

Published in Journal of Human Resources in Hospitality & Tourism, 2018,
vol. 17, no. 1, pp. 80-97 which should be cited to refer to this work
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/15332845.2017.1328262>

Is there structure in the selection interview? Evidence from hotels in Switzerland

Sébastien Fernandez, PhD, Assistant professor

Stéphanie Pougnet, PhD, Assistant professor

¹*Ecole hôtelière de Lausanne, HES-SO // University of Applied Sciences Western Switzerland,*

Route de Cojonnex 18, 1000 Lausanne 25, Suisse. Tel.: +41 21 785 14 99. E-Mail:

sebastien.fernandez@ehl.ch

Abstract

Many studies have shown that structured interviews have better predictive validity than unstructured interviews. The aim of this study was then to examine if recruiters in Swiss hotels use structured interviews to select candidates. Results obtained on 150 recruiters indicate that selection interviews are rather unstructured. They also show that selection interviews are more structured in larger hotels than in smaller hotels and in chain hotels than in independent hotels. Finally, and contrarily to one of the hypotheses, selection interviews are not more structured in 4-star and 5-star hotels than in 3-star hotels.

Introduction

The selection interview is considered to be one of the most widespread selection tools used to evaluate applicants around the globe (König, Klehe, Berchtold & Kleinmann, 2010; Ryan & Sackett, 1987; Zibarras & Woods, 2010). This assertion also holds true in the hospitality and restaurant industry (Chan & Kuok, 2011; Lockyer & Scholarios, 2004; MacHatton, Van Dyke, & Steiner, 1997; Martin & Groves, 2002; Paraskevas, 2000).

Structured interviews and unstructured interviews are two very different types of selection interviews. Hundreds of studies have repeatedly shown that structured interviews outperform unstructured interviews in the prediction of job performance (Huffcutt & Arthur, 1994; Levashina, Hartwell, Morgeson & Campion, 2014; Marchese & Muchinsky, 1993; McDaniel, Whetzel, Schmidt, & Maurer, 1994).

Based on these findings, it is clearly advantageous for recruiters to use structured interviews over unstructured interviews. However, studies have repeatedly shown that recruiters prefer to use unstructured interviews (Highhouse, 1998; Lievens & De Paepe, 2004; Van der Zee, Bakker & Bakker, 2002). Fifteen years have passed since the publication of the latest

empirical studies about the use of structured interviews in the hospitality and restaurant industry (MacHatton, Van Dyke and Steiner, 1997; Parakevas, 2000). At a time when information about the most effective types of selection interviews can be found in books (e.g. Roulin & Bangerter, 2012) and on the Internet, and when online selection interviews might develop in a more globalized and connected labor market, it seems necessary to reevaluate the issue of the use of structured interviews in the hospitality industry.

Statement of purpose

The purpose of this study is to determine to which extent recruiters use structured interviews in the hospitality industry. The use of components of interview structure was also examined in light of variables such as hotel size, ownership and star category.

The specific objectives of this study are therefore:

1. To examine to which extent recruiters use components of interview structure, as a research update on selection practices;
2. To determine which of the components of interview structure are used the most and the least often, so to improve recruiters' practices toward higher predictive validity;
3. To analyze the impact of hotel size, ownership and star category on the use of components of structured interviews, to identify areas for selection improvement.

Literature review

The use of structured interviews in the hospitality industry

To our knowledge, only two studies have ever been conducted about the use of different types of interviews in the hospitality and restaurant industry. MacHatton, Van Dyke and Steiner (1997) have shown that 57.1% of Human Resource directors in restaurant chains in the US

use structured interviews while 30.4% use unstructured interviews. Similar results have been obtained in a sample of hotels in Greece: 85.7% of the recruiters surveyed use situational interviews and 57.1% use behavioral interviews, which are two types of structured interviews, while only 14.3% of them use unstructured interviews (Paraskevas, 2000).

These findings raise at least three inquiries about the use of selection interviews in the hospitality and restaurant industry. First, Roulin and Bangerter (2012) have argued that the concept of structured interviews is poorly understood by recruiters. Therefore, recruiters may ignore what structured interviews really are, as specifically defined by researchers. Their use of structured interviews might consequently be overstated. Secondly, as Paraskevas (2000) surveyed 14 hotel recruiters in Greece, and MacHatton, Van Dyke and Steiner (1997) 112 restaurant recruiters in the USA about fifteen years ago, it is difficult to ascertain that there is a widespread use of structured interviews in the hospitality and restaurant industry. Thirdly, although studies have shown that organizational variables like the size of the company have an impact on the use of selection methods (Mayson & Barrett, 2006), the impact of these variables on the specific use of structured interviews still needs to be studied.

Management practices of hotels and restaurants are claimed to differ according to the establishments' size, ownership (independent hotels vs. chain hotels) and star category or market segment positioning. Bartram (2005) has shown that medium-sized and large companies use more formal selection procedures than small companies. It has also been shown that managers in hotels comprising more than 25 employees are more likely to use references or application forms than managers in smaller hotels (Lockyer & Scholarios, 2004). These differences can be explained by the fact that larger companies tend to have more resources at their disposal than smaller ones (Zibarras & Woods, 2010), be they financial resources or recruiters' competencies.

It is often claimed that recruiters in independent hotels have less formalized systems with which to select prospective employees and prefer to rely on their intuition (Young-Thelin & Boluk, 2012). Some empirical findings support this assertion. For instance, 88.4% of the managers in chain restaurants use structured interviews but only 37.7% of the managers in independent restaurants do so (MacHatton, Van Dyke & Steiner, 1997).

