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Employee Interview Panel Training in Local Government:

Best Practices for Raters

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Alia A. Rodriguez

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by Alia A. Rodriguez

This dissertation written by

Alia A. Rodriguez

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Dr. Mark P. Kling, Committee Chair

Dr. Elaine Ahumada, Committee Member

Dr. Kristen Huyck, Committee Member

Dirk Davis, Ed.D., Associate Vice President of Academics

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to explore how local government organizations train or prepare raters for their role of serving on a job interview panel and to discover the best practices of this process. A qualitative methodology was used to execute the study with a naturalistic approach that offered the examination of real-world, nonmanipulated situations and experiences. A grounded theory design was utilized to organically allow theory to emerge while discovering the current processes in place. Data were collected using various social media platforms that sought specific participants to complete an open-ended, nonrandom survey related to their experiences as a rater on an interview panel. The survey was closed when saturation was reached, and no further unique themes were discovered. Data were analyzed for validity and reliability before being bracketed during the coding process to look for emerging themes. This study contributes to the efficiency and effectiveness of raters that participate in interview panels in a local government setting.

Keywords: interview panelists, raters, training, local government, hiring practices

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To my beautiful daughters Zuriah and Aven: every moment spent with you I become a little surer that anything is possible. Put your hand on your heart and know that in you are power, fervent love, and a pure and intense strength to change the world.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Background

Over the past several decades, the face-to-face interview has been one of the most commonly used employment selection methods (Arvey, 1979b; Carnahan, 2007; Levashina, Hartwell, Morgeson, & Campion, 2014; Tsai, Hsinhung Chen, Chen, & Tseng, 2016). A face-to-face interview is a data collection method where the interviewer, or “rater,” directly communicates with the candidate in accordance with the prepared questionnaire or set of interview questions (Levashina et al., 2014). This method allows an interviewer to verify and/or clarify what the candidate has submitted on the formal application, along with the attitudes, preferences, and other pertinent information during the conversation with the applicant. This process has become so traditional that some claim it is rare or unthinkable to hire without the implementation of this process (Huffcutt & Culbertson, 2011). Face-to-face interviews can often be used throughout the hiring process, beginning with the initial screening to the final stages in the selection process and in varying steps.

However, it is also imperative to understand the common practices of the selection and screening process that gets a candidate to the interview process. According to the Society for Human Resource Management ([SHRM], 2018), the processes most employers in government use to find and select the best talent possible for an open position include the following: (a) posting an open position on career sites to solicit resumes and employment applications, (b) prescreening to eliminate candidates who do not meet the basic requirements of the position, and (c) using a preliminary assessment to screen out those who lack the desired level of skills and competencies for the job. The guiding principle behind any question asked of an applicant, whether in an interview or on the employer's application form, should be to determine whether the applicant is qualified for the position and possesses what the employer is looking for.

Spoils System

In the early 1800s, Andrew Jackson extended Thomas Jefferson's platform of the spoils system process, which allowed elected officials to reward political supporters with government jobs since loyalty was seen as a more important qualification for a job than competence or merit. Some believed that this administrative process was necessary to ensure loyal, passionate, and compliant supporters of the presidential administration in the civil service. However, some argued that appointments to office were based on the needs of the party rather than a person's qualifications or skills to do the job and often led to abuses of political power designed to benefit and enrich the ruling party (Llorens, Klingner, & Nalbandian, 2017). Although this customary practice lived until a fairer, merit-based system was developed, the spoils system often led to displacement of office staff for political partisans, corruption, and favoritism.

During the years of 1883-1937, personnel administration developed into systems based on merit rather than political patronage. Most significantly, the Pendleton Act of 1883 stood as a pillar for the change from benefaction to capability-based hiring practices. Although this change was necessary, it was not until the early 1900s that the scientific management principles of position classification, competency scales, and equitable labor costs became prevalent in the recruitment, selection, and assessment process (Llorens et al., 2017). As the world of public personnel management continued to evolve, more sophisticated and stringent regulations formed to protect the rights of employees in the public workforce.

