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AUTHOR   Freiberg, Kevin L.; Hellweg, Susan A.
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ABSTRACT
        A review of the literature pertaining to
organizational interviewing reveals a number of issues that have
hindered research in that area in recent years. An analysis of these
issues suggests that researchers should adopt an integrative approach
to theory development--one that recognizes the situational
differences of various organizational interviewing contexts.
Interviewing methodologies also need to be strengthened to enhance
the generalizability of research findings, and greater attention
needs to be given to communication variables in the interviewing
process. Interviewing research in organizational contexts needs to be
validated and qualified in view of various job classifications, and
increased research efforts need to be made in the context of
organizational forms of interviewing other than the selection
interview. In addition, future research should test and further
validate coding schemes utilized in organizational contexts. The
development and validation of prototypical scripts for organizational
interviews through empirical investigation may also prove to be a
rich source of communicative data. Finally, the implications of
communication rules and relational analysis development, as well as
other interpersonal communication theoretical frameworks, need to be
determined in organizational interviews. (FL)

A Theoretical and Methodological Evaluation

of Organizational Interviewing Research

From a Communication Perspective

Kevin L. Freiberg

Susan A. Hellweg

Department of Speech Communication

San Diego State University

Abstract

This paper presents a critique of organizational interviewing research from a communication perspective. Specifically, the paper examines theoretical and methodological weaknesses evident in the interviewing literature and offers some plausible alternatives to them. The paper discusses concerns particular to specific organizational interviewing contexts that warrant further attention from communication scholars.

A Theoretical and Methodological Evaluation

of the Organizational Interviewing Research

From a Communication Perspective

Introduction

Within the organization, one of the most widely used tools for gathering information and thus decision making is the interview. Among other things, this tool has become an organizational vehicle for managers to hire, terminate, counsel, promote, and demote employees. Hence, the interview has a significant impact on outcomes both for the individual employee and the organization as a whole. Given the importance of the interview as an organizational tool, it is puzzling to realize that our understanding of it is minimal at best.

As Tengler and Jablin (1983) have stated, ". . . it is somewhat ironic to note that we still know little about the communication dynamics of the employment interviewing process" (p. 1). Their argument, however, must not be limited to employment interviews, because we seem to know even less about the communication dynamics of other types of organizational interviews (e.g., performance appraisal, reprimand, grievance, and exit interviews).

Research has not provided communication scholars with a clear understanding of interviewing for two apparent reasons. First, as scholars have agreed, interviewing research has lacked a consistent theoretical base (Daly, 1978; Jablin and McComb, 1983; and Tengler and Jablin, 1983). And second, it has to date been very difficult to empirically examine the interviewing process in real-life situations. This purpose of this paper is to provide a critique of past organizational interviewing research from a communication perspective.

Accordingly, it will examine the theoretical and methodological issues cur-
rently confronting communication scholars regarding the interv ewing process
in the organizational context.

Theoretical Considerations

In an attempt to surmount some of the obstacles that have hindered inter-
viewing researchers from developing a consistent theoretical base, we can heed
the words of Redding (1979), who cautioning organizational communication theo-
rists, pointed out that:

> Anyone who imagines that there exists 'out there' somewhere a certi-
> fied single set of criteria by which scientific theory dealing with
> human-social behavior can be constructed is doomed to sad disap-
> pointment (p. 314).

Redding's statement is as applicable to theory development in interview-
ing as it is to organizational theory development in general. And in the same
vein that Redding has recommended a "plurality view" in the development of
organizational communication theory, it may not be appropriate for researchers
to assume that there is a single theory underlying interviewing.

At least three different perspectives seem plausible in developing a
theoretical framework for the study of interviewing. Einhorn (1981) examined
the interviewing process from a rhetorical perspective, Goodall and Goodall
(1982) suggested that interviewing research should embrace a model of persua-
sion, and finally, Jablin and McComb (1983) recommended that interviewing
shoul ' be investigated as information-sharing interaction from an assimilation
perspective. One could argue that the rhetorical perspective encompasses both
the persuasive model and the information-sharing model, due to the fact that
it is much more broad-based than either of the latter two perspectives.