While the star category is one of the main characteristics used to differentiate and segment hotels, no study has been conducted so far to examine whether hiring practices differ between five-star hotels and lower categories of hotels. As mentioned in studies conducted on marketing aspects (Lin, Horng, Chen & Tsai, 2011; Sun, Aryee & Law, 2007), hotels from higher star categories try to deliver better service quality and must, therefore, hire candidates who are the most likely to deliver excellent customer service, notably by using selection tools of higher predictive validity.

The components of interview structure

Campion, Palmer and Campion (1997) have suggested that structured interviews differ from unstructured interviews in a variety of ways: 1) Interview duration, 2) Job analysis, 3) Written questions, 4) Same questions, 5) Type of questions, 6) Number of interviews, 7) Number of interviewers, 8) Questions from the candidate, 9) Note-taking, 10) Evaluation of the candidates, 11) Interviewing training.

1) *Interview duration.* Longer interviews are more structured and more valid than shorter interviews due to the opportunity offered to the recruiter to get more information (Campion, Palmer & Campion, 1997). Most of the recruiters spend on average 30 minutes with each candidate (Chapman & Zweig, 2005) but some authors recommend that selection interviews

last between 45 and 90 minutes and should never be shorter than 30 minutes (Petersen & Durivage, 2008).

2) *Job analysis*. The job analysis is a method used to gather information regarding the knowledge, skills, abilities and other characteristics (KSAO) required for a position. When the questions used in a selection interviews are related to the KSAO, the selection interview is more structured and more valid (Campion, Palmer & Campion, 1997). In other industries, it has been shown that a job analysis is used by 34.6% to 51.8% of the organizations (Simola, Taggar & Smith, 2007; Van der Zee, Bakker & Bakker, 2002).

3) *Written questions*. The preparation of written questions increases the likelihood that recruiters ask the same questions to all the candidates. This recommendation is nevertheless not followed by all the recruiters.

4) *Same questions*. It is essential that all the candidates applying for the same position are asked the same questions in same order. Despite this research prescription, and even when recruiters have prepared written questions, most of them do not eventually ask the questions as they were written (Van der Zee, Bakker & Bakker, 2002).

5) *Types of questions*. There are different types of questions that are asked in selection interviews (Campion, Palmer & Campion, 1997; Pettersen & Durivage, 2008). Past behavior questions relate to how applicants reacted in specific situations in the past. Situational questions refer to hypothetical situations and how applicants would behave in these situations. Job knowledge questions refer to the technical or job-related nature of the position. Background questions refer to the work experiences, level of education, and other training or experiences that are related to the position. Past behavior, situational, job knowledge and background questions have been proven to be valid predictors of job performance. On the contrary, motivation and self-description questions are not related to future job performance

(Petersen & Durivage, 2008). Motivation questions are linked with the interests of the applicants and the reasons why they are applying for a vacant position. Self-description questions are very broad questions about the candidates and do not refer to specific attributes identified in a job analysis (e.g. “Can you tell me something about you?”, “What are your three strengths and weaknesses?”). Finally, it is possible that recruiters might ask some questions unrelated to the job (e.g. “Are you married?”, “Do you smoke?”). The predictive validity of questions unrelated to the job has never been studied but as some of them might be discriminatory, recruiters should be discouraged from using them. Despite their low predictive validity, recruiters still ask motivation and self-description questions as well as questions unrelated to the job (Chapman & Zweig, 2005), notably more often than past behavior or situational questions of higher predictive validity (Van der Zee, Bakker & Bakker, 2002).

6) *Number of interviews*. Extending the idea of interview duration, recruiters should rely on two interviews with the same candidate, instead of only one, to gather sufficient information. So far, only Van der Zee and colleagues (2002) have investigated this matter in a sample of Dutch recruiters. They have shown that 98.2% of recruiters conduct two interviews with the same candidate.

7) *Number of interviewers*. The more interviewers there are in the same interview, the more structured is the selection interview. Several reasons can explain that. First, the use of many interviewers should reduce errors and subjectivity. Second, it could prevent interviewers from making irrelevant inferences from pieces of information that are not job-related (Campion, Palmer & Campion, 1997).

8) *Questions from the candidate*. Interviewers are more likely to be able to keep control of the selection interview if they do not allow questions from the candidates at the beginning or

during the selection interviews but allow them at the end of the interview or in another occasion (Campion, Palmer & Campion, 1997).

9) *Note-taking*. Interviews are more structured when interviewers take detailed notes about the responses of the candidates because it diminishes memory and perception biases (Campion, Palmer & Campion, 1997). Most of recruiters tend to take notes during selection interviews (Simola, Taggar & Smith, 2007; Van der Zee, Bakker & Bakker, 2002).

10) *Evaluation of the candidates*. Regarding this aspect, interviews are more structured when recruiters rate the candidates on multiple criteria or questions. Interviews are less structured when recruiters make a single overall judgment on the candidates.

11) *Interview training*. Interviews are considered as more structured when interviewers have received prior training about structured interviews. Interview training makes recruiters aware of all the components of interview structure and helps to implement structured interviews properly.

Hypotheses development

Stemming from the above literature review, the following three hypotheses are examined:

As larger companies tend to have more resources at their disposal than smaller ones to develop formal selection procedures (Zibarras & Woods, 2010), it is hypothesized that a higher number of components of interview structure are used in larger hotels than in smaller hotels. Indeed, it takes time to make a sound job analysis, develop interview questions in advance, to prepare evaluation grids or to train employees.

H1: A higher number of components of interview structure are used in larger hotels than in smaller hotels.

