

# An empirical investigation of interviewer-related factors that discourage the use of high structure interviews

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## Summary

High structure interviews appear to be less frequently used in personnel management practice than might be expected given their good reliability and validity. Although several authors have speculated on the factors of resistance to high structure interviews, empirical research is very scarce. Two studies are conducted among experienced human resources representatives who frequently conduct employment interviews. The first study provides a fine-grained description of the degree of structure used in interviews, showing that in most interviews constraints are placed only on the topical areas to be covered and that scoring is done only on multiple criteria. The second study tests various hypotheses regarding interviewer-related factors, which may lead to lower levels of structure in interviews. Results show that when interviewers are concerned about establishing an informal contact with interviewees, want to have discretion over interview questions, and want to develop interviews efficiently, they are less inclined to use higher levels of structure in interviews. Conversely, people who participated in interviewing workshops and Conventional types report using significantly higher levels of structure. Implications for improving interviewer motivation to use higher levels of structure in interviews are discussed. Copyright © 2004 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

## Introduction

A remarkable finding in industrial and organizational psychology is that personnel practices which are not supported by empirical research are often very popular whereas personnel practices which have been shown to be effective are less frequently used (Dipboye, 1994; Johns, 1993). This inverse relationship between psychometric soundness and popularity is probably most strikingly exemplified by the attractiveness of low structure interviews. In fact, meta-analytic research has demonstrated that low structure interviews are considerably worse than high structure interviews in terms of reliability (Conway, Jako, & Goodman, 1995) and criterion-related validity (Huffcutt & Arthur, 1994; Marchese

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& Muchinsky, 1993; McDaniel, Whetzel, Schmidt, & Maurer, 1994; Wiesner & Cronshaw, 1988). In addition, low structure interviews have been found to produce higher adverse impact (Huffcutt & Roth, 1997) and to lead to less favorable litigation outcomes (Williamson et al., 1997) than their high structure counterparts.

Despite this scientific evidence, low structure interviews continue to be frequently used in organizations. Moreover, the usage of high structure interviews is lower than might be expected given their psychometric soundness. According to a recent survey (Ryan, McFarland, Baron, & Page, 1999), only 34.6 per cent of U.S. firms reported using the same fixed list of job-related questions per candidate for a specific job. Another survey indicated that more interviewers disagreed than agreed with common structured interviewing practices (Dipboye & Jackson, 1999). In addition to these surveys, there is further evidence that, even when organizations adopt high structure interviews, these interviews tend to become less structured over time (Latham & Saari, 1984).

The divergence between interview practice and research illustrates that the adoption and effective implementation of high structure interviews is not only influenced by psychometric criteria but also by various individual, political, and cultural factors, which to date are poorly understood (Campion, Palmer, & Campion, 1997; Dipboye, 1994, 1997; Harris & Eder, 1999; Rynes, Barber, & Varma, 2000; Van der Zee, Bakker, & Bakker, 2002). For example, Rynes et al. (2000) recently posited that *'because of the importance of interviewer motivation to effective interviewing, . . . developing a better understanding of the interviewer's perspective is one of the highest research priorities for improving interview practice'* (p. 270).

This paper begins to fill this gap in the literature. Two studies are conducted. The first descriptive study aims to gather information regarding the degree of structure used in interviews. An important extension to previous surveys that treated structured interview usage as a unidimensional and dichotomous variable (e.g., Harris, Dworkin, & Park, 1990; Ryan et al., 1999) is that we relied upon the two-dimensional taxonomy of Huffcutt and Arthur (1994) to obtain a fine-grained description of the degree of structure used in interviews.

The second study aims to examine a range of individual (interviewer-related) factors, which may reduce the use of high structure interviews. We focus on these interviewer-related factors because these factors are generally thought to be the first and most immediate group of sources of resistance to high structure interviews (Dipboye, 1994, 1997). Recently, Van der Zee et al. (2002) provided empirical evidence that individual interviewers' attitudes and beliefs towards high structure interviews were related to their intentions to use high structure interviews. However, they did not investigate the effects of specific interviewer-related beliefs. A deeper understanding of these interviewer-related objections that slow down the more frequent use of high structure interviews may have direct implications for personnel selection practice. This is because, at a practical level, an in-depth insight into these factors may eventually suggest strategies for improving interviewer motivation and for promoting usage of high structure interviews (Harris & Eder, 1999; Rynes et al., 2000).

## Context

### Societal Context

Belgium is situated in the heart of Europe. Therefore, many multinationals and international organizations (NATO, EU) have headquarters in Belgium. In Belgium, three languages are spoken. The Flemish part of the country speaks Dutch, whereas the Walloon part of the country speaks French.

There is also a small part of Belgium in which German is spoken. This study was conducted in private firms in the Flemish part of Belgium. Approximately 70 per cent of the labor force works in private companies, whereas 30 per cent of the labor force are employed in the public sector.

### **Legal Context**

The fact that three languages are spoken in Belgium necessitates that there is a strong tradition of dialogue, consultation, and compromise. This tradition of social consultation is also prevalent in employment-related areas. This means that efforts are undertaken to strive for compromise between different partners (e.g., employer, employee, union) without much direct outside intervention. When conflicts arise, the court is used only as a last resort. The fact that people seldom refer to the court in selection-related areas is also due to the fact that there are few laws in Belgium that regulate selection practices. For example, there exist no regulations about how employment interviews should be conducted or who should conduct employment interviews.

