Relevance**

Selection tools can be highly accurate and at the same time seem largely irrelevant to the interviewee. Cognitive ability tests exemplify accurate but often irrelevant-appearing selection tools. Extensive research with thousands of people working all kinds of jobs (Schmidt and Hunter, 1981) supports the accuracy of well-constructed cognitive ability tests for predicting on-the-job performance. Yet to the applicant who is taking the test, it all seems highly arbitrary and unrelated to eventual job performance.

Almost everyone can recall one or more interviews that completely overlooked the accomplishments and obvious weaknesses of the applicant. Sometimes the interviewer soars into stratospheric discussion of philosophy that is never brought down to earth. Sometimes the interviewer wanders into a discussion of a sport or hobby he or she has in common with the applicant, and the interview into stories about "the Lakers' chances" or "the fish that got away." After the interview, the applicant realizes that the interviewer found out virtually nothing related to his or her potential contribution on the job. Applicants find nothing quite so disappointing as becoming "psyched up" to handle a probing interview, only to encounter irrelevant or vague questions.

So far, no one has accused the BD interview of being vague or irrelevant. In fact, reactions have been quite the opposite. In first glancing through the BD interview patterns (Appendix A), some interviewers who were experienced in traditional methods have commented: "I could never get away with asking those questions. They are far too personal and specific." Yet, as we document in Chapter 2, managers we have trained tell a different story. Top-quality applicants appreciate an interview that probes their specific accomplishments. One BD-trained manager queried all applicants who received offers from his company to find out why the offers were accepted or rejected. He reported that three top-notch applicants enthusiastically named the style of interview as the key reason for accepting the offer. According to this manager, the applicants reasoned that because the company demonstrated a higher professional standard regarding how it hired new people, it was the kind of company they wanted to work for.

In a different setting, a company that recruited engineers shifted from traditional to BD interviews. The company noted that the proportion of offers accepted rose substantially following the implementation of BD interviewing. An informal follow-up drew applicant comments similar to the aforementioned reactions.

Thus, qualified applicants appreciate relevant, probing interviews that clearly size up their potential contribution to the organization. Top-notch applicants give BD interviews high marks for competence and relevance.

## **The Applicant's Interest in Interview Fairness**

All applicants--but especially minority group applicants--find a common cause in the legal and moral requirements for selection fairness. The BD approach adopts the spirit of job relatedness, building it into every facet of the BD process. The BD questions themselves derive from a detailed behavioral analysis of the job, and the behaviorally defined job dimensions guide interview scoring. If a minority applicant is rejected after an interview that consisted of a rambling discussion of his college sports career, he is much more likely to perceive the interview decision as unfair than if the interview had involved discussions of his accomplishments and specific disappointments.

## **THE LINE MANAGER**

The line manager shares two key concerns with applicants, but from a different perspective. Line managers value their time and must account for the bottom-line performance of their subordinates. Accordingly, line managers share the applicants' interest in selection accuracy, but from their own perspective. Line managers also share an interest in applicants' perceptions of interview relevance. Managers want top-notch applicants to accept most offers, it reduces the need to move down the list to less desirable applicants. We have already discussed the power of BD interviews to convince outstanding performers to accept offers. The remainder of this section expands on BD's organizational payoffs from the line manager's perspective.

### **The Line Manager's Interest in Selection Accuracy**

Line managers are interested in accurate selection decisions for at least four reasons. First, if applicants unsuited to the job are hired, some of them are sure to leave of their own accord. These turnovers create more openings, which means that more money and time must be spent on recruiting, interviewing, and training. Worse yet, some unsuitable applicants will try to hang on, and a great deal of managerial time will have to be spent of (1) correcting avoidable problems, (2) endlessly repeating standard training exercises, and (3) documenting performance deficiencies. Add to these costs the opportunities lost by not having top-notch applicants contributing to the organization, and the bottom-line benefits of better selection stagger the imagination.

### **Summary**

The line manager's interest in selection accuracy thus begins with the consequences of bad hires. Managers want to avoid wasting valuable time with poor performers who drag down the bottom-line showing for their unit, and the utility equation projects the cost savings made possible through BD interviewing.