Recruiters in independent hotels use less formalized systems to select candidates (Young-Thelin & Boluk, 2012). Indeed, as mentioned by Kusluvan, Kusluvan, Ilhan, and Buyruk (2010), effective selection practices are only observed in large and international chains. As there is a willingness to create unified operating standards and procedures across business units in chain hotels, it is reasonable to expect the same regarding the use of evidence-based selection tools such as the structured interview (Lockyer & Scholarios, 2004).

H2: A higher number of components of interview structure are used in chain hotels than in independent hotels.

If high star category hotels (four-star and five-star) want to depart from three-star hotels by providing a better service quality (Sun, Aryee & Law, 2007), one way to do it is to implement evidence-based selection methods (Cho, Woods, Jang, & Erdem, 2006). As structured interviews are considered to have better predictive validity than unstructured interviews, it is expected that a higher number of components of interview structure will be used in five-star and four-star hotels than in three-star hotels.

H3: A higher number of components of interview structure are used in five-star and four-star hotels than in three-star hotels.

Method

Procedure and participants

First, out of a population of 1447 hotels in total, the email addresses of relevant contact persons like general managers and human resources managers for all three-star, four-star and five-star hotels in Switzerland were located with the help of the trade association responsible

for hotel classification in Switzerland, *Hotelleriesuisse*. Second, an email was sent to these contact persons, including a description of the study and a link to an online questionnaire.

Instrument

To examine the use of components of interview structure by Swiss hotel recruiters¹, an online questionnaire translated in French, German and English was created.

The questionnaire contained a first section on demographic variables pertaining to the respondents, more precisely gender, age, educational background, current position and recruitment experience.

The second section of the questionnaire was devoted to organizational variables pertaining to hotels surveyed: specifically the number of employees (to have a measure of hotel size), star category, ownership and location.

In the third section of the questionnaire, ten multiple-choice questions (Q1 to Q10) were asked about the use of components of interview structure, and then an eleventh question (Q11), the only open-ended one, was asked about the three most typical interview questions that recruiters do generally ask applicants in a selection interview. Here are all the questions that were included in the third section of the questionnaire:

- Q1) Interview duration: The following question was asked and the following criteria were considered: *How long on average does the interview take?* a) $< \frac{1}{2}$ hour; b) *between $\frac{1}{2}$ hour and 1 hour*; c) > 1 hour. To acknowledge the use of this component of interview structure, it was necessary that respondents indicate that their interviews last at least half an hour.

¹ The term of « recruiter » in this article refers to any person who is in charge of interviewing candidates

- Q2) Job analysis: The use of a job analysis was measured through the following question: *Do you have a list of selection criteria prior to the interview? a) No, I don't have a list of selection criteria; b) Yes, I have a list of criteria in my mind before the interview; c) Yes, I have a list of criteria formally written before the interview; d) Yes, I have a list of measurable criteria formally written before the interview.* To acknowledge the use of this component of interview structure, it was necessary that respondents answer either c) or d).
- Q3) Written questions: (*Do you have a list of written questions before the interview?*) An affirmative answer on the use of written questions in selection interviews was the criterion for acknowledging the use of this component of interview structure.
- Q4) Same questions: (*Do you ask exactly the same questions to every candidate for the same job position?*) An affirmative answer on the use of same questions in selection interviews was the criterion for acknowledging the use of this component of interview structure.
- Q5) Number of interviews: (*In average, how many interviews, with you or other recruiters, does a candidate have before he gets hired for a position?*) The expected option for acknowledging the use of this component of interview structure was “*at least 2 interviews*”.
- Q6) Number of interviewers: (*In average, how many interviewers does a candidate meet during the same job interview?*) The expected option for acknowledging the use of this component of interview structure was “*at least 2 interviewers*”.

- Q7) Questions from the candidates: (*During the interview, the candidate can ask questions...?*) The expected options for acknowledging the use of this component of interview structure were “*only at the end of the interview*” or “*no question allowed*”.
- Q8) Note-taking: (*Are any notes taken during the interview?*) The expected option for acknowledging the use of this component of interview structure was “*yes (either short or detailed notes)*”.
- Q9) Evaluation of the candidates: (*How do you evaluate the candidate once the interview is over?*) The expected options for acknowledging the use of this component of interview structure were “*yes, through a general score*” and “*yes, through a score for all the specific selection criteria*”.
- Q10) Interview training: (*Have you followed any training related to interview techniques?*) The expected options for acknowledging the use of this component of interview structure were “*Yes, I have followed a specific training about interview techniques for 2 days or less*” and “*Yes, I have followed a specific training about interview techniques for more than 2 days*”.
- Q11) Types of questions: (*Please indicate below the 3 questions you generally ask your candidate*)

Most of these questions were adapted from the questions used by Van der Zee, Bakker and Bakker (2002).

Data analysis

To examine *H1*: A higher number of components of interview structure are used in larger hotels than in smaller hotels, hotel size was considered as either small (less than 20

employees); medium-sized (21-50 employees) or large (more than 50 employees). This grouping has been done in line with industry's segmentation standards and actually led to having a similar number of hotels represented in each group. To study *H2*: A higher number of components of interview structure are used in chain hotels than in independent hotels, there were two modalities for hotel ownership (independent or chain hotels). To investigate *H3*: A higher number of interview structure are used in five-star and four-star hotels than in three-star hotels, three modalities for hotel star category were considered (three-star, four-star or five-star hotels).

The number of components of interview structure used by each participant corresponds to the sum of components for which they satisfy the criteria presented above (minimum = 0; maximum = 10).

