Why Are Structured Interviews so Rarely Used in Personnel Selection?

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By adopting the theory of planned behavior, this study tried to predict human resources managers' ($N =$ 79) intentions toward unstructured and structured interview techniques. Managers evaluated case descriptions of both techniques and were interviewed about their own practices. The data revealed stronger intentions toward unstructured interviewing than toward structured interviewing, which was consistent with their own practices in selecting staff, which appeared to be rather unstructured. I. Ajzen's (1991) theory appeared to be a useful framework for predicting managers' intentions. In particular, attitudes and subjective norms were predictive of intentions to engage in either method. Only intentions toward the unstructured case were related to managers' actual behavior.

Recent reviews have suggested that selection interviews can be quite valid when they are structured (e.g., Harris, 1989; Huffcutt & Arthur, 1994; McDaniel, Whetzel, Schmidt, & Maurer, 1994; Wiesner & Cronshaw, 1988). Campion, Palmer, and Campion (1997) defined *structure* as "any enhancement of the interview that is intended to increase psychometric properties by increasing standardization or otherwise assisting the interviewer in determining what questions to ask or how to evaluate responses" (p. 656). Although there seems to be a ceiling effect for structure in terms of incremental validity (e.g., Huffcutt & Arthur, 1994), introducing structure generally seems to have a positive impact on the psychometric properties of the interview method (Campion et al., 1997; Harris, 1989; McDaniel et al., 1994; Wiesner & Cronshaw, 1988).

Despite the fact that structured interviewing may result in better selection decisions and consequently in better employee performance and higher organizational profitability, structured interviews are infrequently used in practice (Dipboye, 1997; Terpstra & Rozell, 1997). Several reasons have been suggested for the underutilization of structured methods. First, practitioners may be unaware of the academic literature supporting the use of structured interviews, and even when they are aware of the literature, they may question its credibility, relevance, and practical usefulness (Oviatt & Miller, 1989; Terpstra & Rozell, 1997). Second, it has been suggested that in structured interviews important interviewer needs are frustrated, such as the need for autonomy and the need for power (Dipboye, 1997). A highly standardized procedure could

be seen as reducing the task into a boring, monotonous exercise, whereas an unstructured interview could offer challenges and autonomy.

Third, structured interviews may harm the ability to recruit applicants (Dipboye, 1997). Applicants are more favorably disposed to interviewers who are attentive, warm, and socially perceptive, and unstructured interviews allow the communication of these qualities better than structured interviews (Dipboye, 1992, 1997). There is indeed some empirical evidence revealing that candidates evaluate unstructured interviews more positively than structured interviews (Latham & Finnegan, 1993; Zehelein, 1985; see also Schuler, 1993). Particularly in a restricted job market, organizations will regard the recruiting function of the interview as important.

Fourth, social pressures may be responsible for the limited use of structured interviews. Structured staffing practices may be perceived as incongruent with, or even counter to, the organization's philosophy or objectives (Kossek, 1989), and their practice may therefore be disapproved of by the organization. Finally, budgetary and time constraints may prevent the adoption of structured methods. They cost more time and money than unstructured methods, especially if human resources (HR) managers or top executives are unaware of or do not believe in potential payoffs (Bowman, 1976; Terpstra & Rozell, 1997). Moreover, HR managers or top executives may lack a solid background and training in human resources management and may therefore lack the skills and expertise to implement structured interviews (Gannon, 1983; Terpstra & Rozell, 1997).

Although several reasons have been identified in the literature for the underutilization of structured methods and some studies have been performed in which HR managers were questioned about the reasons not to adopt structured interviewing techniques in their daily practice, no studies have explicitly related such motives to HR managers' intentions or actual behavior. The present study examined determinants of practicing structured or

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unstructured interview techniques. We adopted Ajzen's (1991) model of planned behavior because it constitutes a comprehensive model for predicting and explaining human behavior and because we felt that the determinants identified in the literature (lack of knowledge, low attractive value, and social pressures) could easily be classified into Ajzen's model.

The Theory of Planned Behavior

Ajzen's (1991) theory of planned behavior is an extension of the theory of reasoned action (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). A central factor in the theory is the individual's intention to perform a given behavior. Intentions are assumed to capture the motivational factors that influence a behavior. The theory postulates three independent determinants of intentions: attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. First, a person's *attitude* toward a given behavior refers to the degree to which the person has a favorable or an unfavorable evaluation of the behavior in question. Second, the *subjective norm* refers to the perceived pressure to perform or not to perform the behavior. Finally, the degree of *perceived behavioral control* refers to the perceived ease or difficulty of performing the behavior and is assumed to reflect past experience as well as anticipated obstacles.