### **Organizational Context**

In Belgian firms, HR representatives typically develop employment interviews themselves. This means that in Belgium (as compared to the situation in other countries) HR representatives have considerable latitude to influence the level of structure in the employment interviews they conduct.

It should also be noted that in recent years consultancy firms have begun to certify their own personnel in order to ensure and promote the quality of their efforts. For the same reason, many consultancy firms in the Flemish part of Belgium have strongly advocated the use of high structured interviewing practices as a better alternative to low structured interviews. This was evidenced by the publication of practical books and the organization of training workshops on this subject. Yet, this does not mean that high structured have been widely adopted in the Flemish part of Belgium. According to recent surveys, high structured interviews are used in about 30 per cent of the companies in the Flemish part of Belgium.

## **Study 1**

### *Background*

As already noted, previous surveys about structured interview usage (Harris et al., 1990; Ryan et al., 1999) typically treated use of structured interviews as a unidimensional and dichotomous variable. This is not congruent with recent conceptualizations. First of all, use of structure is better seen as a multidimensional variable because there are various ways to structure an employment interview (Campion et al., 1997; Dipboye & Gaugler, 1993; Huffcutt & Arthur, 1994). Recently, Campion et al. (1997) defined structure in interviews very broadly 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) and distinguished 15 ways to structure an interview. According to Huffcutt and Arthur (1994), two structured interviewing practices are especially important at an operational level, namely interview question standardization and response scoring standardization. Huffcutt and Arthur (1994) crossed these two structured interviewing practices to obtain a two-dimensional model of interview structure. Therefore, it is important that a survey about structured interview usage measures at least these two dimensions.

Second, as reflected in the aforementioned definition, structure denotes standardization and therefore is not a dichotomy (structured vs. unstructured interviews). Instead, it is better to use the term 'degree of structure' (low structure vs. high structure interviews) and to conceptualize structure in employment interviews as a continuous variable with various levels. In their model of interview structure, Huffcutt and Arthur (1994) identified four progressively higher levels of interview standardization and three progressively higher levels of scoring standardization. In terms of question standardization, Level 1 consisted of interviews without any constraints on the questions to be asked (i.e., the typical unstructured interview). The next levels consisted of interviews in which constraints are placed on the topics to be covered (Level 2) or in which all main and follow-up questions are determined in advance (Level 3). Finally, the highest level of question standardization (Level 4) contained interviews wherein exactly the same questions with no choice or follow-up are asked. In terms of scoring standardization, the following three progressively higher levels were distinguished: a global evaluation of candidates (Level 1), an evaluation of candidates along multiple established criteria (Level 2), and an evaluation of each individual response of candidates according to pre-established answers (Level 3).

In short, recent conceptualizations have treated interview structure as a continuous and multidimensional variable. Therefore, our first descriptive study will use the two-dimensional model of interview structure of Huffcutt and Arthur (1994) to obtain a more fine-grained description of the degree of structure used in interviews.

## *Method*

### **Sample and procedure**

This study was conducted in the Flemish part of Belgium. On the basis of data provided by the National Institute of Statistics, there are 1249 large private firms (with more than 200 employees) in the Flemish part of Belgium. A representative (in terms of geographical region and industry) sample of 94 firms was drawn from the available list of large private firms. After obtaining contact addresses, we made telephone calls to the human resources (HR) management department of each of these firms. Because some of the HR representatives either reported that they outsourced employment interviewing to consultancy firms or refused to participate, the final sample consisted of 76 participants (response rate = 81 per cent). All of these HR representatives actually conducted employment interviews.

### **Measure**

To measure interview structure, we asked two open-ended questions derived from Huffcutt and Arthur's (1994) two-dimensional model. The first question ('Would you share with me how you ask questions to candidates in the interview?') dealt with the level of interview question standardization. The second open-ended question ('Would you share with me how you rate candidates in the interview?') assessed the level of response scoring standardization. If unclear, respondents' answers were probed by asking for further information or by asking for an example.

The phone interviews were transcribed and independently coded by the two authors in terms of interview question standardization and response scoring standardization. The aforementioned levels of question standardization<sup>1</sup> and scoring standardization of Huffcutt and Arthur (1994) served

<sup>1</sup>Because none of the interviews was assigned to the fourth level of interview question standardization of Huffcutt and Arthur (1994), the results of Studies 1 and 2 deal only with the first three levels of interview question standardization (see Tables 1 and 2).

Table 1. Usage of levels of interview structure in Study 1

Response scoring standardization	Interview question standardization			
	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Total
Level 1	11 (14%)	20 (26%)	4 (5%)	35 (46%)
Level 2	6 (8%)	22 (29%)	9 (12%)	37 (49%)
Level 3	0 (0%)	2 (3%)	2 (3%)	4 (5%)
Total	17 (22%)	44 (58%)	15 (20%)	76 (100%)

*Notes:*  $N=76$ . Level 1 question standardization was no constraints. Level 2 was constraints on the topics to be covered in the interview. Level 3 was a priori determination of all main and follow-up questions from which interviewers can choose. Level 1 response scoring was a global evaluation of candidates. Level 2 was evaluation of candidates along multiple established criteria. Level 3 was evaluation of each individual response of candidates according to pre-established answers (see Huffcutt & Arthur, 1994).

as coding categories. Inter-rater agreement measured by Cohen's (1960) kappa was 0.75 for coding interview question standardization and 0.81 for coding response scoring standardization. Discrepancies among the coders were resolved upon discussion.