The open-ended question (Q11), about typical questions asked in selection interviews was analyzed separately. Typical questions typed down by respondents have been coded according to the following categories: motivation, self-description, background, job knowledge, questions unrelated to the job and finally past behavior/situational questions. Two raters coded the questions and agreement was found for 93.6% of the questions (421 out of the 450 questions). After discussion, agreement was reached on 16 other interview questions (3.6%). Thirteen questions were discarded as it was not possible to place them into any of the six categories mentioned above. Consequently, subsequent analyses were done on 437 interview questions typically asked by recruiters during selection interviews. Because the proportion of interview questions added up to 1.0 across the six types of questions, inferential analyses were based on only four types (motivation, self-description, unrelated to job, past behavior/situational) in order to break the statistical dependence between cells.

All the data were processed using SPSS 21. First, frequencies were calculated, as well as means and standard deviations. Second, t-tests and ANOVAs were used to test the hypotheses of the influence of hotel size, hotel ownership and hotel star category on the number of the components of interview structure used. Chi-squares were also conducted to examine the influence of hotel size, hotel ownership and hotel star category on the use of each component of interview structure separately.

Results

Sample profile

Respondents from 150 hotels completed the online questionnaire, which represents a response rate of 10.4%. This response rate is satisfactory in comparison to rates obtained in similar studies (Zibarras & Wood, 2010; reported 9.8% response rate). Descriptive statistics about the hotels in which the recruiters work are presented in Table 1. Most of the respondents work in medium-sized (21-50 employees), independent and three-star hotels. Respondents work in all of the linguistic regions of Switzerland with a majority coming from the Swiss-German part of the country. In Table 2, descriptive statistics are presented regarding the demographic profile of the respondents. The proportion of males is similar to the proportion of females. Most of the respondents have at least attended high school, occupy the position of general manager and have worked between one and five years in the same position. Most of the respondents are in their forties ($M = 41.83$; $SD = 11.19$).

Frequency of use of the components of interview structure

As shown in Table 3, components of interview are very differently used. While most of the respondents conduct interviews that last more than half an hour (Q1) and take notes (Q8) as prescribed by researchers, most of them also allow candidates to ask questions at any time during the interview (Q7) and evaluate candidates based on a general idea formed during the interview (Q9).

As can be seen at the bottom of the Table 3, most of the questions typically asked in selection interviews (Q11) refer to the motivation of the candidates (“Why would you like to work for us?”; “Why have you chosen our hotel?”; “What are your goals for the future?”), and their self-description (“What are your ethical values”; “Could you describe your personality by using three words?”; “What are your strengths and weaknesses?”). 6% of the questions are not directly focused on the job and could be perceived as discriminatory such as questions about the location of residence, drinking habits, smoking habits, family situation and hobbies. Finally, very few questions are asked about candidates’ background (“What were your tasks in your previous work experience?”) and job knowledge (“Which languages are you able to speak?”). Even if past behavior and situational questions (“Tell me about a time when your work was above expectations?”) are among the most valid to predict job performance, they represent a small proportion of the questions typically asked in selection interviews (4.6%).

A higher number of components of interview structure are used in larger hotels than in smaller hotels. (Hypothesis 1)

A comparison between hotels of different sizes shows a significant effect on the number of components used ($F(2, 147) = 3.90, p < .05$). There are fewer components of a structured interview used in hotels with less than 20 employees ($M = 4.11; SD = 1.71$) than in hotels with more than 50 employees ($M = 5.08; SD = 1.78; t(1, 100) = -2.81, p < .01$). There is no

difference between hotels comprising between 21 and 50 employees ($M = 4.56$; $SD = 1.77$) and hotels with less than 20 employees ($t(1, 100) = 1.31, ns$) or hotels with greater than 50 employees ($t(1, 94) = -1.43, ns$). As there is a significant difference between the largest hotels (more than 50 employees) and the smallest hotels (20 employees and less), these results support the first hypothesis.

Statistical analyses performed at the level of each component of interview structure (see Table 4) show that there is only one significant difference regarding the number of interviewers ($\chi^2(2, 147) = 10.42, p < .01$). Two by two comparisons show that there are more often two recruiters in medium-sized hotel than in small hotels ($\chi^2(1, 100) = 4.50, p < .05$) and in large hotels than in small hotels ($\chi^2(1, 100) = 8.30, p < .01$). However, there is no difference between medium-sized hotels and large hotels ($\chi^2(1, 94) = 1.08, ns$). Furthermore, there is an effect of hotel size on the use of past behavior and situational questions ($\chi^2(2, 434) = 7.06, p < .05$). Two by two comparisons show that past behavior and situational questions are asked more often in large hotels than in small hotels ($\chi^2(1, 298) = 7.30, p < .01$). However, there is no difference between medium-sized hotels and large hotels ($\chi^2(1, 279) = 0.75, ns$) and between medium-sized hotels and small hotels ($\chi^2(1, 291) = 3.59, ns$). No other difference occurs for the type of questions asked (see Table 5).

A higher number of components of interview structure are used in chain hotels than in independent hotels (Hypothesis 2).

Recruiters working in independent hotels use fewer components of the structured interview ($M = 4.43$; $SD = 1.75$) than recruiters working in chain hotels ($M = 5.47$; $SD = 1.87$; $t(1,148) = -2.40, p < .05$). This significant difference supports the second hypothesis.