The assumption is that, the more favorable the attitude and the subjective norm with respect to a given behavior, and the greater the perceived behavioral control, the stronger is an individual's intention to perform the specific behavior and the greater is the likelihood that the individual will actually perform that behavior. The relative importance of attitude, subjective norm, and perceived behavioral control in the prediction of intentions is expected to vary across behaviors and situations (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980).

In addition, the theory of planned behavior deals with the antecedents of attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. The theory postulates that people's overall attitudes toward behavior are based on beliefs about the likelihood of certain outcomes linked to the behavior and evaluations of those outcomes. In the present context, for example, beliefs about loss of autonomy may influence an HR manager's attitude toward structured and unstructured interviews. In a similar vein, subjective norms derive from what people believe others think they should do (normative beliefs) and the motivation to comply with these others. With respect to structured interviewing, the overall attitude toward structured methods in the organization represents a possible normative belief. Dependent on whether individuals regard it as important to comply with important others, those individuals' norms will affect their intentions and subsequently their behavior. Finally, perceived control is determined by beliefs about the likelihood that certain factors will inhibit or facilitate the behavior and the power of these factors to do so. Relevant control beliefs of HR managers may concern factors such as possessing the necessary skills to engage in structured or unstructured interviewing. The theory postulates that underlying beliefs combine to produce overall attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived control and subsequently affect intentions and behavior (see Figure 1).

The Present Study

In this study, we examined in an experimental way the importance of attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral
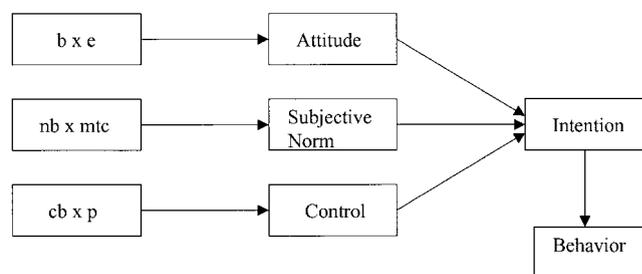

Figure 1. Model of planned behavior (Ajzen, 1991). b = belief; e = evaluation; nb = normative belief; mtc = motivation to comply; cb = control power; p = power.

control in the prediction of HR managers' intentions toward interviewing practices. Managers received descriptions of an unstructured and a structured method of interviewing, and intentions, attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control, as well as the underlying beliefs in response to these methods, were measured. The descriptions were developed by varying the described elements of structure in interview methods identified by Campion et al. (1997). Because we assumed that the beliefs that underlie managers' intentions toward structured interviews may differ from those underlying intentions toward unstructured interviews, we decided to test Ajzen's (1991) model for both methods separately. Finally, the factors from Ajzen's model were related to managers' actual behavior as indicated by the number of elements of standardization they used, as distinguished by Campion et al.

In terms of hypotheses, we expected that managers' intentions toward unstructured interviews would be more positive than their intentions toward structured interviews. Furthermore, we expected that managers' intentions toward both methods as well as their behavior could be significantly predicted from their attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control.

Method

Participants and Procedure

A sample of 79 individuals participated in the study. They were between 23 and 61 years old ($M = 40.85$ years, $SD = 9.51$ years); 85% were male and 15% female. Forty-six percent held a general managerial position; 54% had an HR management position. All participants were involved in staff recruitment and selection. A majority of participants ($n = 55$) were members of technical companies in the Netherlands. Building trade companies were called with the request to provide names and phone numbers of the managers who were responsible for personnel selection. These managers were contacted by telephone and kindly requested to participate. Participants received a questionnaire by mail that contained descriptions of unstructured and structured methods of interviewing and a short questionnaire attached to these descriptions concerning intentions, attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. A few weeks later, they participated in a 1-hr semistructured interview in which they were questioned about their selection methods. These participants could return the completed questionnaire to the researchers at the time of the interview. The interviews took place at their offices.

The remaining participants ($n = 24$) were managers from two large Dutch employment agencies who received the questionnaire at home and who did not participate in an interview. A letter was sent to 50 managers who had, as part of their professional education, participated in a course on human resources management instruments (response rate = 48%). This

group could return the completed questionnaire in a stamped addressed envelope.