## Results

Table 1 presents the results of the phone survey. In terms of interview question standardization, the majority of HR representatives (58 per cent) reported that they determined the topical areas to be covered in the interview in advance. In terms of response scoring standardization, most interviewers (49 per cent) said that they rated applicants on multiple pre-established criteria, although many interviewers (46 per cent) also told us that they gave a global rating. It was unusual (only 5 per cent) for interviewers to rate each individual response of candidates according to example answers (level 3 of response scoring standardization).

When we focus on the cell percentages instead of on the totals across interview/response standardization, the highest usage percentage (29 per cent) was obtained for interviews in which the topical areas were determined a priori and in which the candidates were rated along multiple established criteria. The practice of determining the topics in advance and globally assessing the candidate was also commonly reported (26 per cent).

Because we used a more fine-grained measure of interview structure, this study also shows where specific bottlenecks exist. In fact, only 3 per cent of the interviewers reported that they a priori determined all main and follow-up questions and that they rated each individual response of candidates according to example answers. The low usage of such high structure interviews is troublesome because there is meta-analytical evidence that highly structured interviews yield incremental validity over moderately structured interviews with corrected validity coefficients increasing from 0.35 to 0.56 (Huffcutt & Arthur, 1994, p. 188). All of this confirms the importance of investigating the interviewer-related factors behind the underutilization of high structure interviews. As noted above, this is the focus of Study 2.

Taken together, this survey indicates that the majority of interviewers reported that they conduct interviews with a modest degree of structure in terms of question and scoring standardization. This modest degree of structure is reflected in the fact that constraints are placed only on the topical areas to be discussed and that scoring is done only on multiple criteria. Thus, these results also show that the underutilization of high structure interviews is not an American phenomenon but generalizes to European countries such as Belgium.

## Study 2

### *Background*

#### **Sources of resistance to high structure interviews**

Dipboye (1994, 1997) developed a broad conceptual model of the factors that discourage the use of high structure interviews. In this model, organization-related and interviewer-related factors were distinguished. Organization-related factors involved the norms of procedural and distributive justice that exist in the organization, organizational politics, and cultural assumptions and values associated with the organization. Interviewer-related factors included the personal needs of interviewers and their desire to provide a good person–organization fit. Generally, according to Dipboye, low structure interviews seem to persist in practice because they are more personally satisfying for interviewers. For instance, low structure interviews provide interviewers with the opportunity to express their idiosyncratic preferences and allow them discretion over the questions to be asked. Low structure interviews also do not put interviewers in the role of passive observers. Instead, they allow more open and informal communication and challenge interviewers to make a global intuitive assessment of candidate fit with the organization.

In another recent conceptual paper, Harris and Eder (1999) delved deeper into these interviewer-related factors that reduce the use of high structure interviews. Specifically, they classified the various interviewer-related needs and concerns enumerated by Dipboye (1994, 1997) into four specific groups. First, interviewers might find it important that employment interviews do not reduce their discretion and control in terms of interview questions and scoring. There is indeed some empirical evidence that interviewers value discretion and flexibility in terms of interview questions and scoring. A recent survey revealed that more practitioners disagreed than agreed with the practice of asking the exact same questions across applicants and of rating applicants on criteria (Dipboye & Jackson, 1999). In a survey among prominent I/O psychologists, discretion over interview questions and scoring also emerged as one of the main reasons for the continued popularity of low structure interviews (Church, 1996). Although these results are insightful, none of these studies examined the actual relationship between discretion when conducting employment interviews and resistance to the use of high structure interviews. Therefore, this study tests the following hypothesis:

*Hypothesis 1:* If interviewers attach importance to a high level of discretion when conducting employment interviews, they will be less inclined to use higher levels of structure in interviews.

Second, Harris and Eder (1999) speculated that interviewers might prefer a certain level of informality in employment interviews. More generally, this refers to the important social function of employment interviews (see Anderson, 1992). Examples of the social dimension of employment interviews include establishing an informal and personal contact with the interviewee, having a two-way communication process, or making the interviewee feel comfortable. This social dimension is especially relevant if the interview is used as a recruitment device (Rynes, 1989). In that case, the central goal consists of selling the job and the organization to applicants and of providing a realistic job preview. Hence, it is crucial that the interviewer is seen as warm and friendly because interviewees often use interviewer behaviors as signals for the organization's culture (Turban, Forret, & Hendrickson, 1998).

Some studies revealed that interviewees assign great importance to the social dimension of interviews. Kohn and Dipboye (1998) found that student applicants reacted more favorably to low structure interviews and that they particularly preferred interviews high on interpersonal warmth, high on voice, and low on question standardization. Hysong and Dipboye (1999) discovered that student

applicants preferred interview practices, which treated them as ‘people’ (e.g., asking personal questions). Conversely, structured interview practices such as the interviewer controlling the interview or scoring answers numerically were least preferred. Latham and Finnegan (1993) reported similar applicant perceptions regarding employment interviews. Applicants favored low structure interviews because they allowed them to feel at ease and to say everything they wanted. Although empirical research on the interviewer’s perspective is lacking, we expect that, similar to interviewees, interviewers will be concerned about having personal and informal contact with applicants. In turn, this concern might impede the more frequent use of high structure interviews. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

*Hypothesis 2:* If interviewers are concerned about having personal contact with interviewees when conducting employment interviews, they will be less inclined to use higher levels of structure in interviews.