A good starting point in building a theoretical foundation for interviewing may be to begin from a rhetorical perspective. In its most rudimentary form the communication model developed by Berlo (1960) provides us a theoretical basis from which to understand interviewing. Berlo's model includes both a persuasive element and an information sharing element; Berlo's model looks at how information is exchanged between a source and a receiver and how persuasive messages are conveyed.

Although a number of scholars have recognized the rhetorical nature of the interviewing process (Einhorn, 1981; Goodall and Goodall, 1982; Jablin and McComb, 1983; and Ragan, 1983), only Einhorn has provided a comprehensive rhetorical analysis of interviewing. She found that successful interviewees, in contast to unsuccessful interviewees, used effective rhetorical strategies. Specifically, she showed that successful interviewees displayed more speech behaviors that were consubstantial with their prospective employers than unsuccessful interviewees. Additionally, these interviewees supported their arguments, clarified and organized their ideas, and conveyed positive self-images.

The rhetorical approach to the study of interviewing is valuable because it shows us processually how we as interviewers and interviewees may convey messages of value that will ultimately lead to a desired action. As Kenneth Burke (1962) observed, "Where there is persuasion, there is rhetoric . . . and wherever there is 'meaning,' there is 'persuasion' . . . and so, out of persuasion, we can . . . derive pure information . . ." (p. 568).

What Burke (1962) seems to be arguing is that meaning and understanding are synonymous terms and that one cannot have meaning without having persuasion. What does all of this mean to the interviewing researcher? It means

that whether one chooses to investigate interviewing from an information-sharing perspective or a persuasive perspective, one must look to rhetorical theory, because it is in rhetorical theory that each of these perspectives is grounded.

A second theoretical perspective advocated by Goodall and Goodall (1982) suggests that researchers should focus more on the employment interview as a persuasive communication event where participants seek to accomplish their individual goals. This perspective differs from the more general rhetorical theoretical perspective in that it does not account for the interviewing process as merely an information-gathering process. With the rhetorical theoretical perspective, one can look at interviewing as either an information-sharing process, a persuasive process, or both. The persuasive paradigm is more specific because it examines interviewing as solely a manipulative or influential process. In accordance with this idea, Goodall and Goodall (1982) argued that "effective persuasion occurs when mutual goals can be identified and the participants can manage communication used to obtain the goals" (p. 117).

The paradigm suggested by Goodall and Goodall (1982) is especially useful for particular types of interviews (selection, reprimand, and negotiation) where the situation is persuasive in nature. In these types of interviews both participants have a goal and use or manipulate communication to achieve that goal. Hollandsworth, Kazelskis, Stevens and Dressel (1979) suggested that hiring practices are determined by whether or not interviewees perform particular desired behaviors. If this is true, it is reasonable to assume that interviewees will attempt to manifest communication behaviors that appear

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to be favorable to the interviewer (Stevens, 1981). Accordingly, the inter-
viewer manipulates the interviewee insofar as he or she attempts to draw a
specific piece of information from him. This suggests that for interviews
where both participants have a particular goal in mind, the persuasive para-
digm may be the most appropriate context from which to conduct research.

Jablin and McComb (1983) held that the persuasive paradigm is not a good
paradigm upon which researchers should base their analysis. They argued that
with the persuasive model there is a tendency for researchers to: (1) examine
the interview as a linear rather than reciprocal interaction process; and (2)
view the participants in the selection interview as adversaries. The
researchers believe this approach will foster a perspective which finds the
interviewer and interviewee attempting to manipulate one another, "acting"
rather than "interacting" in a very intentional manner in order to achieve
their individual goals.

As an alternative to the theoretical perspective offered by Goodall and
Goodall (1982), Jablin and McComb (1983) suggested yet another potential
perspective from which scholars can investigate the process of interviewing.
They asserted that the interview should be examined as an assimilation pro-
cess. This particular perspective seems to hold great promise for theory
development because it "eliminates most of the deficiencies . . . with respect
to the persuasive approach, while still allowing those who wish to examine the
rhetorical properties of the process" (Jablin and McComb, 1983, p. 14). By
investigating the screening interview as an information-sharing interaction,
communication scholars can examine the role of participants as harmonious
rather than adversarial. Additionally, this perspective allows the
researcher to explore transactional nature of the interviewing process as well

as its communicative role in the assimilation of new employees into the organization.