Instruments

Experimental manipulation. To evoke participants' reactions toward structured and unstructured interview methods, descriptions of an unstructured and a structured method of interviewing were developed. Cases of fictitious technical companies were developed concerning a building trade company in the low-structure condition and a metal company in the high-structure condition. For both cases, information was provided on 10 elements of structure in interview methods identified by Campion et al. (1997; see Elements 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 10, 12, 13, and 14 in Table 1). To evoke reactions to unstructured versus structured interviews, the case represented the lowest structure versus the highest structure positions on each element. Appendix A shows a fragment from each case description. Additional information was the same across conditions, and the number of words was about equal in both versions. The cases differed with respect to type of industry (building trade vs. metal), but we do not believe that the lack of counterbalancing had any serious effect on the results.

A short introduction preceded the cases. Participants were told that we were interested in their opinions about two examples of selection procedures in which the interview played an important role. Each description was followed by a questionnaire including indicators of behavioral intentions, attitudes, subjective norms, perceived control, and underlying beliefs. Appendix B contains the questionnaire items for the low-structure condition. To control for possible order effects, half of the subjects received the low-structure condition followed by the high-structure condition; the remaining subjects received the high-structure condition followed by the low-structure condition. Preliminary analyses revealed no order effects.

Behavioral intentions. Participants' behavioral intentions were measured by a three-item scale that was linked to each case. Participants gave their answers on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (*very unlikely*) to 5 (*very likely*). Cronbach's alpha for this scale was .89 in the low-structure condition and .79 in the high-structure condition.

Overall attitudes. In both conditions, overall attitude was measured by a seven-item scale with items describing favorable and unfavorable evaluations of each methodology, such as *very bad* at the negative pole versus *very good* at the positive pole. Participants indicated their position on a 5-point scale with 1 representing the negative pole and 5 representing the positive pole. Alphas of .92 and .89 were found in the low- and high-structure conditions, respectively.

Belief-based attitudes. Nine specific attitudinal beliefs (see Appendix B) were generated from the literature, referring to outcomes such as the cost-effectiveness of the method, annoyance of candidates, and the quality of the decision. A belief-based indicator of attitudes was obtained by multiplying the perceived likelihood of each outcome (belief strength) by the evaluations of each outcome (evaluation of the belief) and summing across the nine attitudinal beliefs (Ajzen, 1991). For both belief strength and evaluation, a 5-point scale was used ranging from 1 (*very unlikely*) to 5 (*very likely*) and from 1 (*not very serious*) to 5 (*very serious*), respectively. The reliability of the resulting belief-based indicator (represented by the product terms[1]) was .74 in the low-structure condition and .76 in the high-structure condition.

Overall subjective norms. Overall subjective norms were measured with three items. Participants gave their answers on a scale ranging from 1 (*never*) to 5 (*always*). Alpha was .87 in the low-structure condition and .70 in the high-structure condition.[2]

Belief-based subjective norms. Belief-based subjective norms concerned norms of the organization, the management, and colleagues. A belief-based indicator of subjective norms was obtained by multiplying the assessed likelihood that these referent others would approve of performing a given behavior (normative beliefs) by the motivation to comply with these referent others and summing across the three beliefs. The scale

ranged from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*strongly*) for normative beliefs and from 1 (*totally disagree*) to 5 (*totally agree*) for motivation to comply. Cronbach's alpha for the resulting scale represented by these product terms was .85 in the low-structure condition and .76 in the high-structure condition.

Overall perceived control. Four items were included for overall perceived control. Again, a 5-point scale was used ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*strongly*). Alpha was .81 in the low-structure condition and .72 in the high-structure condition.

Belief-based perceived control. A belief-based measure of perceived control was obtained by combining the perceived likelihood of six factors to inhibit or facilitate structured or unstructured interviewing (control beliefs) in a multiplicative fashion with the perceived power to do so and summing across beliefs. Items were mirrored in the high-structure condition, because it was assumed that the absence of factors that presumably facilitate structured interviewing may enhance unstructured interviewing. Participants gave their answers on a scale ranging from 1 (*very unlikely*) to 5 (*very likely*) for beliefs and from 1 (*never*) to 5 (*always*) for power. Cronbach's alpha for the belief-based indicator of control was .84 in the low-structure condition and .81 in the high-structure condition.

Actual behavior. A few weeks after filling out the questionnaire, in a semistructured interview, a subsample of 55 participants were questioned about their own methods in selecting new staff. Nineteen open-ended questions were included concerning the amount of structure in the selection interview. The 19 elements of structure were derived from a review by Campion et al. (1997; see Table 1). The items that were not explicitly mentioned by Campion et al. concerned whether the interviews were prepared in advance, whether multiple interviews were used, whether participants kept track of the literature on selection, and whether participants discussed general procedures with the interviewers involved. These elements were added on the basis of practical experience but can also be inferred from the elements distinguished by Campion et al. Preparation of interviews seems to be a more general requirement for introducing elements of standardization; a higher number of interviews seems to extend interview length, and both knowledge acquisition and on-the-job evaluation can be regarded as an extension of training.