At the risk of sounding overly dogmatic, we believe the bottom line speaks for itself. Whereas before we could only speak of the general value of hiring top-notch people, we now have two quantitative measurements: (1) how much it would cost to implement BD interviews and (2) how much it would cost not to do so.

## **THE HUMAN RESOURCE SPECIALIST**

The human resource (HR) specialist shares the line manager's and the applicant's concern for accuracy and perceived relevance. Since the preceding two sections covered those shared interests, this section will

concentrate on the dominant remaining concern--the HR specialist's interest in selection fairness and legality.

The impact of equal opportunity legislation and federal executive action has changed the face of selection practice in the United States. Canada and the European community lag behind, but they have many of the same concerns and practices. The Canadian province of Ontario, for example, recently adopted, almost intact, the list of proscribed interview questions circulated by the U. S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC).

Although line managers retain ultimate responsibility for selection practices, the expertise for defending and developing defensible selection systems lies in the HR function. The legal definitions of disproportionate impact, job relatedness, test validation, and affirmative action are paramount, and position descriptions for HR management inevitably require a working knowledge of EEOC rulings and guidelines. We leave it to others to weigh the pros and cons of legal developments; this section relates them to selection interviewing and to BD interviewing in particular.

The enactment of Title VII, prohibiting discriminatory hiring practices, and the subsequent legal decisions, beginning with the *Griggs v. Duke* power case, radically altered how management thinks about the selection process. Because employment testing came under fire first, one reaction was to eliminate testing and stick to the unstructured interview. As Schmidt and Hunter (1981) pointed out, however, the costs of eliminating testing sometimes greatly exceeded the costs of defending a valid test. So far, we are unaware of court cases that set out preferred interview processes, although the EEOC does list questions that can lead to challenges to interview decisions. We believe that the interview is likely to come under increased legal scrutiny. Therefore, BD interviewing equips its practitioners to defend their decisions in the following ways.

First, following Bob Guion's (1976) advice, BD interviewers build a strong hypothesis that relates their interview questions to on-the-job performance. They build this strong hypothesis by first discovering the behaviors that differentiate effective and ineffective performers and then deriving interview questions that focus on critical job-related situations from the applicant's past.

Once the questions are asked and the applicant's responses are noted, BD interviewing requires that each applicant be assessed against the behavioral job dimensions. In this way, the rating process magnifies the direct relationship between job behavior and interview content.

We feel that the strong relationship between job behavior and interview content, magnified by the applicant assessment process, is a strong argument for the legal defensibility of properly conducted BD interviews. This can be illustrated by the following anecdote.

One of us trained the staff of a municipal parks and recreation division to interview students for summer staff jobs. The job types ranged from pool superintendents to lifeguards, camp counsellors, and the like. Full-time staff members, who had developed BD interview patterns for each job, considered an increased ability to defend their selection decisions to be one of the positive outcomes of the BD program. Many more students applied for the summer positions than could be hired, and sometimes, when the son or daughter of a prominent civic figure was refused a job, the office received an angry phone call the next day. In the past, such calls had produced considerable stress and caution on management's part. With BD interviewing in place, however, the managers receiving these calls went to the file, read the notes, and found little difficulty in clearly explaining why a particular applicant was refused. They reported greater confidence in their decisions and satisfaction in being able to calm down irate "big-wigs" with the facts. Although this was not a court case, it does illustrate the improved defensibility of BD interview decisions.

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## CHAPTER TWO: WHAT WE KNOW FROM RESEARCH AND EXPERIENCE

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Many opinions on "how to interview" have appeared in print. Although this [excerpt] also contains some of our opinions, it argues the merits of behavior description interviewing on the basis of evidence from research and experience. Even if your goal is simply to make better selection decisions, sooner or later someone will want to know what stands behind your new approach. Therefore, read on to be prepared.

The chapter is divided into two main parts. The first part reviews research on interviewing, including documentation of the deficiencies of the unstructured interview and discussion of five improvements to traditional interviewing-- all of which are characteristic of behavior description interviewing. The five improvements are (1) structuring the interview, (2) defining job requirements, (3) basing questions on behavioral analysis, (4) taking notes, and (5) assessing applicants on job-related dimensions.

The second part describes five practical applications of behavior description interviewing. These descriptions add life to the message documented in the research and illustrate useful variations in the practical application of BD interviewing principles.