Civil Rights Act

In response to the increase of racial tension in America, President Kennedy recommended an all-encompassing legislative action called the Civil Rights Act, which addressed voting rights, public accommodations, discrimination in employment, and education (Posthuma, Morgeson, & Campion, 2002). The proposed legal solutions, the president argued, "are the embodiment of this Nation's basic posture of common sense and common justice," and protect the rights that most Americans take for granted (Gregory, 2014, p. ix). President Kennedy then spoke to his concerns on employment discrimination and stated that the "democratic principle that no man should be denied employment commensurate with his abilities because of his race or creed or ancestry" (Dreiband & Swearingen 2015, p. 1). In President Kennedy's pleas to Congress, sex discrimination was never cited or referenced. However, a little over year after Kennedy was assassinated, Public Law 88-352 statute included the provisions of a Civil Rights Act that prevented discrimination on the basis of sex and race in hiring, promoting, and firing, passed (Constitutional Rights Foundation, 2018). In the final legislation, Section 703a made it unlawful for an employer to "fail or refuse to hire or to discharge any person, or otherwise to discriminate against any individual with respect to his compensation, terms, conditions or privileges or employment, because of such individual's race, color, religion, sex, or national origin" (U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission [EEOC], 1991).

Through the 11 titles, the law outlined the various problems with discrimination, including race, color, religion, and natural origin, which were addressed in different contexts ranging from voter rights to federal financial assistance (Civil Rights Movement, 2018; EEOC, 1991; U.S. Office of Personnel Management, 2008). However, it was Title VII that specifically spoke to discrimination in employment. Although often sparking litigation, Title VII was meant "to encourage informal conciliation and to foster voluntary compliance" through "the creation of anti-harassment policies and effective grievance mechanisms" (Bond-Nelms, 2018, p. 3; see also EEOC, 1991; U.S. Office of Personnel Management, 2008). Amended several times, Title VII currently makes it unlawful for an employer

> To limit, segregate, or classify employees or applicants for employment in any way which would deprive or tend to deprive any individual of employment opportunities or otherwise adversely affect the status as an employee, because of such individual's race, color, religion, sex, or national origin. (EEOC, 1991, Section 703(a); see also SHRM, 2015).

The EEOC was formed by Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and was implemented on July 2, 1965. The mandate and authority of the EEOC was set forth in Title VII and expanded in later laws enacted by Congress (EEOC, 1991). During the past 52 years, the EEOC has grown and now includes the following areas:

- The Age Discrimination in Employment Act of 1967 (ADEA) prohibits discrimination against workers age 40 and older.

- The Pregnancy Discrimination Act of 1978 (PDA) prohibits discrimination based on pregnancy, childbirth, or related medical conditions and requires employers to treat pregnancy and pregnancy-related medical conditions as any other medical disability.
- The Equal Pay Act (EPA) prohibits sex discrimination in the payment of wages to men and women performing significantly equal work in the same company
- Titles I and V of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) prohibits employment discrimination based on disability by private and state and local government employers.
- Title II of the Genetic Information Nondiscrimination Act of 2008 (GINA) prohibits employment discrimination based on a potential candidate or employee's genetic information—including family medical history.

Cumulatively, these laws help protect individuals from employment discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, disability, and genetic information (Aziz, 2014). Additionally, these laws make it illegal to retaliate against a person for opposing employment discrimination, filing a charge of discrimination, or participating in an investigation or lawsuit regarding employment discrimination (Aziz, 2014).

The EEOC examines the intent behind the question, as well as how the information is used, to determine whether any discrimination has occurred (EEOC, 1991). As a general rule, state and federal equal opportunity laws prohibit preemployment inquiries that disproportionately screen out members based on protected status unless some business purpose justifies the questions. The EEOC and state agencies take the position that the information obtained through preemployment inquiries should be aimed solely at determining qualifications without regard to criteria based on irrelevant, non-job-related factors (California Department of Fair Employment and Housing, 2017; EEOC, 1991; SHRM, 2018). Selection decisions should be well supported and based on a person's qualifications for the position. Accordingly, agencies have viewed inquiries that reveal information bearing no relationship to the job qualifications (e.g., year of graduation from high school, childcare arrangements, country of origin) as evidence of an employer's discriminatory intent (Berrey, Hoffman, & Nielsen, 2012; Fasbender & Wang, 2017). The purpose of an employment application and resume review is to screen out applicants who do not meet the basic requirements for a position (e.g., minimum experience or education, willingness to relocate, salary requirements). Although technology has radically changed this step for those using applicant tracking systems, many human resources (HR) practitioners still screen each resume or application manually.