A third factor of resistance might stem from interviewers’ endeavors to go beyond assessing person–job fit and to evaluate person–organization fit (Dipboye, 1994, 1997). Indeed, in the person–organization fit literature, it has often been asserted that low structure interviews are ideally suited to assess person–organization fit (Cable & Judge, 1997; Chatman, 1991; Judge & Ferris, 1992; Rynes & Gerhart, 1990), even though a recent review study found that person–organization fit is also often measured in high structure interviews (Huffcutt, Conway, Roth, & Stone, 2001). No empirical studies have linked this interviewer-related concern to the use of structure in employment interviews. However, it can be hypothesized that, similar to assertions in the person–organization fit literature, interviewers perceive low structure interviews as very well suited to go beyond the person–job fit model and to assess person–organization fit. In turn, this concern might impede the more frequent use of high structure interviews. Thus:

*Hypothesis 3:* If interviewers assign great importance to the assessment of applicant fit with the organization in employment interviews, they will be less inclined to use higher levels of structure in interviews.

Finally, according to Harris and Eder (1999), one of the strongest sources of interviewer-related resistance to high structure interviews might stem from the increased preparation related to the development of high structure interviews. High structure interviews demand more preparation time due to the need for a careful job analysis, the development of a fixed list of job-related questions, and the construction of detailed scoring guides. Typically, this development time increases when the level of structure in employment interviews increases (Huffcutt & Woehr, 1999). Interviewers’ ease of preparation concerns might be at odds with the higher development time of high structure interviews. There is some empirical evidence for this interviewer-related concern. Latham and Finnegan (1993) showed that interviewers ( $N = 59$ ) perceived high structure interviews as lower on ease of preparation. Although this study suggested that the reduced ease of preparation might serve as an objection for using high structure interviews, the actual link between interviewers’ perceptions and use of higher levels of structure in interviews was not examined. Therefore, this study tests the following hypothesis:

*Hypothesis 4:* When interviewers assign great importance to ease of preparation in interview development, they will be less inclined to use higher levels of structure in interviews.

Note that this hypothesis deals only with the time demands in the preparation (development) of high structure interviews. After all, once high structured interviews have been developed, their actual use might be more time efficient than their low structured counterparts.

### Individual differences

Resistance to high structure interviewing might also depend on various individual differences variables (Dipboye, 1994; Graves & Karren, 1999). A first relevant variable might be an interviewer's knowledge of structured interviewing practices and their benefits (Terpstra & Rozell, 1997). When people participate in an interviewing workshop, for instance, they usually will learn about the academic literature supporting high structure interviews. Besides specific interview training, we also expect that people with a background in industrial and organizational psychology will be more likely to use high structure interviews. This is because people with a degree in industrial and organizational psychology typically know more about the reliability and validity of high structure interviews than other people. All of this leads to the following two hypotheses:

*Hypothesis 5:* Interviewers who have participated in interviewing workshops will be more likely to use higher levels of structure in interviews.

*Hypothesis 6:* Interviewers with a degree in industrial and organizational psychology will be more likely to use higher levels of structure in interviews.

Next, several scholars (Harris & Eder, 1999; Campion et al., 1997) emphasized the role of interviewing experience. Harris and Eder (1999) speculated that experienced interviewers might show more resistance to high structure interviews and their inherent loss of discretion over questions/scoring than inexperienced interviewers because experienced interviewers have more ingrained habits. Furthermore, Campion et al. (1997) posited that experienced interviewers might dislike a high structure interview because they consider it a dull and mindless exercise. Thus:

*Hypothesis 7:* We expect that more experienced interviewers will be less likely to use higher level of structure in interviews.

Apart from interviewers' training and experience, interviewers' self-image of being good judges of character might also play an important role (Dipboye, 1994, 1997). This was confirmed by several surveys, which indicated that many interviewers are confident about their personal intuitions of candidates (Bretz, Rynes, & Gerhart, 1993; Hakel, 1982) and believe they can read between the lines and detect who candidates really are (Dipboye & Jackson, 1999). We expect that interviewers who perceive themselves as skillful in reading people will be less likely to use high structure interviews because they consider structured interview practices as unnecessary. This leads to the following hypothesis:

*Hypothesis 8:* Interviewers with a self-image of having good insight into human character will be less likely to use higher levels of structure in interviews.

Finally, Dipboye (1994) posited that two vocational personalities included in Holland's (1985, 1997) RIASEC model might influence the use of high structure interviews. Although the five-factor model (Costa & McCrae, 1992; McCrae & Costa, 1996) might also be useful in this context, Holland's RIASEC model might be especially relevant here because a key assumption of this model is that people search for environments congruent with their interests (also referred to as vocational personalities). On the basis of this congruency hypothesis, Dipboye (1994) assumed that Social types who are characterized as sociable, friendly, warm, cooperative, and kind (Holland, 1997) will be more likely to use low structure interviews as compared to high structure interviews because low structure interviews enable them to establish a personal and informal contact with interviewees. This leads to the following hypothesis:

*Hypothesis 9:* Interviewers high on Social will be less likely to use higher levels of structure in interviews.



Holland (1997) defined Conventional types as methodical, orderly, conforming, and unimaginative. Conventional people also like keeping records, filing materials, and planning in an orderly, systematic, and careful manner. We expect that Conventional types will have less resistance against high structure interviews because the careful planning of high structure interviews (e.g., the development of a fixed list of questions, the construction of detailed scoring guides) is congruent with their preferred activities. This leads to the following hypothesis:

*Hypothesis 10:* Interviewers high on Conventional will be more likely to use higher levels of structure in interviews.