The answering categories were based on the degrees of structure that Campion et al. (1997) distinguished for the different elements. The interviewer classified the participants' reactions to each question into the answering categories. Table 1 presents the score distributions for all items. Removing four unreliable items (Items 2, 4, 11, and 12) resulted in a scale with moderate reliability ($\alpha = .62$).

Results

Central Variables From Ajzen's (1991) Model

First, we were interested in participants' intentions toward both methodologies. The data revealed that, as we predicted, intentions toward the unstructured case were more positive than intentions toward the structured case ($M = 3.14$ vs. 2.05, respectively), $F(1, 70) = 33.54$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .32$, supporting the basic assumption of the present study that HR managers would be more likely to engage in unstructured interviewing than in structured interviewing. Next, for both conditions separately, the value of attitudes,

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[1] Internal consistencies for belief strength, normative beliefs, control belief, and perceived power exceeded .70. The internal consistency for evaluation of the belief was low ($\alpha = .15$).

[2] The reliability of the scales for overall attitude, subjective norms, and perceived control was consistently lower in the high-structure condition. The reliability was probably due to the fact that participants had more ambivalent feelings toward the structured methodology as described in the case.

Table 1

Results of Interviews on Interview Structure: Percentages of Actual Behavior

Item	%	*M*	*SD*
1. The extent to which questions are based on job analysis			
Intuitively	9.3		
Standard interview scheme	9.3		
General demands for the specific position	29.6		
Job analysis	51.8		
2. Preparation of the interviews			
No preparation	20.0		
Shortly before the interview	63.6		
In a separate meeting	16.4		
3. The extent to which specific question types are used (1 = *rarely*, 5 = *very often*)			
Past behavior		3.84	1.21
Hypothetical questions		3.29	1.30
Background (education, work experience)		4.75	0.52
Relevant knowledge		4.02	1.16
Motivation, goals, ambition		4.76	0.57
Self-descriptions		4.07	1.26
4. The extent to which candidates receive the same questions			
Interviewer is free to ask whatever he or she likes	34.5		
Questions based on a prepared list of topics	16.4		
Basically the same, but adjusted flexibly	49.1		
Exactly the same questions	0.0		
5. Standardization of follow-up questioning			
No standardization	78.2		
Structured follow-up questioning	1.8		
No follow-up questioning	20.0		
6. Allowing candidates to ask questions			
Questions allowed during entire interview	94.5		
Questions only at the end	5.5		
No questions allowed	0.0		
7. Note taking			
No note taking	7.5		
Optional or brief notes	88.7		
Summarizing each answer	3.8		
8. Number of interviews			
1	1.8		
2	98.2		
9. Length of the interview			
<1/2 hr	0.0		
1/2–1 hr	49.1		
1–2 hr	50.9		
10. Number of interviewers			
Only 1	18.2		
2 or 3	80.0		
4 or 5	1.8		
11. The extent to which the same interviewers are used across all candidates			
Differs across candidates	14.5		
May vary but preferably not	12.7		
The same interviewers are used	72.8		
12. Discussion of candidates			
After each interview	9.1		
Both after each interview and at the end	67.3		
At the end of all interviews	23.6		
13. Evaluation of candidates			
Global evaluation	64.8		
Evaluation on multidimensional scales	16.7		
Separate evaluation of each answer	18.5		
14. Use of rating scales			
No rating scales	89.0		
Unanchored rating scales	5.5		
Behaviorally anchored rating scales	5.5		
15. Use of ancillary information (e.g., test results, recommendations)			
Ancillary information is included in the discussion of the interview	27.3		
Ancillary information is considered separately	20.0		
Withdrawal of ancillary information	52.7		
16. Training of the interviewed person himself or herself			
No training	32.8		
As part of general professional education	23.6		
In a special course	43.6		
17. Training of other interviewers involved			
No training	67.3		
Training	32.7		
18. Keeping hold of professional developments			
No	25.5		
Yes	74.5		
19. General evaluation of practiced procedures among employees involved			
No	41.8		
Yes	58.2		

subjective norms, and perceived control in predicting participants' intentions was considered. Table 2 presents the raw correlations between all variables in Ajzen's (1991) model. As Table 2 reveals, in both conditions all three independent variables were significantly related to participants' intentions. Hierarchical regression analysis with intentions as the criterion variable and attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived control as predictors revealed that, in the low-structure condition, attitudes and subjective norms were significant independent predictors (see Table 3). In the high-structure condition, all three model variables explained a significant amount of variance in participants' intentions toward structured interviewing, with attitudes as the most potent predictor. Together, the three model variables explained 60% of the variance in the low-structure condition and 50% of the variance in the high-structure condition.