The information-sharing perspective seems to be most appropriate for interviews where the participants are simply trying to gain information rather than persuade their counterparts. This would typically occur in interviews that are intended to be informative in nature (e.g., selection, counseling, research, focus group interviews).

So far, this paper has sought to present three plausible perspectives for theory development in the context of organizational interviewing research. When discussing alternative theoretical perspectives, it is easy for researchers to interpret these perspectives as exclusive; one is not sharing information when one is persuading and one is not persuading when one is sharing information. The confusion develops if we assume that sharing information and persuading should be considered as independent purposes of communication.

The perspectives for theory development proposed in this paper are in no way mutually exclusive; rather, they are interdependent. There may be varying degrees of persuasion and information-sharing within the context of different types of organizational interviews. This is why interviewing researchers must develop a pluralistic approach to theory development. It is not a matter of discovering an all-encompassing theoretical perspective to further our understanding of interviewing; rather, it is a matter of integrating selected perspectives as they apply to particular interviewing situations.

Communication Variables

Another area that has limited our ability to build a theoretical foundation for interviewing is the limited evidence of communication variables in

our studies. Ragan (1983) observed that, "While 'communication skills' are frequently claimed to be the most important factor in a successful interview, these skills have not been explicitly designated, nor do we know how they are demonstrated or recognized in an interview" (p. 5).

Daly and Leth (1976) examined the effect of communication apprehension on the personal selection decision and found that high apprehensive individuals are seen as weaker job candidates than low apprehensive individuals. These researchers also argued that the amount of communication demands of a job could have a significant impact upon the interviewing process and specifically how apprehensive an interviewee might be. In accordance with their findings, it would be reasonable to assume that if the amount of communication demands is important to the interviewing process, the type of communication demands would be of equal importance. This is an area for future research.

Other researchers have examined the impact of source credibility and information favorability on job offer acceptance (Fisher, Ilgen, and Hoyer, 1979). These researchers found that interviewees were more likely to accept jobs when the information about a particular job was favorable and not sup- plied by the interviewer. They suggested that future research should focus on the way impressions of a potential employer are formed and changed in the context of an interview; such research could provide valuable information for potential interviewees. Another area that deserves attention in the inter- viewing literature is the lack of specificity about actual communication behaviors that distinguish good interviews from bad interviews. Watson and Smeltzer (1982) provided evidence which suggests that nonverbal communication behaviors have an effect on interview impressions and decisions. These researchers argued that interviewee eye contact, appearance, and facial

expressions are remembered most by interviewers. Sampugnaro, Wood, and Young (1983) identified a number of nonverbal behaviors a job candidate should exhibit to increase his hireability.

As mentioned earlier, Einhorn (1981) found that successful interviewees as opposed to unsuccessful interviewees used effective rhetorical strategies. Specifically, she found that successful interviewees demonstrated more verbal behavior that identified them with their prospective employers. In yet another study where verbal behaviors were examined, Ragan (1983) found that alignment talk differentiated the power positions of the interviewer and interviewee. In other words, alignment talk substantiated and reinforced the status disparity of the interviewer and the interviewee. She conceded that alignment talk may not be advantageous since it weakens rather than strengthens mutuality between the interviewer and the interviewee. More research investigating the effect of alignment talk upon the relationship of the interviewer and the interviewee is necessary to determine the validity of this argument.

Daly (1978) has suggested that there are a host of unexplored communication variables that are important to our understanding of interviewing. For instance, what type of communicator style is most effective for interviewers and interviewees to achieve their goals? Is perceived communication competence more important than sex or physical appearance variables? Does the interviewer's communicator style have an affect on whether or not an interviewee will distort messages? How does verbal and nonverbal feedback influence the interviewee's performance? To what degree does listening determine the success of an interviewer to predict how well an interviewee will perform in a particular position?

It is evident that researchers have only begun to touch the surface of interviewing questions related directly to communication. This is partially due to the fact that we are not far enough advanced methodologically to pursue some of the foregoing research questions.

Methodological Considerations

Accompanying the theoretical grounding difficulties associated with interviewing research is the absence of research procedures that enable scholars to examine interviewing as a real-life process. Consequently, the validity of our findings and generalizations is questionable. The following is a discussion of the problems contributing to the methodological flaws that exist in past interviewing research.