During the employment interview, an employer will attempt to ascertain and verify the critical skills of a candidate in ways that cannot be done solely with a written test (Heimbaugh, 2016). Specific questions during the interview are developed to determine how the candidate can analyze a situation, create a solution, deal with difficult situations, or match his or her skills with the job (Macan, 2009; Tsai et al., 2016). For example, an interviewer may ask a candidate to explain a time when the candidate had to work quickly against a pending deadline or to describe why he or she would be the best person for the job. Typically, raters can ask follow-up questions to dig deeper into the candidates' critical thinking process to see whether they fit the skill sets that the organization needs for a successful employee. However, there are many other factors an interviewer considers when interviewing, such as how questions are answered, how the interviewees communicate the responses, how well the interviewees maintain eye contact, and how candidates presents themselves, their personality, and more. Since the face-to-face interview is witnessed independently, interviewers must remain objective and assess candidates for the position they are interviewing for.

When an interviewer is engaged in an employment interview with a candidate, it is imperative to listen to hear how the candidate answers the questions (Lee Flores, 2014; Powell, Hughes-Scholes & Sharman, 2012; Pulakos, 2005). One thing to look for is the body language of the interviewee to determine whether candidates are demonstrating signs of being physically uncomfortable, such as shifting their eyes, fidgeting, or avoiding eye contact. Depending on the position, these types of nonverbal cues can be just as important to the employer because these skills can only be judged during a face-to-face interview (Degroot & Gooty, 2009; Pulakos, 2005). Consequently, candidates' appearance can also be equally important—or at least contribute to the initial impression that may ultimately shape the interviewer's perception of them. It may not be completely fair to claim that appearance does not matter; however, studies have shown that judgments and assumptions are often made based solely on how a person looks (Fox Rothschild LLP, 2014; Johnson, Podratz, Dipboye, & Gibbons, 2010; Shahani-Denning, 2003). If a poor impression is made because of a nonprofessional outfit, unsanitary characteristics, or simply a disheveled look, then the qualifications, skills, experiences, and educational component may not account for much (Fessler, 2017; Flint et al., 2016). Recruits who do not take the time to maintain a professional impression for an employment interview can hurt their chances of getting selected.

The employment interview allows both parties to exchange information, ask questions, and evaluate the potential for establishing a professional working relationship (Berman et al., 2016; Yahiaoui, Anser, & Lahouel, 2015). This practice not only enables an organization to learn more about an applicant but also allows the candidate the opportunity to become familiar with the demands of a given position and determine whether they choose the organization as well (Arvey, 1979b; Jacobson & Sowa, 2015). In other words, both parties have an opportunity to get a feel for one another and determine whether the chemistry is right. The fit, or chemistry, is just as essential as the qualifications and skills because it contributes into the overall organization and culture.

Organizational culture stems from many things but is usually defined, nurtured, and protected from the inception of the organization, or it comes about organically as a collection of the beliefs, experiences, and behaviors of those on the team (Lee Flores, 2014; Levashina et al., 2014). Once the organizational culture has been defined, ideally every action, strategy, decision, and communication should support the cultural beliefs, including all HR processes from recruitment and hiring to the performance review systems. Hiring employees who do not “fit” well with the existing or desired company culture can lead to poor work quality, decreased job satisfaction, and a potentially toxic environment (SHRM, 2015). According to SHRM (2015), “The interview to assess cultural fit is important, because company cultures can vary greatly, and not every employee will do well or be happy in every culture” (p. 4). Such detrimental results can ultimately lead to turnover which has high costs—both fiscally and non-fiscally (Izard-Carroll, 2016).