Testing Ajzen's (1991) Model of Planned Behavior

Two important assumptions underlie Ajzen's (1991) model. First, Ajzen assumed that belief-based measures of attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived control should correlate highly with general indicators of these model components. Second, the model assumes direct effects of the central variables (attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived control) on intentions and indirect effects of the belief-based indicators of attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived control through their effect on the central variables (see Figure 1). To test whether these assumptions held, we performed path analysis. Unfortunately, because the number of cases for which we collected both behavioral and attitudinal data was restricted ($n = 55$), it was not possible to include behavior in this analysis.

In Ajzen's (1991) model, general indicators of attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived control are assumed to be "caused by" the belief-based indicators of the same variables. Path coefficients of the paths running from belief-based indicators to general indicators of the three central variables are represented by the raw correlations between belief-based and general measures that can be derived from Table 2. The direct paths from the general indicators to intentions are estimated by the partial correlation between each general indicator and behavioral intention, controlled for the effect of the remaining five independent variables, which are all directly or indirectly linked to behavioral intention (see Cohen & Cohen,

1983). For example, the path coefficient for the path running from overall attitudes to intentions was obtained by regressing intentions on overall attitudes, after controlling for the effects of overall subjective norms and overall perceived control and for belief-based attitudes, belief-based subjective norms, and belief-based perceived control.

As Figures 2 and 3 show, both assumptions that underlie Ajzen's (1991) model were supported reasonably well by the data. In the low-structure condition, support was found for the indirect pathway from belief-based attitudes via overall attitudes to intentions and from belief-based subjective norms via subjective norms to intentions. An additional direct path was found running from belief-based attitudes to intentions. After we controlled for the effect of the remaining independent variables, the effect of belief-based attitudes on intentions remained significant. No support was found for an independent direct effect of perceived control on intentions. In the high-structure condition, all paths were significant except for the path running from belief-based perceived control to overall perceived control. An additional direct path was found from belief-based subjective norms to intentions. The total amount of variance explained by the six independent variables was 61% ($R = .78$) in the low-structure condition and 55% ($R = .74$) in the high-structure condition.

Participants' Actual Behavior and Its Relationship to Their Intentions

Next, we examined how participants' intentions toward unstructured interviewing reflected their own actual behavior. Table 1 reveals that, although participants scored at the highest level of structure on a number of interview elements, most figures revealed a rather unstructured way of working. Although a small majority of participants based interview questions on job analysis and used the same interviewers across candidates and in almost all cases two interviews were performed, pointing at attempts to structure procedures, results also showed that selection committees usually consisted of only two or three interviewers; that there was no standardization of follow-up questioning; and that candidates were allowed to ask questions during the entire interview, clearly reflecting a lack of structure.

To examine the relationship between participants' expressed intentions and their actual behavior, we computed correlations

Table 2

Correlations Among the Model Variables (N = 79)

Variable	Low-structure condition								High-structure condition							
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Own behavior	—	−.33*	−.55**	−.52**	−.18	−.35**	−.43**	−.25†	—	.09	.10	−.02	.42**	−.01	.13	.08
2. Behavioral intention		—	.70**	.72**	.43**	.64**	.64**	.37**		—	.63**	.54**	.30**	.56**	.63**	.51**
3. Attitude			—	.71**	.37**	.66**	.61**	.36**			—	.65**	.03	.73**	.63**	.64**
4. Subjective norm				—	.48**	.60**	.70**	.57**				—	.08	.51**	.58**	.61**
5. Perceived control					—	.41**	.39**	.43**					—	.20	.21	−.01
6. Belief-based attitude						—	.48**	.37**						—	.57**	.48**
7. Belief-based subjective norm							—	.44**							—	.65**
8. Belief-based control								—								—

† $p < .10$.   * $p < .05$.   ** $p < .01$.

Table 3
Results of Hierarchical Regression of Behavioral Intention on Attitude, Subjective Norm, and Perceived Control (N = 79)

Variable	Low structure	High structure
Attitude	.39**	.49**
Subjective norm	.40**	.21*
Perceived control	.09	.27**
R	.77	.71
R^2	.60	.50

Note. The values for attitude, subjective norm, and perceived control are standardized regression coefficients.
* $p < .05$.   ** $p < .01$.