Statistical analyses performed at the level of each component of interview structure show that recruiters in chain hotels are more likely to use scales to evaluate candidates than recruiters in independent hotels ($\chi^2(1, 148) = 4.86, p < .05$). They are also more likely to have attended a specific training program on interview techniques in the past ($\chi^2(1, 148) = 4.69, p < .05$). Past behavior and situational questions are asked more often in chain hotels than in independent hotels ($\chi^2(1, 435) = 18.87, p < .001$).

A higher number of components of interview structure are used in five-star and four-star hotels than in three-star hotels. (Hypothesis 3)

There is no difference in terms of number of components of interview structure used between three-star hotels ($M = 4.39; SD = 1.87$), four-star hotels ($M = 4.64; SD = 1.76$) and five-star hotels ($M = 5.05; SD = 1.50; F(2, 147) = 1.15, ns$). The hypothesis 3 is rejected based on the absence of significant differences between five-star, four-star and three-star hotels.

Statistical analyses performed at the level of each component of interview structure also show no difference between the three groups of hotels. There is however a difference regarding the types of questions asked in the selection interview, more precisely on the use of past behavior and situational questions ($\chi^2(2, 434) = 20.01, p < .001$). Two by two comparisons reveal that past behavior questions are asked more often in five-star hotels than in four-star hotels ($\chi^2(1, 219) = 6.19, p < .05$), in five-star hotels than in three-star hotels ($\chi^2(1, 274) = 20.92, p < .001$). There is also a significant difference between three-star hotels and four-star hotels ($\chi^2(1, 375) = 4.17, p < .05$).

Discussion and conclusion

The use of components of interview structure in the hospitality industry

This study had three objectives. First, it is aimed at examining if recruiters working in hotels use structured interviews. Instead of relying on verbal reports from the respondents, precise questions about the components of their interviewing practices were asked. In contrast with previous studies conducted in the hospitality industry, but in line with other studies covering other industries and where a similar methodology was used, it is found that selection interviews are rather unstructured in Swiss hotels. For instance, more than half of the respondents have not conducted any job analysis prior to the interview (Q2), more than two thirds of them have no written questions (Q3), and almost 90% of them use no scoring guide to evaluate the candidates' responses (Q9). Then, the conclusion drawn from this study is not as optimistic as the results stated by MacHatton, Van Dyke and Steiner (1997) and Paraskevas (2000) who found that recruiters used structured interviews more often than unstructured interviews. The methodology used in these studies may have probably led to overestimate the extent to which structured interviews are used (Roulin & Bangerter, 2012). The results obtained in the current study are eventually more in line with claims that practitioners rely on intuitive selection practices and unstructured interviews (Kuslivan et al., 2010).

The second objective of this study was to determine which components of interview structure were used the most often and the least often. The two components of interview structure that are used the most often relate to note-taking (Q8) and to the interview duration (Q1). Indeed, most of the recruiters take notes and conduct interviews that last more than 30 minutes. These results are consistent with those observed in similar studies (Van der Zee, Bakker & Bakker, 2002). The two components of interview structure that are used the least often are related to the questions from the candidates that should not be allowed during the interview (Q7), and the evaluation of the candidates that should be based upon specific criteria (Q9). These

findings are similar to those observed in other industries (Van der Zee, Bakker & Bakker, 2002).

The third objective of this study was to examine the impact of hotel size, ownership and star category on the use of components of structured interviews. Confirming the first hypothesis (H1), it is found that selection interviews conducted in hotels comprising more than 50 employees tend to be more structured than in hotels comprising less than 20 employees. This difference is particularly noticeable for some components like the number of interviewers (Q5), which is generally 1 in small hotels, and questions unrelated to the position (Q11), which are more likely to be asked in small hotels. The first hypothesis (H1) is thus confirmed. It is indeed reported that the evidence of high-performance practices that ensure a sustainable competitive advantage can be only observed in “*large, foreign-owned, international chain establishments*” (Kusluvan et al., 2010, p. 177), where recruiters are more knowledgeable and trained in best selection practices.

Confirming the second hypothesis (H2), it is also found that interviews tend to be more structured in chain hotels than in independent hotels. This result confirms previous findings (Lockyer & Scholarios, 2004; MacHatton, Van Dyke & Steiner, 1997). The difference between chain hotels and independent hotels is particularly noticeable on two components: evaluation of the candidates (Q9) and interviewer training (Q10). It is more common to find a formal scoring guide to evaluate candidates in chain hotels than in independent hotels. The same holds true for the prevalence of interview training programs, which is comprehensible given that chains are more likely to design standard procedures that have to be followed across all hotels. Finally, past behavior and situational questions (Q11) are more often asked in chains than in independent hotels. The second hypothesis (H2) is thus confirmed. This result is consistent with existing research which generally shows that chain hotels are keener

to have better qualified and trained management practitioners and therefore also more sophisticated selection practices than independent locally-owned ones (Kusluvan et al., 2010). The third hypothesis (H3) is rejected because no clear difference in the interviewing practices is found between three-star, four-star and five-star hotels. In other words, interviews tend to be as structured, or just as unstructured, in the three segments of hotels. These results cast a degree of doubt on the efficiency of five-star hotels to differentiate themselves from less luxury hotels (Lin, Horng, Chen & Tsai, 2011; Sun, Aryee & Law, 2007). If recruiters in these hotels do not use the most effective selection tools, it could be difficult for them to hire the most qualified personnel to deliver excellent service (Cho et al., 2006).