### RESEARCH ON BETTER INTERVIEWING

This section is not intended to be a comprehensive review of the interviewing literature, since several comprehensive reviews already exist (Arvey and Campion, 1982; Mayfair, 1964; Schmitt, 1976; Wagner, 1949; Webster, 1982). The accumulated evidence has documented the poor accuracy of traditional, unstructured interviews in predicting job performance, and recent research has probed the reasons for this failure. Webster (1982), for example, explores the topic in detail. The review here concentrated on research findings that support behavior description interviewing principles and procedures.

#### How Bad Is the Unstructured Interview?

Wagner (1949), going back to 1919, reported that none other than Alfred Binet, the inventor of intelligence testing, first tried interviews. He had three schoolteachers interview the same five children to assess their intelligence. When Binet asked the teachers whether they were confident of their assessments, they responded that they were. There was only one problem. They disagreed widely about the students' intelligence levels. Binet then abandoned the interview in favor of more rigorous testing methods.

Wagner (1949) also reported on three other early studies of the selection interview-Scott (1915), Scott, Bingham, and Whipple (1916), and Hollingsworth (1922)-which were similar to Binet's study but more sophisticated. Hollingsworth (1922) examined rankings given applicants for postings in the army. The same applicants were interviewed by several classification officers, but there was little agreement among ranks assigned by different classification officers. When several interviewers ranking the same man can't agree, it must be assumed that at least some of them err in judgment. Hollingsworth (1922) described one case in which an applicant was ranked first by one officer and fifty-seventh by another officer. Thus, this early research established the low validity of the unstructured selection interview.

Let's zoom ahead in time and put a number on the accuracy of the unstructured selection interview. Human resource specialists state the accuracy of any selection method on a correlation scale that ranges from -1.0 to 1.0. A value of zero means random or useless selection decisions; a value of 1.0 or -1.0 means that the

hiring tool perfectly predicts eventual on-the-job performance.

To provide a frame of reference, Schmidt and Hunter (1981) reviewed hundreds of studies relating scores on cognitive ability tests to training or job performance. They reported that the tests ranged in accuracy from .26 for simple, routine jobs to the mid .50s for mentally demanding jobs.

Reviewing and combining all reported validation studies provides the best fix on the accuracy of a particular hiring tool. In a report of such an analysis at a conference on validity generalization, Ofsanko (1983) cited the best estimate of interview validity as .14. But what does this .14 rating mean? Certainly, 14 percent accuracy sounds pretty poor.

Look at it this way. If you could perfectly pick the very best applicants (the one who would work out best once hired), selecting accuracy would be 1.0. You should capture all of the human resource potential in the applicant pool. An accuracy rating of 0.14 means that you get only 14 percent of that potential. It's better than zero, but far below that .50 capture rate studies have demonstrated for behavior-based interviews. At the top end, even expensive, sophisticated, selection assessment centers lasting several days only raise accuracy to the .60s.

The following sections describe research that supports each of the major improvements that can be derived from applying the principles of behavior description interviewing.

### **Research on the Importance of Structure**

Wonderlic (1942), another intelligence tester, advocated using a structured set of questions so that each applicant is taken over the same ground. McMurray (1947) reported support for "patterned interviews," as these structured interviews were called. In McMurray's study, scores from a patterned interview at one company correlated .68 with job performance rating and .43 with length of service.

Somewhat later, Younge (1956) reported the findings of a patterned interview that was specifically designed to assess six performance topics. The median rank-order correlation between supervisor ratings of suitability and applicants' interview scores was .71. In a more recent study of structured interviews, Mayfield, Drown, and Hamstra (1980) used a "selection interview blueprint" to train personnel officers in the insurance industry. They concluded that interviewers can agree when they are making ratings about factual characteristics and that interview structure improves interview reliability. Four additional studies (reviewed later in the discussion of behaviour-based question content) also support the advantages of an interview pattern. A study by Heneman, Schwab, Huett, and Ford (1975) did not support the advantages of interview structure. However, the study used videotapes of fake interviews, and the people playing the applicants were already employed. It is therefore difficult to tell how seriously the interviewers took their task in this study.

Thus, research findings generally have been in favor of increased interview structure, since structure often improves interview accuracy and validity. Covering the same performance topics with all applicants makes sense when the goal is a clear basis for applicant comparisons.