Preliminary assessment of candidates can be conducted through in-person interviews, panel interviews, video interviews, or any combination of the three. The three key goals of employment interviews are to find out as much as possible about the candidates' knowledge, to learn how they have applied and tested work skills, and to determine where their abilities are (Arvey, 1979a; Macan, 2009). Ideally, each of the questions raters ask during a typical 1-hour interview should provide the most insight into the candidates' knowledge, skills, and abilities. Organizations have now become more rigorous and sophisticated in the selection process. As a result, many governmental organizations use a panel interview to rate and assess the candidates (Frieder, Van Iddekinge, & Raymark, 2016). There are several local government jurisdictions within the Riverside County and San Bernardino areas of Southern California that utilized the employment interview, such as the County of Riverside, City of Moreno Valley, City of Riverside, City of Corona, City of Temecula, City of Rancho Cucamonga, City of Redlands, and more.

A panel interview involves being interviewed by multiple people simultaneously, which can range from personnel within or outside an organization, professionals who are deemed qualified, or experts in the field, and perhaps a person from the HR department. Research has suggested that a typical panel consists of two or more persons who have extensive knowledge of the job and are trained in administering interviews (U.S. Office of Personnel Management, 2008). According to SHRM (2016),

> When selecting interviewers, do not base your selection decision solely on convenient schedules of the potential interviewers. It is imperative that you think strategically about the responsibility of conducting fair and effective interviews to

ensure that the interviewers you have selected are the right people for that role. (p. 8)

Along with aforementioned aspects, the interviewer's mannerisms and ability to conduct the interview are paramount. According to researchers, the panelist should become familiar with the types of questions and topics that must be avoided in an interview (Camp, Schulz, Vielhaber, & Wagner-Marsh, 2011; Huffcutt & Woehr, 1999). According to the EEOC, employer/panelists cannot ask about race, color or national origin, religion, sex, gender identity or sexual orientation, pregnancy status, disability, age or genetic information, citizenship status, marital status, or number of children (EEOC, 1991). In addition, interviewers should familiarize themselves with areas that are not permissible as interview questions or throughout the selection process. For example, questions related to age, sex, race, color, national origin, religion, genetics, or disabilities should be avoided entirely both directly and indirectly (California Department of Fair Employment and Housing, 2017; EEOC, 1991). Specifications of various federal and state laws affect the types of questions that organizations may ask an applicant during an employment interview.

Although recruiting and selecting a candidate for a vacant employment position weighs heavily on job related qualifications and experiences, organizational fit is also paramount. Organizational fit is viewed as one's ability to mesh with the "attitudes, beliefs, customs, and written and unwritten rules" of an organization ("Organizational Culture," n.d., p. 1). This is directly connected with the overall "organizational culture" (n.d.) of the workplace, which identifies the following:

(1) the ways the organization conducts its business, treats its employees, customers, and the wider community,

(2) the extent to which freedom is allowed in decision making, developing new ideas, and personal expression,

(3) how power and information flow through its hierarchy, and

(4) how committed employees are towards collective objectives. (p. 1)

According to an article by Quillian, Pager, and Midtbøen (2017) in *Harvard Business Review*, hiring an employee for organizational/cultural fit should be vetted thoroughly during the recruitment and selection process. In order for this to occur, the organization should first identify what their culture is and ensure that human resources, the hiring manager, and the interview panelists are clear as well. The culture can be identified in a variety of ways, including hiring an external consultant or as defined in the organizations' mission statement. Once this is understood, the personnel involved with the selection process can determine what characteristics are ideal for the candidate and can assess said skills through the interview process and interview questions. Training for the raters on the interview panel is highly recommended because it can be difficult to strike a balance between assessing a candidate for organizational culture fit, ensuring discrimination does not occur, and including diversity (Berrey, 2014; U.S. Office of Personnel Management, 2008). When considering the evaluation of these intangible criteria, it is critical to understand the potential benefits and setbacks. Some of the benefits include the following:

- Happier and more productive employees
- Shared values

- Cohesiveness amongst staff
- Reduction of turnover (Hennigan & Evans, 2018).

HR professionals claim that one major result of hiring an employee who does not fit the culture can lead to turnover which can ultimately cost an organization between 50-60% of the employee's annual salary (SHRM, 2017). Some of the cons to including culture fit assessment into the interview process are the following:

1. The assessment process can lead to bias and subjectivity
2. Lack of diversity
3. Homogeneity can lead to stagnant work performance and lack of innovation (Hennigan & Evans, 2018).