According to Goodall and Goodall (1982), past selection interviewing research has not made distinctions according to job classifications and categories. One possible result of this may be that our generalized notions about communication behaviors in particular interviewing situations may not be accurate. More research should be devoted to case studies in which the interviewing process can be investigated according to specific jobs.

With the exception of a few studies (Watson and Smeltzer, 1982; Tengler and Jablin, 1983), most of the research conducted to date has employed some form of simulation technique. The problem with investigating simulated interviews is that they do not allow the investigator to account for extraneous variables that could affect the interviewing process.

One of the most plausible alternatives to the foregoing problem has been presented by Tengler and Jablin (1983). These scholars used a room where audio and video tape equipment unobtrusively monitored actual interviews. Interviewees were not told until after the interview that they had been

monitored. While this is an appealing alternative, this procedure presents another problem, that of not notifying subjects of the data collection prior to its taking place. On the other hand, obtaining written consent from subjects prior to data collection could very likely skew the results of an interviewing study.

Another criticism levied against interviewing research procedures is that the type and size of samples used in many studies cause one to question the generalizability of findings. The literature is inundated with studies that employ college students as subjects. In many cases it is not appropriate to generalize from students, because the type of jobs students apply for and the interviewing experiences they undergo may be quite different from those of long-term members of the work force. Again, by employing more case studies researchers should be able to examine a cross-section of applicant types which would make their results more generalizable. It is also evident that the sample sizes of many studies have hindered the ability of researchers to generalize their findings; larger sample sizes will increase the statistical power in the examination of research questions.

Finally, according to Jablin, Tengler, and Teigen (1982), a majority of the research on interviewing has focused on the interviewer. Only a few studies have examined the interviewing process from the interviewee's point of view (Fisher, Ilgen, and Hoyer, 1979; Jablin, Tengler, and Teigen, 1982). If we are going to increase our understanding of the communication interaction that takes place in an interview, it is important that future research examine the communication behaviors of the interviewees more thoroughly.

So far, this paper has sought to present a number of the theoretical and methodological issues with which researchers should be concerned. To date,

the majority of interviewing research has been devoted to the selection inter-
view. Consequently, a vacuum exists in the literature regarding other types
of organizational interviewing processes. The remainder of this paper focuses
on what research has been conducted by communication scholars in connection
with two other forms of organizational interviews and potential areas for
future research for each.

Appraisal Interview

Nemeroff and Cosentino (1979) noted that the appraisal interview is an
integral part of any employee evaluation system. However, communication
scholars have devoted very little attention to investigating the ways in which
the appraisal interview could be an effective vehicle for subordinate develop-
ment. According to O'Donnell-Trujillo (1981), a major problem with investi-
gating the appraisal process is the "definitional impreciseness of performance
dimensions." He argued that when performance dimensions are ambiguous or
undefined, appraisals of job performances are not valid because they are
inconsistent. It appears that one way to make performance dimensions more
explicit may be to more clearly define employees' job descriptions. In having
job descriptions that have been clearly defined, an interviewer is better able
to assess how well an employee is performing in his job. One study found that
managers used an appraisal document for both individual feedback to the
employee and for determination of salary and promotion. As a result,
appraisals were distorted because managers were afraid to hinder employees'
long-term promotional opportunities (Laird and Clampitt, 1982). The problem
with multiple use of an appraisal instrument in part results from this "defi-
nitional impreciseness."

Perrill and Stopek (1981) have attempted to establish a taxonomy of criteria that supervisors use consistently in the appraisal interview. In their study of forty-four organizations, they found twenty-two specific criteria that were consistent among respondents. This appears to be a valuable start in alleviating the definitional problems with the appraisal interview. Future research should involve more replication studies in this area to further determine the usefulness of the criteria mentioned above.

O'Donnell-Trujillo (1981) pointed out that interviewers should be provided with training in how to evaluate work-related behavior. Other scholars have concurred with this point of view by arguing that performance appraisals have not had a significant impact on subordinate job performance because of the lack of managerial skill in conducting the appraisal interview (Cederblom, 1982; Maier, 1958; Nemeroff and Cosentino, 1979). Smilowitz and Holden (1983) addressed this problem by proposing a workshop designed to increase supervisory appraisal interviewing skills.