### **Research Supporting Clear Knowledge of Job Requirements**

Would the same set of "all-purpose" questions do for all jobs, or should the interviewer be familiar with specific job requirements? Langdale and Weitz (1973) reported significantly higher interviewer agreement among interviewers who had been supplied with detailed job information. (Interviewers in the control group received only a job title.) Leonard (1974) also demonstrated that interviewers agreed better on topics that were relevant to the purpose of the interview.

Wiener and Schneiderman (1974) reported an elaborate study that considered the relevancy of favorable and unfavorable applicant characteristics. Half of the hypothetical applicants were evaluated by managers who had studied a complete job description. The rest of the applicants were evaluated by managers who had no job information. The researchers found that the managers who had studied the job description were less influenced by irrelevant facts that had been programmed into the hypothetical applicants.

In short, knowledge of specific job requirements enhances interview decision quality.

### **Behavior-Based Question Content**

Given the findings that an interview pattern based on knowledge of job requirements helps interview accuracy, we can now consider research that suggests how the pattern questions should be formed.

In 1941, Dudycha reported a successful approach to predicting punctuality using the interview. He asked applicants what they would do in situations that called for punctual behavior. This was the first behavior-based approach to writing interview questions.

Maas (1965) moved the notion of behavior-based questions several steps forward. He began by having interviewers who were familiar with the job list traits of successful performers. Then the interviewers wrote behavioral examples of high, medium, and low performance on those traits. Finally, a separate set of managers sorted the examples into performance level, without knowing which level they were supposed to be. The behaviour examples that managers sorted into the same levels intended by the interviewers who wrote them were retained, and the interviewers rated applicants' responses against these examples. Maas (1965) reported high interviewer agreements-- .58 in one study and .69 in a second.

Latham, Saari, Purcall, and Campion (1980) refined the Maas procedure into what they called the situational interview. Instead of having interviewers merely list traits, they began with critical incidents of job performance-- that is, stories that describe specific events that exemplify effective or ineffective job performance. Interview pattern writers turned the critical incidents into questions by asking applicants how they "would perform" in the described circumstances. The situational interview designers also prepared benchmark answers to guide interviewers when rating applicant responses to the behavior-based questions. Latham et al. (1980) reported interviewer reliability for the situational interview of .71 and .67 in two studies. Also in support of the validity of the situational interview, interview scores correlated .46 and .30 with supervisory performance ratings.

Janz (1982) reported a direct comparison of traditional unstructured interviews with behavior description interviews. Eight senior business students received behaviour description interview training and eight other students were trained on standard interview process skills. A total of fifteen teaching assistants were interviewed four times, twice by interviewers trained in behavior description interviewing and twice by interviewers trained in standard techniques. All interviewers had a maximum of 30 minutes to gather information and predict the teaching ratings the teaching assistants would receive at the end of the term. Later in the term, the actual teaching ratings were gathered and compared with the ratings predicted by the interviewers.

We determined whether the BD-trained interviewers actually asked different kinds of questions and obtained more BD answers by taping all 60 interviews, but because of technical and operator difficulties, we obtained only 45 complete tapes. These 45 tapes were scrutinized, and each question was categorized as credentials, experiences, opinions, or behavior description. We also grouped each applicant's answers into the same four categories. Thus, we directly compared the types of questions and answers used by traditional versus BD-trained interviewers. Table 2.1 details the comparison.

Clearly, the training produced substantial differences in the types of questions and answers used by the

traditional and BD interviewers. Thus, we have established that BD interviews are different-- but are they more accurate? We found that the standard interviewers demonstrated better agreement (.71 vs. .46), but the behavior description interviewers more accurately predicted subsequent teaching ratings (.54 vs. .08)-- the "bottom-line" criterion for teaching assistant (TA) performance.

**Table 2.1: Information Type Percentages for Traditional vs. Behavior Description Interviews**

<b>Information Type</b>	<b>Traditional Interview</b>	<b>Behavior Description Interview</b>
Credentials	15	4
Experiences	32	40
Opinions	48	23
Behavior descriptions	5	33

An in-depth look at the data suggested why the standard interviewers agreed with each other, but on the wrong TAs. Some TAs in the business faculty were downtowners, who dressed and sounded like businesspeople. They were older and had job experience. Other TAs were graduate students, who didn't look much like businesspeople. The downtown TAs were also more aloof and less responsive to student concerns, whereas the graduate student TAs could identify better with the students and were actually better TAs. Thus, the standard interviewers liked the downtowners and disliked the graduates. They could agree on this. The problem was that they picked the wrong TAs to get high teaching ratings.