## Method

### Sample and procedure

Questionnaires were sent to 190 HR representatives in the Flemish part of Belgium. This questionnaire sample was generated in a similar way to the telephone sample. However, respondents were not necessarily the same (overlap was 20.5 per cent,  $N = 38$ ; see Discussion section). The questionnaire was distributed a month after the phone interview through e-mail. Study participation was voluntary. We received completed and usable questionnaires from 127 HR professionals, yielding a response rate of 67 per cent. Seventy-five of the HR representatives were female and 52 were male. Their age ranged from 23 to 54 years, with an average of 33.3 years ( $SD = 7.5$ ). Ninety-five per cent of the HR representatives had a university degree, of whom 32 per cent had a degree in industrial and organizational psychology. In Belgium, HR professionals typically have a middle management position because they report to the HR manager and are in charge of several HR assistants. Mean full-time working experience of the HR representatives was 8.7 years ( $SD = 7.7$ ). The mean interviewing experience was 6.1 years ( $SD = 4.8$ ).

HR representatives spent on average 28 per cent of their job time conducting employment interviews and they interviewed most frequently for jobs in production (24 per cent), followed by technical (17 per cent), clerical (15 per cent), and sales (14 per cent) jobs. With the exception of one HR representative, all HR representatives indicated that they had relative freedom in deciding about their style of conducting employment interviews. These last two elements are important because a study on the effects of interviewer-related factors on the use of the degree of structure in interviews is meaningful only under the conditions that (a) the respondents sampled actually are responsible for designing and conducting employment interviews and (b) they could influence the type of interview that they conduct.

### Measures

*Interviewer concerns.* With the help of five experienced interviewers (three women, two men; mean age = 28.1 years,  $SD = 2.3$  years; mean tenure in consultancy firm = 4.2 years,  $SD = 1$  year) we constructed two items for each of the four interviewer concerns. Example items are (interviewer concerns in parentheses): 'An interview should allow the interviewer discretion when asking questions' (discretion), 'There should be a personal contact between the interviewer and the interviewee' (personal contact), 'An interview is ideally suited to assess whether candidates fit with the organization' (person-organization fit), and 'An interview should not require a lot of preparation' (ease of preparation). Interviewers responded to these items using a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (*Strongly disagree*) to 5 (*Strongly agree*). Internal consistencies for the four scales varied from 0.60 (discretion concern) to 0.78 (personal contact concern). The lower internal consistency of the discretion concern was probably due to the fact that one of the items of this scale was negatively worded. Although these reliabilities may seem low, they are respectable because each concern was measured with only two

items. We measured each concern with only two items to keep the survey as short as possible in order to maximize the response rate of our field sample. As a standard for comparison, the Spearman–Brown correction formula suggests that scales containing six items instead of two items would all have had reliability coefficients  $>0.80$ .

*Individual differences.* Three items were constructed to measure interviewers' perceptions of being a good judge of character. An example item is: 'I am a good judge of human character.' Interviewers responded to these items using a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (*Strongly disagree*) to 5 (*Strongly agree*). The internal consistency of this scale was 0.73.

To measure the vocational personalities, three items were taken from the Social and Conventional scales of the authorized Dutch adaptation (Hogerheijde, Van Amstel, De Fruyt, & Mervielde, 1995) of the Self-Directed Search (Holland, 1977).<sup>2</sup> Interviewers responded to these items using a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (*Strongly disagree*) to 5 (*Strongly agree*). Internal consistencies equaled 0.61 (Conventional) and 0.67 (Social). Again, these reliabilities are respectable because only three items were taken from both the Social and Conventional scales. If we had measured Social and Conventional with the full scale of 10 items, the Spearman–Brown correction formula suggests that the scales would have yielded reliability coefficients of 0.84 and 0.87, respectively.

Besides these scales, the questionnaire included questions about respondents' interviewing experience (in months), educational background, and participation in interviewing workshops (yes/no). Respondents wrote down their answers (e.g., average interview time) or checked the appropriate box.

### Dependent variable

We used Huffcutt and Arthur's (1994) two-dimensional model to construct two items related to interview structure. The first item measured interviewers' practices regarding interview question standardization. Respondents rated their level of interview question standardization using a 5-point scale, with the following behavioral anchors: 1 (*There are no constraints about the topical areas to be discussed or the questions to be asked in the interview*), 3 (*I determine in advance the topical areas to be discussed in the interview*), and 5 (*I determine in advance all main and follow-up questions to be asked in the interview*). These behavioral anchors were adapted from the different levels of interview question standardization distinguished by Huffcutt and Arthur (1994). The second item measured interviewers' practices regarding response scoring standardization on a 5-point scale, with the following behavioral anchors: 1 (*I assess candidates globally*), 3 (*I assess candidates along multiple established criteria*), and 5 (*I assess each individual response of candidates according to pre-established answers*). These behavioral anchors were adapted from the different levels of response scoring standardization distinguished by Huffcutt and Arthur (1994).