It is often claimed that human resource management practices tend to be more informal in the hospitality industry than in other industries (Lockyer & Scholarios, 2004). Among large private firms in Belgium (Lievens & De Paepe, 2004), it has indeed been observed that 54% of them use scores to evaluate candidates whereas in this study this percentage is 11.3%. Moreover, in comparison with Van der Zee, Bakker and Bakker (2002), interviews are less structured for each and every component, excepted for note-taking. It seems clear from these results that interview practices in the hospitality industry are less structured than those in other industries. This could be due partly to the fact that most of the hotels have fewer employees than companies in other industries. For instance, all the organizations surveyed in Lievens and De Paepe (2004) employed more than 200 persons but in this study only 5.3% of the hotels had 200 employees or more. Therefore, the variation in company size can explain the difference in the results obtained (Zibarras & Woods, 2010).

Practical implications

Training, education, and better communication can be used to encourage recruiters in using structured interviews of higher predictive validity. Recruiters should use a higher number of components of structure in the selection interviews. Based upon a proper job analysis, they should prepare and write their questions in advance and ask the same questions to all candidates. Because past behavior and situational questions are effective in gathering relevant information about candidates, recruiters should use them more often. Finally, they should stop making hiring decisions on a general impression got from the candidate and instead rely on criteria to evaluate candidates quantitatively.

Training and education

As very few recruiters in this sample have followed a training program specifically dedicated to interview techniques, participating in a workshop could be a way to quickly increase their awareness of the principles of evidence-based interview techniques. One fruitful method to train recruiters could be to explain the nature of common perception errors that are made in selection interviews (Latham, Wexley and Pursell, 1975). These practical recommendations are particularly relevant for recruiters in five-star hotels as the ability to hire employees able to deliver high-quality service may constitute an important competitive advantage (Cho et al, 2006). Structured selection interviews are mostly recommended for selecting service professionals that can drive organizational service-based differentiation (Crawford, 2013). Therefore, researchers might bridge research outcomes and concrete practices by helping practitioners build structured interviews, not only by training current recruiters but also by educating future recruiters. One way to diffuse the use of structured interviews to students might be to emphasize their importance and to show how to design them in classes of Human

Resources Management or Organizational Behavior delivered in hospitality management schools.

Better communication

Above and beyond a knowledge-gap that might prevent recruiters from using structured interviews, there might be perception biases. Even if recruiters are trained in the use of structured interviews, there is no guarantee that they will use them. Selection scholars and consultants should better convince recruiters that the use of structured interviews is possible at no additional cost (Kusluvan et al, 2010). Structured interviews might imply more time and energy expenses at the beginning, in the interview guide creation stage, but should then lead to a faster comparison and a more effective analysis of candidates' answers, which would finally make structure more profitable than no structure in the long run.

Specific strategies

To gain time and reduce costs, job analysis inventories, like the O*NET, Occupational Information Network in the USA (Peterson et al., 2001) can be used as starting points to specify the job requirements needed for a certain position. Personality-oriented work analysis methods can also be used to analyze the personality traits needed to succeed in positions that need to be fulfilled (O'Neill, Goffin & Rothstein, 2013). Hotel associations can also provide hotel recruiters with job descriptions and job specifications that can be tailored to each establishment's need and inspire proper behavioral and situational questions to be asked in structured interviews.

In chain hotels where it is unlikely that only one recruiter is involved in the selection of the candidates, recruiters might fear a lack or a loss of autonomy by conducting interviews that were structured by somebody else in headquarters. Participative management, through which operational recruiters should be involved in the interview questions development, might

reduce this perception that hinder recruiters' use of structured interviews. To make the job analysis and the questions more job-related, operational recruiters who had first-hand experience in the jobs they hire for might be able to convey the kind of realistic job previews that would make selection practices more effective (Raub & Streit, 2006). Another approach could be to use multimodal interviews (Schuler & Funke, 1989) that are designed in different parts. Some parts of the interview are aimed at building rapport and can be unstructured while others are aimed at assessing the suitability of the candidate for the position and these parts are more structured. In doing so, it would be possible for recruiters to preserve control on the interview and at the same time collect data in a standardized manner.

At a time when online selection interviews might develop in a more globalized and connected labor market, and when talent management calls for highly performing recruiters to hire highly performing employees, researchers and practitioners might join forces to help the building of a sustainable fit between employees and employers by fostering the use of structured interviews.

Limitations

There are limitations to this study. First, although there is a consequential number of respondents in comparison to similar studies conducted in the hospitality industry (e.g. Paraskevas, 2000), the percentage of recruiters who agreed to participate in this study is rather low in comparison with the target population (10.4%). Although, this is not so different from response rates obtained in similar studies (Zibarras & Wood, 2010). Second, the sample comprised only three-star, four-star and five-star hotels. It is then difficult to generalize these findings to one-star and two-star hotels. Third, as all the respondents come from Switzerland, it is not certain that conclusions from this study can be generalized to other countries. Finally,

it was decided to exclude certain components of interview structure such as the use of ancillary information, the use of anchored rating scales, the importance of statistical prediction or the discussion about the candidates. As a result, this study does not provide a complete picture of interview structure as defined by Campion, Palmer and Campion (1997). This decision was made for the following reasons: to keep the questionnaire as short as possible and to exclude questions and concepts that could be misunderstood by the respondents (e.g. anchored rating scales), with the hope to maximize the response rate from the participants.

Acknowledgement

This work was supported by a grant from the *Lausanne Hospitality Consulting SA*. We are grateful to *Hotelleriesuisse* who provided us with hotel respondents' emails and therefore made this study possible. We would also like to thank Anka Pilauer and Sarah Weyer for their help in the data collection process.

References

Bartram, T. (2005). Small firms, big ideas: The adoption of human resource management in Australian small firms. *Asia Pacific Journal of Human Resources*, 43, 137-154.