The behavior description interviewers had a tougher time agreeing. (They assessed the TAs on five behavioral dimensions of TA performance, and their disagreements fell on either side of the TAs eventual student ratings.) However, the behavior description interviews more accurately predicted eventual TA student ratings by several times.

We report this substantial difference in accuracy to alert you to the size of the possible increase in accuracy if you apply the procedures in this rigorously. Instead of looking forward to retaining only the 14 percent of the human resource pool potential, you can retain as much as 55 percent. (As mentioned earlier, the tables in appendix B will help you tally up the dollar benefits.)

To round out the evidence for behavior-based question content, Latham and Saari (1983) reported another concurrent validation study of the situational interview for clerical workers. They found that supervisor ratings and peer ratings of job performance correlated .39 and .42 with situational interview scores.

So far, the evidence in support of behavior-based questions is positive and strong. However, more studies are needed to support these initial findings and to prompt further improvements to the behavior-based methods of pattern formation.

### **Research on Taking Notes**

The Life Insurance Management Research Association (LIMRA) conducted several studies on the interview, one of which investigated the impact of note taking on content retention (LIMRA, 1974). In this study, insurance managers listened to a 20-question taped interview with a prospective agent. They all had note-taking materials available. After they had heard the tape, the managers were asked to recall what they had heard. Some managers recalled all the answers; others recalled only five. It was found that those with the high scores had taken notes.

A study by Schuh (1978) also examined the effects of note taking and interruption on interviewer recall. The researcher showed company interviewers one of two different videotapes and told half the interviewers to take notes and the other half not to do so. One videotape contained a short interruption at the beginning. The highest retention of content from the tape occurred for interviewers who took notes and did not see the interrupted videotape. In short, the evidence weighs in on the side of taking notes before assessing applicants.

### **Research on Applicant Assessment**

Several studies have addressed the final step in the behavior description process-- how and when to assess the applicant. Two key questions dominate the discussion: (1) whether the interviewer should size up the applicant during the interview or after it is over and (2) whether the interviewer should make a simple accept/reject decision or an assessment of the applicant on key job-related performance topics.

Younge (1956) was critical of the interviewing practice reported at the time. He particularly criticized unstructured interviewing for having poorly defined objectives, for not knowing what to measure, and for using poor measures of job criteria. His solution included assessing the applicant following the interview on carefully defined performance dimensions. As noted earlier, the median correlation between supervisor job performance ratings and interview assessments was .71 in his study.

Asher (1970) started out to examine the effects of appearance on reliability and validity, but a secondary manipulation in that study bears more directly on the discussion here. In one research condition, applicants rated videotaped interviews and made three-point ratings on each of several questions. In a second condition, a single rating was made following the interview. In all conditions, interviewer agreement was higher for a combination of the three-point ratings than it was for the single rating made at the end of the interview.

The research findings on behavior-based interviewing reported by Latham et al. (1980), Janz (1982), and Latham and Saari (1983) all support methods in which the interviewers gather information during the interview and make assessments on specific performance topics following a review of interview notes.

### **Summary**

Research has provided evidence that the following improvements should be made to the traditional, unstructured interview. First, the interviewer should be working from a pattern of questions that take all applicants through roughly the same performance topics. Second, the topics should be closely job-related. Third, the job-related topics should focus on job performance features that have been found to indicate the difference between effective and ineffective performers. Fourth, the interviewer should assess the applicant on the basis of a set of notes. Finally, the interviewer should assess the applicant on job-related performance topics following the completion of the interview.

Later chapters provide the step-by-step detail for achieving the high levels of selection decision accuracy reported for patterned, behavior-based interviews. The research reported here is useful only if it helps convince you to take those steps.

## **EXPERIENCES WITH BEHAVIOR DESCRIPTION INTERVIEWING**

If this book were meant to be digested by completely logical beings, the cold light of reason shining over research would convince all skeptics and motivate immediate adoption of improved interview methods.