There was a moderate correlation ( $r = 0.32$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) between these two items. This confirms Huffcutt and Arthur's (1994) finding that interview question standardization and response scoring standardization are two relatively independent dimensions of interview structure. Hence, these items were not summed to construct a measure of interview structure. Instead, we followed the same procedure as Huffcutt and Arthur (1994) to construct a measure of interview structure. In particular, the ratings on

<sup>2</sup>Similar to the original English version of the Self-Directed Search (Holland, 1977), the Dutch adaptation assesses each of the six interest types on the basis of scales for (a) the activities someone likes to do, (b) the competencies someone has, and (c) the occupations someone likes to do. In addition, the Dutch adaptation includes a fourth scale assessing personality characteristics on the basis of Holland's description of the six types (Holland, 1985). Because in this study we were specifically interested in vocational personalities, we considered this last set of scales to be most relevant. Therefore, only the abbreviated set of scales referring to personality descriptors (and essentially the scales tapping the Social and Conventional types) were used. Prior research (Hogerheijde, Van Amstel, De Fruyt, & Mervielde, 1995; see also Holland, 1999) found fairly high convergence (median  $r = 0.53$ , range = 0.43–0.72) between this scale referring to vocational personality descriptors and the more traditional scales referring to activities, competencies, and occupations.

Table 2. Usage of levels of interview structure in Study 2

Response scoring standardization (rating scale)	Interview question standardization (rating scale)				
	1	2	3	4	5
1	4 (3.15%) <sup>a</sup>	4 (3.15%) <sup>a</sup>	7 (5.51%) <sup>b</sup>	2 (1.57%) <sup>c</sup>	0 (0%) <sup>c</sup>
2	2 (1.57%) <sup>a</sup>	7 (5.51%) <sup>a</sup>	9 (7.09%) <sup>b</sup>	6 (4.72%) <sup>c</sup>	0 (0%) <sup>c</sup>
3	6 (4.72%) <sup>b</sup>	11 (8.66%) <sup>b</sup>	49 (38.58%) <sup>c</sup>	15 (11.81%) <sup>c</sup>	2 (1.57%) <sup>c</sup>
4	0 (0%) <sup>c</sup>	0 (0%) <sup>c</sup>	1 (0.78%) <sup>c</sup>	0 (0%) <sup>d</sup>	2 (1.57%) <sup>d</sup>
5	0 (0%) <sup>c</sup>	0 (0%) <sup>c</sup>	0 (0%) <sup>c</sup>	0 (0%) <sup>d</sup>	0 (0%) <sup>d</sup>

Notes:  $N = 127$ . Interview question standardization was rated on a 5-point scale, with 1 (*There are no constraints about the topical areas to be discussed or the questions to be asked in the interview*), 3 (*I determine in advance the topical areas to be discussed in the interview*), and 5 (*I determine in advance all main and follow-up questions to be asked in the interview*). These three anchors parallel the three levels of question standardization of Study 1. Response scoring standardization was rated on a 5-point scale, with 1 (*I assess candidates globally*), 3 (*I assess candidates along multiple established criteria*), and 5 (*I assess each individual response of candidates according to preestablished answers*). These three anchors parallel the three levels of scoring standardization of Study 1. Cells with the same superscripts were collapsed to form the measure of interview structure (see Huffcutt & Arthur, 1994).

the two items were crossed (see Table 2). Next, specific cells of Table 2 were collapsed to construct four progressively higher combinations of structure. To obtain the lowest level of structure (Structure 1), ratings lower than the midpoint (3) of the scale on both question and scoring standardization were collapsed into one category. Thus, Structure 1 represented interviews with little or no constraints on questions and scoring. Structure 2 was distinguished by the use of some formal structure. To this end, ratings that were equal to the midpoint of the scale on either question or scoring standardization were collapsed into one category. Structure 3 was defined by a relatively high level of structure, although some variability in the process was permitted. This level of structure contained ratings equal to the midpoint of the scale on both question and scoring standardization and ratings higher than the midpoint of the scale on either question or scoring standardization. Finally, Structure 4 was characterized by a high degree of structure. To this end, ratings higher than the midpoint of the scale on both question and scoring standardization were collapsed into one category. These four progressively higher combinations of structure are the same as those distinguished by Huffcutt and Arthur (1994).<sup>3</sup>

## Results

Means, standard deviations, and intercorrelations of this study's variables are presented in Table 3. Among the interviewer concerns, establishing personal contact with the interviewee received the highest mean rating ( $M = 4.32$ ), indicating that interviewers perceived this concern as most important in employment interviews. To examine our hypotheses, we conducted a multiple regression analysis. As shown in Table 4, the interviewer concerns together with the individual differences variables explained 36.2 per cent of the variance,  $F(11, 127) = 9.52$ ,  $p < 0.001$ . Table 4 also indicates that interviewer concerns regarding discretion, personal contact, and ease of preparation had significant negative regression coefficients. This is consistent with Hypotheses 1, 2, and 4, which stated that greater concerns about discretion, personal contact, and ease of preparation in employment interviews would be

<sup>3</sup>Slight variations in the levels collapsed to compose progressively higher combinations of structure produced similar results to those in Tables 3 and 4.

Table 3. Means, standard deviations, and intercorrelations of Study 2 variables

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
<i>Interviewer concerns</i>												
1. Discretion	3.79	0.76	—									
2. Personal contact	4.32	0.61	0.23	—								
3. P–O fit	3.92	0.72	0.26	0.29	—							
4. Ease of preparation	2.57	0.82	–0.04	0.09	–0.09	—						
<i>Individual differences</i>												
5. Workshop participation	0.63	0.48	–0.03	–0.05	–0.10	–0.17	—					
6. I/O psychologist	0.32	0.47	0.08	0.05	0.13	0.07	0.08	—				
7. Interviewing experience	73.81	57.46	0.03	–0.11	0.09	–0.17	–0.19	–0.18	—			
8. Judge of character	3.79	0.53	0.13	0.19	0.39	0.04	–0.11	0.25	–0.02	—		
9. Social	4.29	0.64	0.09	0.07	–0.07	0.19	0.00	0.20	0.04	0.12	—	
10. Conventional	3.86	0.53	0.14	0.25	0.32	0.01	0.12	0.17	0.09	0.14	0.17	—
<i>Dependent variable</i>												
11. Level of structure	2.49	0.74	–0.19	–0.28	–0.12	–0.35	0.37	0.07	0.05	–0.15	0.04	0.15

Notes:  $N = 127$ . Correlations equal to or above 0.18 are significant at  $p < 0.05$  and correlations equal to or above 0.23 at  $p < 0.01$ . All measures were rated on a 5-point scale, with the exception of use of structure (four possible values, see Table 2), workshop participation (0 = no, 1 = yes), and I/O psychologist (0 = no, 1 = yes). The amount of interviewing experience is indicated in months.