The appraisal interview has the potential of being an extremely valuable tool for assessing subordinate performance and increasing organizational productivity. However, if researchers are going to gain a better understanding of this tool, several alternative directions for future investigations appear necessary. Specifically, more attention should be given to how practitioners can increase the effectiveness of the appraisal interview. As mentioned above, a more precise definition of performance dimensions would help interviewers to more accurately appraise performance behaviors. In attempting to more clearly define performance dimensions, scholars should examine the appraisal interview situationally. This will allow researchers to more fully account for the uniqueness of various jobs.

Finally, because the appraisal interview involves the potential for a defensive and/or conflictive climate, investigations which look at question sequencing, communicator style, and interaction regulation and control may be particularly worthwhile.

Grievance Interview

The grievance interview is another communication mechanism that is extremely valuable to the organization. It serves as an arena for hearing and acting upon employee complaints, as an outlet for employees to express their frustrations with working conditions, other personnel members, or situational concerns. For management, the greivance interview may serve as a useful feed-back mechanism.

Hellweg and Sullivan (1983) developed a profile of current grievance interviewing practices in major American corporations. Outside of this investigation, virtually no grievance interviewing research is evident in the literature which has been conducted by communication scholars. With the increasing pervasiveness and impact of unions in organizations, greater research emphasis should be placed upon investigating the effects of various communicative behaviors in the grievance interviewing context. Future research should examine the type of questions and sequencing of questions associated with effective and ineffective grievance interviews, as well as the effects of communicator style, communication competence, communication appre-hension, message types, and the use of various conflict strategies on the grievance interview.

Conclusions

It has been the attempt of this paper to bring to surface those issues that have hindered the progress of organizational interviewing research in recent years. On the basis of our analysis of the literature, we offer the following recommendations:

(1) An integrative approach to theory development should be adopted, one which recognizes the situational differences of various organizational interviewing contexts.

(2) Interviewing methodologies need to be strengthened to enhance the generalizability of research findings, specifically through increasing sample sizes, and moving from simulated research contexts to real ones.

(3) Greater focus needs to be given in our research efforts upon communicative variables in the interviewing process, variables which are less in the domain of personnel psychologists and which pertain to message-related behaviors.

(4) Interviewing research in organizational contexts needs to be validated and qualified in view of various job classifications (at minimum, white collar versus blue collar classifications).

(5) Increased research efforts need to be made in the context of other organizational forms of interviewing than the selection interview. While it may be the most pervasive interview within organizations, it may not always have the most potential for critical, long-lasting effects. Increased attention by communication scholars should be given to the performance appraisal, reprimand, grievance, and exit interviews.

(6) Future research should test and further validate coding schemes utilized in organizational interviewing contexts. Hawes (1972) developed such a

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system based upon sixteen videotaped and audio recorded thirty-minute
physician-patient interviews. By developing and validating coding
schemes, we may learn a great deal about the contingencies of interviewer
and interviewee communication behaviors in the organizational context.

(7) The development and validation of prototypical scripts for organizational
interviews through empirical investigation may also prove to be a rich
source of communicative data, if this is indeed feasible. Donnellon,
Gioia, and Sims (1983) utilized speech act theory and discourse analysis
to develop consensual "scripts" for performance appraisal interviews.
From their analysis, they generated a generic script for such interviews,
as well as variations for high and low performers. While the data from
the study are compelling, it is important to note that the researchers
utilized simulated interviews in generating their findings. Scripting
needs to be tested in real-life organizational environments and with
other types of interviews besides that of the performance appraisal.
Conditional contingencies of such interviews also need to be further
identified.

(8) Finally, the implications of communication rules and relational analysis
development as well as other interpersonal communication theoretical
frameworks need to be determined in organizational interviews. For
example, Brown and Levinson's (1978) concept of politeness strategies may
be particularly useful in the investigation of performance appraisal
interviews.

As Daly (1978) has pointed out, "the interviewing literature is replete
with research and theoretical opportunities for the communication scholar"

(p. 17). It is our hope that this paper has been helpful in stimulating its

further development.

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