Figure 3. Revised model of planned behavior in the high-structure condition. b = belief; e = evaluation; nb = normative belief; mtc = motivation to comply; cb = control belief; p = power. *$p < .05$. **$p < .01$.

between intentions toward both cases and the indicator of actual behavior (see Table 2). In the low-structure condition, a significant negative relationship was found between intentions and behavior, indicating that the higher participants' intentions to act in the way that was described in the case, the less structured was their own method of interviewing. This finding supports the validity of our findings, although it must be noted that the association was not very strong. It is interesting that a strong negative correlation was found for both attitudes and subjective norms with behavior. The higher the subjective norms and the more positive the attitudes toward unstructured interviewing, the fewer elements of structure that participants had included in their own daily practice. Moreover, participants' actual behavior was also significantly negatively related to belief-based indicators of attitudes and subjective norms. Again, the more positive participants' attitudes and their subjective norms toward unstructured interviewing, the less structured was their own way of working. Behavior was marginally significantly related to belief-based perceived control. It is interesting that the findings for actual behavior were consistent with the findings for intentions: Overall subjective norms and belief-based attitudes and norms were also the best predictors of participants' intentions (see Tables 2 and 3). The element of structure that was most consistently related to Ajzen's (1991) model variables referred to the extent to which structured rating scales were used, which appeared to be negatively associated with intentions ($r = -.33$, $p < .05$), attitudes ($r = -.33$, $p < .05$), subjective norms ($r = -.45$, $p < .01$), belief-based attitudes ($r = -.34$, $p < .05$), and belief-based subjective norms ($r = -.45$, $p < .01$). No

significant association between participants' intentions and their actual behavior was found in the high-structure condition. However, we did find a significant positive correlation between overall perceived control and behavior. A perception of control over structured interview methods was associated with a structured way of working in practice. When the individual elements of structure were considered, again the extent to which structured rating scales were used appeared to be related to perceived control ($r = .30$, $p < .05$), as well as amount of structure in the discussion of candidates (Element 1; $r = .36$, $p < .01$), the number of interviews ($r = .33$, $p < .05$), the amount of training of interviewers ($r = .33$, $p < .05$), and own training ($r = .30$, $p < .05$).

Discussion

In terms of criteria such as objectivity, reliability, and validity, performing selection interviews in an intuitive and unstructured way may seem foolish. Science has propagated introducing far-reaching elements of standardization, but HR managers in practice seem to be very reluctant to adopt well-structured procedures. The HR and general managers who participated in this study worked in a semistructured way in which some form of assistance was provided in conducting the interviews but in which the process was in many aspects not standardized (see Campion, Pursell, & Brown, 1988). In line with these findings, a description of an unstructured case evoked stronger intentions to engage in the described behavior than a description of a structured case.

What are the determinants of practicing structured or unstructured interview techniques? In the present study, Ajzen's (1991) theory appeared to be a useful framework for predicting managers' intentions toward both interview methods. With respect to unstructured interviewing, support was found both for direct effects of overall attitudes and subjective norms on intentions and for indirect effects of belief-based attitudes and subjective norms on intentions through their effect on overall attitudes and subjective norms. Overall and belief-based indicators of attitudes and subjective norms also were consistently related to managers' actual behavior. The more favorable their attitudes and the higher the subjective norm toward unstructured interviewing, the less participants were inclined to work in a structured way in their daily practice. No support was found for the influence of perceived control on intentions or behaviors. With respect to structured interviewing, support was found for the direct effects of overall attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived control on intentions.
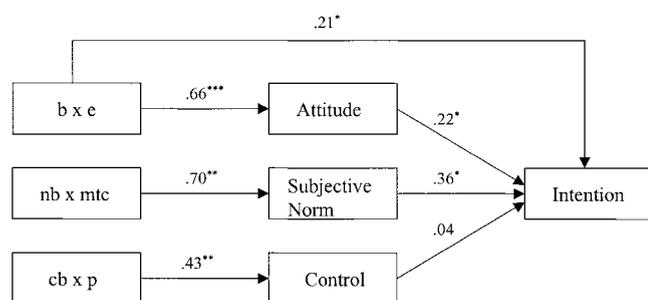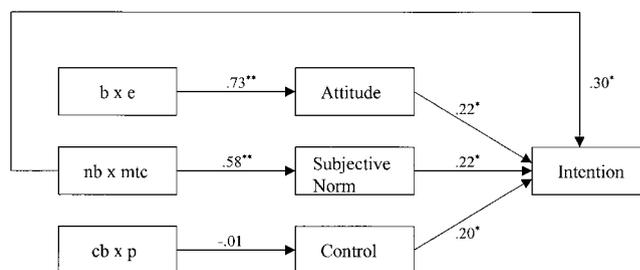

Figure 2. Model of planned behavior in the low-structure condition. b = belief; e = evaluation; nb = normative belief; mtc = motivation to comply; cb = control belief; p = power. *$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$.