Fortunately, however, we are human, and nothing interests and communicates to us as well as practical experiences. Therefore, we have chosen five success stories to share with you.

### **Crossfield laboratories: Regional Soils Sales Representative**

The president of Crossfield Laboratories, Jim Mullis, Sr., approached one of us after reading a story about BD interviewing in his local newspaper's business pages. Crossfield Laboratories chemically analyzes soils and animal feed samples, and Jim needed a regional sales representative for its first expansion territory.

Jim Mullis, Sr., a chemical engineer by training and an entrepreneur at heart, had been owner-manager of several chemical technology firms. As he put it, "I made some good and poor hires, but I'm smart enough to know how costly the poor ones are." He worried, therefore, about the risks that accompany seat-of-the-pants interviewing.

We began a systematic BD interviewing program by interviewing Jim and his sales manager --Jim Junior-- to develop examples of effective and ineffective sales performance. Next, we interviewed current customers of Crossfield Labs to gather more stories. Most of these interviews were conducted by phone. Then, armed with a pile of critical incidents describing effective and ineffective sales rep performance, we constructed a job pattern. We showed it to Jim Senior and Jim Junior, and they made a few additional suggestions for the operational pattern.

With the pattern complete, we began training Jim Senior and Jim Junior on using it effectively. Our manual for BD workshops guided them through two days of training exercises, and videotapes of effective behavior description interviews and practice interviewing brought them up to speed. They worked hard and always completed their reading of the sections of the manual before we began working on them. Jim Senior was an old pro and worked smoothly with the Behavior Description questions. Although Jim Junior was naturally less confident, by the end of training he, too, moved smoothly and persistently through the pattern.

Advertisements for the sales rep opening were placed in local farm community papers. Jim Senior and Jim Junior worked out an effective division of labor for the actual interviews: Jim Junior directed the questions while Jim Senior took notes. Jim Senior also stepped in and followed up in tricky spots when an applicant seemed to be sliding away from a behavior description question. After receiving 56 resumes, prescreening of the applications produced a short list of five qualified applicants, and interviews were taped so that we could evaluate the applicants independent of how Jim senior and Jim Junior sized them up.

On returning to Crossfield, both Jims confidently announced that they had found a top performer, but they held off on making an offer until we could review the tapes and complete an independent assessment.

When we listened to the taped interviews, the payoff for our careful training appeared repeatedly. When an applicant started to slip away on a particular question, Jim Senior slid in smoothly to get the behavior description answer. When we compared our assessments to the assessments made by both Jims, we found that we had selected the same applicant, and we had agreed strongly on scoring of the others.

The chosen applicant, Les, was hired and sold over \$200,000 in soils testing in his first two months. He also closed over 80 percent of his cold calls. When the sales season was over, Les remarked to Jim Senior: "Now I can get on with the real job, servicing my customers and providing support."

Clearly, we had reached an effective decision, but Jim Senior told us that he would have hired a different applicant if he hadn't used behavior description interviewing. Les had the least sales and soils analysis experience of the five applicants, and Jim Senior had felt that Les did not come across positively in the interview. We then reanalyzed Les's interview tape and noted that Les had evaded the behavior description questions because he was simply not familiar with that type of question. When the Jims pinned him down,

however, he gave excellent answers. Other applicants sounded more eager and willing to blow their own horns, yet when it came down to how they behaved in job-related circumstances, Les stood out from the rest.

Until a bit later, we weren't sure that Jim Senior was right when he said that he would not have chosen Les if he had used a traditional interview. In preparing a demonstration for a convention presentation, we took excerpts from the taped interviews of three of the Crossfield applicants--one from Les's interview, the others from interviews with rejected applicants. We played the tapes to a roomful of psychologists at the convention, and only one chose Les as the applicant who had been hired and who had sold \$200,000 in soils testing. It so happened that the one psychologist to correctly identify the high-performing applicant was Gary Latham, mentioned earlier as the developer of the situational interview. We also played the tapes to a class of 50 business students. Not one chose Les.