Table 4. Regression of level of interview structure on concerns and individual differences variables

Predictor	<i>b</i>	SE ( <i>b</i> )	$\beta$	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Discretion	–0.16	0.08	–0.16	–2.09	0.04
Personal contact	–0.27	0.10	–0.22	–2.73	0.01
P–O fit	–0.06	0.09	–0.05	–0.60	0.55
Ease of preparation	–0.29	0.07	–0.32	–4.04	0.00
Workshop participation	0.40	0.12	0.26	3.28	0.00
I/O psychologist	0.12	0.13	0.07	0.91	0.37
Interviewing experience	0.00	0.00	0.02	0.23	0.82
Judge of character	–0.11	0.12	–0.08	–0.97	0.33
Social	0.10	0.09	0.09	1.10	0.27
Conventional	0.28	0.12	0.20	2.39	0.02

\* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ .  $R^2 = 0.36$ ; adjusted  $R^2 = 0.31$ .

related to lower levels of structure in the interview. The regression coefficient of person–organization fit was not significant. This result does not support Hypothesis 3.

With regard to the individual differences variables, two of our hypotheses were confirmed. In line with Hypothesis 5, interviewers who participated in interviewing workshops used significantly higher levels of structure in employment interviews. In addition, Conventional types were found to use significantly higher levels of structure, supporting Hypothesis 10. Contrary to expectations, interviewers' educational background, interviewers' self-perceptions of being good judges of character, and Social did not have significant effects on the degree of structure used in interviews. We used Baron and Kenny's criteria (1986) to examine whether these individual differences variables had indirect effects (mediated by the interviewers' concerns) on the degree of structure used in interviews. No support was found for possible mediating effects of interviewers' concerns.

## General Discussion

### *Main conclusions*

Past research on high structure interviews has been mainly psychometrically oriented. Granted, it is of key importance to increase interview reliability and validity. However, due to the emphasis on measurement issues, researchers have neglected the perspective of the interviewers. This study is a step in shifting the emphasis from psychometrically oriented issues to more motivationally oriented issues.

This study lends empirical support to three interviewer-related factors that discourage the use of high structure interviews. When interviewers are concerned about having discretion over questions/scoring, want to establish personal and informal contact with interviewees, and attach importance to the ease of preparation, our results suggest that they will be significantly less inclined to use structure in employment interviews. No empirical support was found for our hypothesis that the concern to assess person–organization fit would affect the use of high structure interviews.

The non-significant result for person–organization fit does not confirm assertions in the person–organization fit literature that particularly low structure interviews are suited to judge person–organization fit (Cable & Judge, 1997; Chatman, 1991; Rynes & Gerhart, 1990). The distinction between complementary fit and supplementary fit may explain these divergent results. According to Kristof (1996), complementary fit refers to the degree to which persons supply the knowledge, skills, and abilities that organizations need. Conversely, in supplementary fit, the compatibility between persons and organizations is conceptualized in terms of more basic characteristics such as values, goals, and norms. It is possible that previous statements about the usefulness of low structure interviews to assess person–organization were typically made at the level of supplementary fit. However, this study's interviewers might have interpreted person–organization fit in terms of complementary fit and therefore might have perceived high structure interviews and the assessment of knowledge, skills, and abilities as reconcilable.

Another important finding is that interviewing workshop participation was strongly related to the use of high structure interviews. Thus, regardless of the specific content and method of interviewing workshops, they seem to have effects beyond teaching various technical principles because they also appear to encourage interviewers to use higher levels of structure in interviews. It should be noted, however, that these results are correlational and not causal. Therefore, it is also possible that interviewers who initially are more motivated to use high structure interviews are more likely to participate in interviewing workshops.

Finally, this study contributes to the interview literature because we found that interviewers' vocational personalities play some role in interviewer motivation to use high structure interviews. In fact, the vocational personality 'Conventional' influenced the degree of structure in interviews, with more Conventional people reporting that they used higher levels of structure. In support of Holland's (1997) congruency hypothesis methodical, systematic, careful, and forward-planning people seem to be more likely to use higher levels of structure in interviews.

### *Limitations*

We acknowledge certain limitations of our study. In this study, we focused on the concerns of HR representatives of large private firms. As was evidenced by the average job time these HR officers spent interviewing, interviewing played a central role in their job. Given their middle-level position in HR departments, they also reported that they had some discretion in designing and conducting interviews. Future research, however, should examine the generalizability of our findings in other populations. For

example, interviewing might play a more peripheral role in the job of other people (e.g., typical line managers who occasionally interview candidates). Accordingly, these people might assign greater importance to some of the concerns or might even have different objections against high structure interviews. Given that this study was situated in a Belgian context (see contextual sidebar), it is equally important that future studies examine the generalizability of our findings in other countries. For example, it is possible that HR representatives in the United States have less freedom in deciding about their interviewing style because of legal considerations, so that interviewer-related objections become less relevant. Similarly, in settings such as the public sector, the effects of interviewer-related factors on the use of structure in interviews might also be reduced because there might exist very stringent rules in terms of interview format.