Only perceived control was also related to actual behavior. The higher managers' perceived control over structured methods, the more participants were inclined to work in a structured way themselves. Support for indirect effects of belief-based measures on intentions was found for both attitudes and subjective norms but not for perceived control. In this condition, belief-based measures were unrelated to actual behavior.

Although we established relationships between several model variables and managers' actual behavior, the present study provided only weak evidence for a link between intentions and behaviors. In the unstructured condition, a modest relationship was found, whereas in the structured condition, we did not find a significant relationship at all. Ajzen (1991) argued that the relation between intentions and behaviors may be weak or even absent if behaviors pose serious problems of control. In the high-structure condition, we found a rather strong relationship between perceived control and behavior. In this condition, managers with serious intentions to engage in structured interviewing may have lacked the necessary knowledge and skills to actually perform a structured interview and therefore may have refrained from doing so. In response to the question whether they applied the "situation–task–action–result model," which refers to a well-known method of standardized prompting (e.g., Gramsbergen & Van der Molen, 1992), the majority of participants stated that they never applied it or—even more extreme—did not know it at all. An alternative explanation may be that the case presented in the high-structure condition was too extreme in comparison to participants' actual behavior. Their own way of working was generally semistructured. Even those participants at the higher end of standardization may have had negative intentions toward the method that was described in the case. Adding a semistructured condition in the study could have revealed a stronger relationship between behavior and intentions.

In both conditions, underlying beliefs were significantly related to managers' attitudes toward both methodologies. These underlying beliefs referred to the performance of each method, such as success rate, gaining insight into candidates' capabilities, and cost-effectiveness, which were consistently evaluated more positively in the low-structure condition than in the high-structure condition ($M = 2.60$ vs. 2.11 for insight into capabilities and $M = 2.60$ vs. 2.13 for cost-effectiveness, respectively). It is apparent that if scientists were more successful in communicating that structured interviews are likely to enhance the quality of the decision and to result in lower failure rates, whereas unstructured methods are less successful in this regard, behavioral intentions might change.

In addition, attitudinal beliefs referred to the evaluation of the selection procedure by candidates. Again, the structured interview scored less favorably with respect to its value in recruitment than did the unstructured interview ($M = 2.60$ vs. 3.71 for recruitment and $M = 2.64$ vs. 4.06 for avoiding annoyance). It is questionable whether these evaluations are valid. In the introduction, we argued that empathic behavior of the recruiter is associated with higher ratings of the organization's attractiveness and of the probability of job acceptance (Taylor & Bergman, 1987) and that unstructured interviews allow the communication of these qualities better than structured interviews (Dipboye, 1992, 1997). However, Taylor and Bergman also found that the higher the interview structure, the more likely candidates were to accept job offers. Efforts could be made to communicate to HR managers that it is by no means clear whether candidates do prefer unstructured over structured methods. Moreover, interview training could focus on combining a strict attitude associated with high structure with empathic responding (e.g., Gramsbergen & Van der Molen, 1992). It is probably easier to be perceived as empathic in an unstructured interview, and the interviewer may need more social skills to be friendly and receptive in a structured one. Teaching the necessary skills seems therefore to be very important.

Belief-based subjective norms were significantly related to the general subjective norm. These belief-based norms referred to the general climate in the organization and the opinion of important others in the organization (colleagues and the management). Moreover, belief-based subjective norms also affected intentions toward both unstructured and structured interviews. Thus, unless the organizational climate changes in the direction of less favorable overall attitudes toward unstructured interviews, HR managers will not be inclined to change their behavior. The importance of social norms implies that isolated activities aimed at training or providing information to HR managers will probably not be very useful.

The failure to find a relationship between belief-based and general indicators of control in the high-structure condition suggests either that general control refers to a more global psychological state—that is, in contrast to what Ajzen (1991) suggested in his theory—not related to salient control beliefs or that we simply failed to detect the salient beliefs that HR managers in our sample held. The fact that in the low-structure condition we did find a significant correlation between the belief-based and the general indicator of perceived control suggests that the second explanation is most plausible. Because we did find a significant relation of overall perceived control with intentions and behavior in the high-structure condition, it seems worthwhile to try to discover the salient control beliefs in future research.

In conclusion, the present findings may help in designing interventions aimed at encouraging a more structured way of working. In particular, attempting to change the organizational climate and providing organizations with knowledge that the quality of the decision is enhanced by including elements of standardization may be successful. However, the size of the present sample was small. And, of course, we have to be aware of the fact that because the data are correlational, no conclusions can be drawn with respect to the direction of the relationships. What others approve of may be inferred from one's own intentions rather than the other way around. Before any firm conclusions can be drawn about the implications of these findings for the daily practice of organizations, future studies are needed with larger sample sizes that incorporate longitudinal designs.