Campion, M. A., Palmer, D. K., & Campion, J. E. (1997). A review of structure in the selection interview. *Personnel Psychology*, 50, 655-702.

Chan, S. H., & Kuok, O. M. (2011). A study of human resources recruitment, selection, and retention issues in the hospitality and tourism industry in Macau. *Journal of Human Resources in Hospitality and Tourism*, 10(4), 421–441.

Chapman, D.S., & Zweig, D.I. (2005). Developing a nomological network for interview structure: Antecedents and consequences of the structured selection interview. *Personnel Psychology*, 58, 673–702.

Cho, S., Woods, R., Jang, S. & Erdem, M. (2006). Measuring the impact of human resource management practices on hospitality firms' performances. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 25(2), 262-277.

Cortina, J. M., Goldstein, N. B., Payne, S. C., Davison, H. K., & Gilliland, S.W. (2000). The incremental validity of interview scores over and above cognitive ability and conscientiousness scores. *Personnel Psychology* 53, 325–351.

Crawford, A. (2013). Hospitality operators' understanding of service: a qualitative approach. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management* 25, 65-81.

Hausknecht, J. P., Day, D. V., & Thomas, S. C. (2004). Applicant reactions to selection procedures: An updated model and meta-analysis. *Personnel Psychology*, 57, 639–683.

Highhouse, S. (2008). Stubborn reliance on intuition and subjectivity in employee selection. *Industrial and Organizational Psychology*, 1(3), 333-342.

Huffcutt, A. I., & Arthur, W. A. (1994). Hunter and Hunter (1984) revisited: Interview validity for entry-level jobs. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 79, 184–190.

König, C. J., Klehe, U. C., Berchtold, M., & Kleinmann, M. (2010). Reasons for being selective when choosing personnel selection procedures. *International Journal of Selection and Assessment*, 18, 17-27.

Kusluvan, S., Kusluvan, Z., Ilhan, I. and Buyruk, L. (2010). The human dimension: A review of human resource management issues in the tourism and hospitality industry. *Cornell Hospitality Quarterly*, 51(2), 171-214.

Latham, G. P., Wexley, K. N., & Pursell, E. D. (1975). Training managers to minimize rating errors in the observation of behavior. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 60(5), 550-555.

Levashina, J., Hartwell, C. J., Morgeson, F. P., & Campion, M. A. (2014). The structured employment interview: Narrative and quantitative review of the research literature. *Personnel Psychology, 67*, 241-293.

Lievens, F., & De Paepe, A. (2004). An empirical investigation of interviewer-related factors that discourage the use of high structure interviews. *Journal of Organizational Behavior, 25*, 29-46.

Lin, L., Horng, J. S., Chen, Y. C., & Tsai, C. Y. (2011). Factors affecting hotel human resource demand in Taiwan. *International Journal of Hospitality Management, 30*, 312-318.

Lockyer, C., & Scholarios, D. (2004). Selecting hotel staff: why best practice does not always work. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management, 16*, 125-135.

MacHatton, M. T., Van Dyke, T., & Steiner, R. (1997). Selection and retention of managers in the US restaurant sector. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management, 9*, 155-160.

Marchese, M. C., & Muchinsky, P. M. (1993). The validity of the employment interview: A meta-analysis. *International Journal of Selection and Assessment, 1*, 18-26.

Martin, L., & Groves, J. (2002). Interviews as a selection tool for entry-level hospitality employees. *Journal of Human Resources in Hospitality & Tourism, 1*, 41- 47.

Mayson, S., & Barrett, R. (2006). The 'science' and 'practice' of HRM in small firms. *Human Resource Management Review*, 16(4), 447-455.

McDaniel, M. A., Whetzel, D. L., Schmidt, F. L., & Maurer, S. D. (1994). The validity of employment interviews: A comprehensive review and meta-analysis. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 79, 599-616.

Middendorf, C. H., & Macan, T. H. (2002). Note-taking in the employment interview: Effects on recall and judgments. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 87(2), 293-303.

Nolan, K. P., & Highhouse, S. (2014). Need for autonomy and resistance to standardized employee selection practices. *Human Performance*, 27(4), 328-346.

O'Neill, T. A., Goffin, R. D., & Rothstein, M. (2013). Personality and the need for personality-oriented work analysis. In N. Christansen & R. Tett (Eds.), *Handbook of personality at work* (pp.226-252). New York: Taylor and Francis.

Paraskevas, A. J. (2000). Management selection practices in Greece: Are hospitality recruiters any different? *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 19, 241-259.

Peterson, N. G., Mumford, M. D., Borman, W. C., Jeanneret, P. R., Fleishman, E. A., Levin, K. Y., Campion, M. A, Mayfield, M. S., Morgeson, F. P., Pearlman, K., Gowing, M. K., Lancaster, A. R., Silver, M. B., & Dye, D. M. (2001). Understanding work using the

Occupational Information Network (O* NET): Implications for practice and research.

Personnel Psychology, 54(2), 451-492.

Pettersen, N., & Durivage, A. (2008). *The Structured Interview: Enhancing Staff Selection*.

Québec: Presses de l'Université du Québec.

Raub, S., & Streit, E-M. (2006). Realistic recruitment. An empirical study of the cruise industry. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management* 18, 278-289

Roulin, N., & Bangerter, A. (2012). Understanding the academic–practitioner gap for structured interviews: ‘Behavioral’ interviews diffuse, ‘structured’ interviews do not.

International Journal of Selection and Assessment, 20, 149-158.

Ryan, A., & Sackett, P. R. (1987). A survey of individual assessment practices by I/O psychologists. *Personnel Psychology*, 40, 455-488.