Other limitations result from the use of a cross-sectional research design and a survey instrument for collecting the data. For example, we tried to keep the survey as short as possible in order to maximize the response rate. However, this reduced survey length limited the quality of the information collected. For example, constructs were measured with only two items and abbreviated versions of existing scales were used, leading to attenuated, though still acceptable, internal consistency values. This may have underestimated the effects found. Because our results are based on cross-sectional self-reports to a survey, common method variance in the form of priming and consistency effects may also be an alternative explanation for our results. However, we do not believe that monomethod bias is a likely explanation for our results. Monomethod bias may inflate the results but it does not explain the pattern of relationships found (i.e., the insignificant effect of person–organization fit) (Turban et al., 1998).

Moreover, the overlap in respondents across both samples enabled us to check the quality (reliability) of our data. Specifically, we correlated the ratings about the use of interview structure for the group of HR representatives ( $N = 38$ ) that were included in both the telephone and questionnaire survey. Ratings across the two surveys correlated 0.75 ( $p < 0.001$ ) for question standardization and 0.65 ( $p < 0.001$ ) for response scoring standardization. These values attest to the quality of the data collected, especially if one takes into consideration that different methods (i.e., phone survey versus questionnaire survey, open-ended answers versus rating scales) were used across the surveys.

### *Implications for practice and future research*

Interviewers' motivation to use high structure interviews is of key practical importance because—as confirmed by this study—low structure interviews and interviews with a modest degree of structure are still often used despite their substantially lower validity. Therefore, the challenge in practice consists of developing strategies, which promote higher levels of structure in employment interviews and therefore higher reliability/validity, while at the same time ensuring favorable interviewer/applicant reactions. Because we found empirical support for some of the possible interviewer-related factors, which reduce the level of structure used in interviews, our results might be informative as to which strategies to choose from.

First, interviewers should be encouraged to participate in an interviewing workshop. In this workshop/training, particular attention should be paid to convincing interviewers that low structure interviews may often lead to biased information gathering and decision making (see Dipboye, 1997, for a detailed discussion of these biases) and hence to lower validity. Hereby we recommend that practitioners go beyond a lecture with presentation of validity evidence. This is because research on social persuasion, belief change, and attitude change (e.g., Morley, 1987) demonstrates that people are often more impressed by 'vivid' anecdotal evidence (e.g., case studies) than by abstract evidence (e.g., validity coefficients).

Second, to increase interviewers' motivation, we recommend involving them in strategic interviewing issues such as the adoption of high structure interviewing in organizations. If interviewers are

involved in the decision regarding which type of structured interview format to adopt, we believe they are less likely to feel that structured interviewing practices were imposed on them and subsequently limit their discretion.

Whereas both former strategies aim to persuade interviewers to use higher levels of structure in interviews while leaving the structured interview format unchanged, a third strategy consists of subtly modifying the structured interview format. Specifically, interviewers' concerns about discretion over questions/scoring and about establishing informal contact with interviewees may also be accommodated by including a period of free conversation upon completion of the high structure part and by communicating this to interviewees at the start of the interview. An example of such an interview format is the multimodal interview (Schuler & Funke, 1989). This interview contains situational questions, biographical questions, and a period of free interviewer and applicant questions.

We believe that future research should be geared at the following four directions. First of all, more research on the interviewer perspective should be conducted. In this study, we focused on two key operational dimensions of interview structure (i.e., interview question standardization and response scoring standardization). Future studies should scrutinize interviewer reactions to other structured interviewing practices (see Campion et al., 1997; Dipboye & Gaugler, 1993). Examples include conducting a job analysis, note taking during the interview, the absence of a pre-review of candidate information, or using a panel of interviewers. In addition, we need to know whether interview content (situational interviews versus behavior description interviews) makes a difference in terms of interviewer perceptions and resistance. Initial research by Latham and Finnegan (1993) indicated that interviewers ( $N = 59$ ) reacted significantly more favorably to situational interviews as compared to behavior description interviews.

As a second avenue for future research, we need to broaden the range of criteria used to evaluate interview effectiveness. In particular, both interviewers' reliability/validity and interviewers' reactions should serve as criteria. After all, the ultimate goal should be to promote the reliability/validity of high structure interviews while at the same time ensuring interviewer motivation to use these interviews.

Third, broader theoretical frameworks should be applied to explain people's motivation/resistance to use high structure interviews. An example is Ajzen's (1991) theory of planned behavior, which states that people's intentions (e.g., to use high structure interviews) are determined by their attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived control (see Van der Zee et al., 2002). Another example is the broader literature on judges' confidence in their expertise (see Camerer & Johnson, 1991, for a review).

Finally, future research should not only examine the role of interviewer-related impediments to high structure interviews but should also include various organizational factors. For instance, according to Dipboye (1994, 1997), low structure interviews continue to be used in organizations because they are better vehicles for conveying an organization's values and culture. In addition, political factors such as seeking to acquire and maintain power in organizations may make low structure interviews attractive because of their ambiguity and lack of accountability. An examination of these organization-related factors may give a full insight into the complex dynamics underlying the less frequent use of high structure interviews in organizations.

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