It can be understood that seeking a cultural/organizational fit is important because it allows an alignment of core values, opinions, and attitudes which can be huge for developing or maintaining a positive organizational culture (Gioaba & Krings, 2017). However, this ideology must be explored with the mindset that a highly skilled, high-performing candidate who does not seem to fit at first glance can also have many benefits (SHRM, 2017). These candidates may impact the existing culture in a positive way through being diverse in their ways of thinking, being a smart risk taker, and possessing an openness to learn and make mistakes.

The use of interviewing candidates for the workplace is not only commonly used but has various elements that can be considered in order to administer a fair, equitable, and legitimate process. This begins with identifying a position within an organization, enacting the recruitment process, screening of applicants, selecting panelists/raters for the interview, conducting the interview or interviews, gauging organizational fit, and finally selecting the successful candidate. Although these practices are commonly used and can seem somewhat routine, organizations need to ensure they are understanding, acknowledging, and adhering to the laws and statutes of the hiring process. This protects candidates and employers alike.

Laws and Statutes Governing the Hiring Process

It is vital for interviewers to understand the employment laws of the state in which they are operating and to be familiar with the federal and state legal provisions regulating the types of questions permissible in an employment interview (Arvey, 1979b; Camp et al., 2011; Capman, 2017; Hennigan & Evans, 2018).

The Civil Rights Act of 1964, Title VII, was written to prevent discrimination based on race, sex, color, national origin, or religion (Arvey, 1979b; Bell, 1986; Berman et al., 2016; Bond-Nelms, 2018). The ADEA of 1967 prohibits questions about a candidate's age (California Department of Fair Employment and Housing, 2017; EEOC, 1991). The inclusive ADA protects qualified people with disabilities from discrimination in employment (Brecher, Bragger, & Kutcher, 2006; Moore, 2012; Strand, 2015). The GINA of 2008 prohibits employers from collecting and using genetic information (California Department of Fair Employment and Housing, 2017; Sinckler, 2014). The 1978 Uniform Guidelines on Employee Selection Procedures, though not an actual legislation or law, has been given respect by the courts in litigation concerning employment issues (Arvey, 1979b; Posthuma et al., 2002; Williamson, Campion, Malos, Roehling, & Campion, 1997; Posthuma et al., 2002). All of these acts are prohibited and can lead to allegations of unfair hiring practices during the hiring process, including the interview.

Depending on the number of candidates to be interviewed, there are a variety of interview methods that can be used, such as

1. Initial phone interviews to narrow down a large list of candidates and then invite the top candidates in for face-to-face interviews;
2. Individual interview between hiring manager and candidate;
3. Panel interview; and
4. Multi-interviewer approach (immediate supervisor interviews the candidate one-on-one followed by a panel interview of peers).

There are many possible combinations; however, a two- or three-person interview panel is recommended (U.S. Department of State Bureau of Human Resources, 2005). In most workplaces, interviews are typically conducted either by one person, usually the hiring supervisor, or a panel, which consists of two or more persons who have extensive knowledge of the job and are trained in administering interviews (U.S. Office of Personnel Management, 2008). Panel interviews can be more advantageous over interviewing alone since interviewing with others can help panelists compare their reactions to the information provided and how well they believe the candidates match the requirements of the position. Even an experienced interviewer can miss vital information or be misled by personal biases. The best check against this is to compare conclusions with other interviewers. To the extent possible, members of an interview panel should be diverse and composed of individuals having various relationships to the position (U.S. Office of Personnel Management, 2008).

It is essential to train the person who will administer the structured interview. Interviewer training increases the accuracy of the interview. Before or during the training, the interviewer should receive a guide or clear directions describing the interview process in detail. The training should emphasize the importance of notetaking, discuss the impact of the interviewer's nonverbal behavior, and review common rating biases and errors.

HR departments are encouraged to train interviewers on the execution of the questions, friendliness, demeanor, and common/hidden interviewer biases or any behavior that can be interpreted as discriminatory in order to execute the best interview practices. The purpose of this study was to explore the patterns and trends of how local government municipalities train raters to serve on employment interview panels and determine the best practices for the interview process.