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Appendix A

Fragments of Case Descriptions in the Low- and High-Structure Conditions

High Structure

One hour before the interviews, the committee goes over the interview scheme (which has been developed in an earlier phase) and divides roles among members. During the interview, the interview scheme is strictly followed. At the beginning of the interview, the director takes some time to provide information about the job content and the organization. Candidates do not get the opportunity to ask questions until the end of the interview. During the interview, two committee members take detailed notes of everything the applicants put forward. The other committee members score the given answers on the job demands.

After each interview, committee members evaluate candidates on the job demands. After the final interview, candidate profiles are discussed among committee members under supervision of the chair of the committee, Mr. Steenhuis (consultant).

Low Structure

Fifteen minutes before the interviews, the director (Derksen) and a member of the management team come together to discuss some possible questions for candidates that they have put on paper. At the beginning of the interview, the director provides extensive information about the job content and the organization. Candidates get the opportunity to ask questions during the entire interview. During the interview, questions arise from a flexible role division, and dependent on what candidates put forward, additional questions are asked or questions are prompted. In each interview, new information is brought up by candidates, and this information is further elaborated on. Both committee members form a global evaluation on the basis of their major impressions during the interview.

After each interview, subjective impressions of each candidate are discussed. After all interviews, it is evaluated which candidate came out as the best.

(*Appendixes continue*)

Appendix B

Questionnaire Items in the Low-Structure Condition

Intentions

1. When I have to perform a selection procedure during the next months, I will work in the described way.
2. I intend to apply some of the elements from the described method in my own selection procedures.
3. I expect that I am going to work in the described way during the next months.

Overall Attitudes

I think the described selection method is: a) bad/good; b) unpleasant/pleasant; c) insensible/sensible; d) ineffective/effective; e) unprofessional/professional; f) weak/strong; g) inefficient/efficient.

Belief Evaluations

1. That the interview has recruiting power on candidates is . . .
2. Preventing candidates from getting annoyed is . . .
3. Making the right selection decision is . . .
4. The interview being pleasant is . . .
5. The interview being spontaneous is . . .
6. Hiring the right candidate is . . .
7. That candidates perceive the procedure as justified is . . .
8. The procedure being cost-effective is . . .
9. That the procedure gives insight into the capabilities of candidates is . . .

Belief Strength

This method will:
1. Reduce the recruiting power of the interview.
2. Cause annoyance among candidates.
3. Enhance the chances of a high quality decision.
4. Enhance the pleasantness of the interview.
5. Reduce the spontaneity of the interview.
6. Enhance the chances of hiring the wrong candidate.
7. Be experienced by candidates as more justified.
8. Be more cost-effective in terms of invested time and staff members.
9. Give a better insight in the capabilities of candidates.

Overall Subjective Norms

1. People at work think I should work in the described way.
2. People at work would disapprove it when I would work in the described way.
3. People at work would look down upon me when I would work in the described way.

Normative Beliefs

1. The organization thinks personnel selection procedures have to be performed according to the method as described in the case.

2. My colleagues would disapprove it when I would work in the described way.
3. The company's management thinks I should work in the described way.

Motivation to Comply

1. In general, I want to do what is expected from me by the organization.
2. In general, I want to meet the management's expectations.
3. In general I want to live up to the standards of my colleagues.

Overall Perceived Control

1. I am able to work in the described way if I want to.
2. I possess the knowledge to perform selection interviews in the described way.
3. I think it is difficult to perform selection interviews in the described way.
4. I can decide by myself to work in the described way.
5. I possess enough skills to work in the described way.
6. The company has enough skills and resources to perform selection procedures according to the methodology that is described in the case.

Control Beliefs

How likely is it that you would work in the described way if:
1. You had less staff available to participate in the procedure?
2. You were busy with other activities?
3. You were under higher time pressure?
4. You were less well trained in the field of personnel selection?
5. Your staff was less well trained in the field of personnel selection?
6. You had less money available to hire experts to support you with the procedure?

Perceived Power

How often does it happen that:
1. You do not have enough staff to participate in the selection procedure?
2. You are too busy with other activities to spend much time on preparing and performing selection interviews?
3. You have to perform selection procedures under time pressure?
4. You feel insufficiently trained in personnel selection methods?
5. You feel that your staff is insufficiently trained in personnel selection methods?
6. You have too little money available to hire experts to support you with the procedure?