Schuler, H., & Funke, U. (1989). The interview as a multimodal procedure. In Eder, R.W., & Ferris, G. R. (Eds.), *The employment interview: Theory, research, and practice* (pp. 183–192).

Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Simola, S. K., Taggar, S., & Smith, G.W. (2007). The employment selection interview:

Disparity among research-based recommendations, current practices and what matters to human rights tribunals. *Canadian Journal of Administrative Sciences*, 24, 30–44.

Sun, L. Y., Aryee, S., & Law, K. S. (2007). High-performance human resource practices, citizenship behavior, and organizational performance: A relational perspective. *Academy of Management Journal*, 50, 558-577.

Tsai, W., Chen, C., & Chiu, S. (2005). Exploring boundaries of the effects of applicant impression management tactics in job interviews. *Journal of Management*, 31, 108-125.

Van der Zee, K. I., Bakker, A. B., & Bakker, P. (2002). Why are structured interviews so rarely used in personnel selection? *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 87, 176–184.

Young-Thelin, L., & Boluk, K. (2012). A case study of human resource practices in small hotels in Sweden. *Journal of Human Resources in Hospitality & Tourism*, 11, 327-353.

Zibarras, L. D., Woods, S. A. (2010). A survey of UK selection practices across different organization sizes and industry sectors. *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*, 83, 499–511.

Table 1

Descriptive statistics of hotels

Hotels	Percentage (N)
Ownership	
Independent	87.3% (131)
Chain	12.7% (19)
Star category	
three-star	50% (75)
four-star	36.7% (55)
five-star	13.3% (20)
Linguistic region	
French	28% (42)
German	58% (87)
Italian	6% (9)
Romansh	8% (12)
Number of employees	
0-10	14.7% (22)
11-20	21.3% (32)
21-50	32% (48)
51-100	20% (30)
101-200	6.7% (10)
> 200	5.3% (8)

Table 2

Descriptive statistics of respondents

Respondents	Percentage (N)
Gender	
Male	49.3% (74)
Female	50.7% (76)
Educational background (N =143)	
Obligatory school	4.2% (6)
Apprenticeship	13.3% (19)
High school	46.9% (67)
Academic background	35.6% (51)
Current position	
General manager	62% (93)
Human resource manager	22.7% (34)
Head of department	15.3% (23)
Recruitment experience in the hotel (N = 147)	
Less than 1 year	17.7% (26)
1-5 years	36.1% (53)
6-10 years	15.6% (23)
11-20 years	19% (28)
More than 20 years	11.6% (17)

Table 3

Percentage of respondents using each component of interview structure

Question	%
1. Interview duration	
30 minutes and more	88.7% (133)
< 30 minutes	11.3% (17)
2. Job analysis	
Written criteria	24% (36)
No written criteria	76% (114)
3. Written questions	
Yes	58% (87)
No	42% (63)
4. Same questions	
Yes	38.7% (58)
No	61.3% (92)
5. Number of interviews (N = 148)	
≥ 2 interviews	68.9% (102)
1 interview	31.1% (46)
6. Number of interviewers	
≥ 2 interviewers	50% (75)
1 interviewer	50% (75)
7. Questions from the candidate only at the end of the interview	
Yes	0.7% (1)
No	99.3% (149)
8. Note-taking during interviews	
Yes	93.3% (140)
No	6.7% (10)
9. Evaluation of the candidate	
Score (overall or for criteria)	11.3% (17)
General impression	88.7% (133)
10. Training related to interview techniques	
Yes	22.7% (34)
No	77.4% (116)
11. Types of questions (N = 437)	

Motivation, goals and aspirations	54.5% (238)
Self-descriptions	20.4% (89)
Background	8.2% (36)
Job unrelated	6.2% (27)
Past behavior/ situational	4.6% (20)
Job knowledge	2.7% (12)

Table 4

Percentage of respondents using each component of interview structure according to the hotel size, ownership and star category

	Hotel size (nb employees)			Ownership		Star category		
	0-20	21-50	> 50	Independent	Chain	Three-star	Four-star	Five-star
Interview duration	.82	.94	.92	.89	.90	.80	.91	1.00
Job analysis	.19	.23	.31	.24	.27	.21	.26	.30
Written questions	.52	.54	.69	.57	.68	.51	.62	.75
Same questions	.41	.38	.38	.37	.53	.47	.27	.40
Number of interviews	.69	.63	.77	.68	.79	.65	.75	.70
Number of interviewers	.33	.54	.65	.47	.68	.45	.55	.55
Questions from the candidates only at the end	.02	.00	.00	.01	.00	.01	.00	.00
Note-taking	.93	.92	.96	.93	.95	.92	.95	.95
Evaluation of the candidate	.06	.13	.17	.09	.26	.11	.13	.10
Interview training	.17	.27	.25	.20	.42	.21	.22	.30

Table 5

Proportion of different types of questions according to the hotel size, ownership and star category

Questions	Hotel size (nb employees)			Ownership		Star category		
	0-20	21-50	> 50	Independent	Chain	Three-star	Four-star	Five-star
Motivation	.56	.50	.56	.56	.47	.60	.50	.47
Self-description	.18	.26	.18	.21	.19	.19	.20	.25
Background	.10	.06	.09	.09	.05	.07	.11	.05
Job unrelated	.10	.03	.05	.06	.05	.07	.07	.03
Past behavior/ situational	.01	.05	.08	.03	.16	.01	.05	.15
Job knowledge	.03	.04	.02	.02	.05	.01	.05	.02