Jim Senior had been right. Les had evaded the behavior description answers and he had not played up his own responsibility for accomplishing tasks, whereas other applicants had tried to paint rosy pictures of their skills. Without the behavior description pattern and the skills to use it properly, interviewers can easily fall prey to applicants who are skilled at creating a good impression. Consequently, organizations often miss out on the talents of high performers who come across less favorably in interviews. The same reasoning accounted for the aforementioned results reported by Janz (1982).

To cap the story, off, all the additional work created by Les's sales success meant that Crossfield needed more lab staff. Jim Senior said, "From now on, we won't hire anyone without a Behavior Description pattern in place." Thus, the success with the first pattern led to our writing a second one for the lab assistant. (Both patterns appear in Appendix A.)

### **B.C. Hydro: Computer Programmer, Systems Analyst**

Sherman Kwan, manager of corporate information systems for B.C. Hydro, a large provincial power utility, had attended an early behavior description interviewing workshop. Sherman appreciated the usefulness of cognitive ability tests for identifying good performers for the jobs of programmer and analyst, but the personnel department took a long time to get back with test results. He needed an accurate method for identifying quality computer staff that short-circuited the delay for test scoring, since the long waits for test results often meant that good applicants accepted positions elsewhere.

Therefore, in January 1982, four Hydro supervisors who were trained in BD interviewing developed a common pattern for interviewing 32 graduates of the local institute of technology. Twelve students were hired and, according to Sherman, they have all proved to be excellent employees. What's more, the successful hires were heard to comment favorably on Hydro's interviews as the most in-depth interviews of all employers visiting the institute.

### **First Chicago Bank: Credit Management Trainees**

First Chicago Bank asked Personnel Decisions, Inc., to develop a system of sequential BD interviews for the position of credit management trainee. The applicants were largely new MBAs, who were interviewed during a day-long, on-site visit following on-campus screening. We developed an interview pattern using the BD methods outlined in this book.

As Crossfield had done, the bank management worked out a useful division of labor. Since each applicant met with several managers, the managers decided ahead of time which performance dimensions they would emphasize. This allowed for greater depth when the pieces were put together after the applicant left. At least two managers focused on each of the behavioral job dimensions.

Bank management has reported the success of the program on two fronts. First, they noticed a substantially higher rate of acceptance for offers; more of the really top-notch applicants accepted bank offers than before. Second, the training department at the bank, which is completely separate from the managers who perform selection decisions, reported that the first BD-selected group was "the brightest crop of people we have seen in a while."

### **Bailey and Rose: Systems Analysts, Computer Programmers**

Bailey and Rose is an international computer software firm specializing in sophisticated systems development. Ken Harrap, a manager charged with recruiting staff abroad, had attended an early BD interviewing workshop. Immediately following the workshop, Ken faced 100 interviews in Britain on a mission to search out top talent for the firm. On his return, Ken told the following story.

Ken was satisfied with his improved ability to size up the advantages and drawbacks presented by applicants, but something else excited him more. In debriefing all the analysts who accepted offers with Bailey and Rose, he observed that several of the really top-notch applicants cited the thoroughness and professional competence of the interview as a prime factor in their decision to take a job with the firm. According to Ken, the applicants had reasoned that because Bailey and Rose demonstrated such high professional hiring standards, it was the kind of firm they wanted to join. Ken added one personal illustration to make his point.

One high-quality applicant whose reputation had preceded him had wanted a job in Vancouver. However, although the BD interview had strongly impressed this applicant, by his own report, Bailey and Rose had no openings in Vancouver. Ken informed him that the firm wanted to hire him and asked him to check back later. The applicant did call back later, informing Bailey and Rose that he now had an offer from a firm in Vancouver but that he would prefer a job with Bailey and Rose. Ken still had no openings for this applicant's special skills in Vancouver, but he did have one in Ottawa, on the other side of the country. The analyst accepted the job in Ottawa.

### **Honeywell: Staffing a Residential Products Division**

A residential products division of Honeywell asked Personnel Decisions, Inc., to design and install a BD interviewing system. Once again, the company expressed satisfaction with the improved selection quality, but reported it with a twist.

Applicants who had refused offers were sent a questionnaire, and a bonus was awarded to them if they responded. The questionnaire probed the applicants' reasons for refusing the offers and included spaces for open-ended responses. The Honeywell managers were impressed that many of the applicants who had rejected offers commented favorably on the quality and thoroughness of their BD interviews.