Statement of the Problem

Evolution of Hiring Practices

When the world was first created, there was "work," and there were "jobs" that had to be fulfilled by mankind, whether it was to eat or to protect. Regardless of the kind of work, there was a requirement of some type of skillset, such as hunting skills, planning, logic, and knowledge in order to accomplish the task at hand. For example, because of their brute strength, men in the beginning of time hunted while women were tasked with gathering food. As time evolved into the Greek and Roman era, the work force was more clearly identified and did not simply revolve around survival and food. Ancient Rome was a complex society that required a number of different job functions and skills to function, such as farmers, soldiers, merchants, craftsman, entertainers, and teachers, while most of the menial tasks were delegated to slaves (Betancourt, 1972). One of the more prominent job fields was in the government. The governments of Rome and Greece were massive with jobs ranging from tax collectors and clerks to high ranking positions such as senators. These officials often served in their positions until death but coached apprentices to be their successors and often passed their profession from generation to generation (Betancourt, 1972). As time progressed through the Anglo-Saxon, Medieval, Tudor, Restoration, and Enlightenment eras, the importance of having skilled employees became paramount.

While the personnel management of public administration was evolving, most of the concerns of hiring practices stemmed from the spoils system in the early 1800s during presidential running's for political office. This ideology circulated around the approval of individual hiring decisions based on a person's loyalty to the appointing official rather than qualifications to perform the work. As the political patronage systems began to be minimized, new processes were introduced to help with the equity and fairness of employee selection—such as the employment interview.

Though it is not certain when the employment interview was incepted or developed, many scholars tie the birth of the employment interview to Thomas Edison. Edison had a dilemma with having several hundred applicants who wished to work with him. He realized that he needed some way to quickly identify the most qualified applicants and developed a series of over 100 questions to evaluate their knowledge (Bell, 1986; Dennis, 1984). Although many of the questions were relevant to the job being sought, many were more general and related to common knowledge. Since very few applicants could answer all the questions, Thomas Edison developed a way of categorizing and selecting the most qualified candidates from a large pool. Newspapers of the day wrote about Edison's approach to selecting candidates (Martins, 2016), and other industry leaders began developing their own employment questions, which eventually evolved into the employment interview process in use today.

Today, there is perhaps no more widely used selection procedure than the employment interview (Arvey, 1979b; Carnahan, 2007; Levashina et al., 2014; Tsai et al., 2016). Although there are many different types of employment interviews being used today, all interviews can be categorized as either following a structured approach or an unstructured approach.

Structured interviews. According to the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (2008), a structured interview is an assessment process designed to measure the job-related competencies of candidates through a systematic approach inquiring about their behavior in past experiences and/or behavior in hypothetical situations. The intent of structured interviews is to ensure candidates have equal opportunities to provide information and are assessed accurately and consistently (U.S. Office of Personnel Management, 2008). Additionally, some benefits of structured interviews are:

- They can evaluate competencies that are difficult to measure using other assessment methods (e.g., interpersonal skills)
- All candidates are asked the same pre-scripted questions in the same order
- All responses are evaluated using the same rating scale and standards for acceptable answers.

To expand, this method is used to connect interview questions to specific criteria that are essential to perform in the job and to which such competencies are typically used as the context for structuring the interview (Brecher et al., 2006). The skills are identified and based on a job analysis, which is a systematic review of what it takes to be successful in the position, between HR and the hiring manager or department. Questions are then prewritten to safeguard that the same questions are asked of each candidate. This helps to ensure a consistent, equitable, and fair process in which all candidates will have the same opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge, skills, and background to perform the job. During this process, ratings are integrated with a uniform method to come to an overall score and develop a profile of the candidate's key strengths and weaknesses.

Unstructured interviews. Unstructured interviews are contrary to structured interviews by the execution being more like a casual conversation than planned. This method tends to be more flexible, free-flowing, open-ended, and informal (Chrysler-Fox & Roodt, 2014; Dipboye, Gaugler, Hayes, & Parker, 2001). The interview questions are not specific although there are usually specific topics that the interviewers wish to cover. Although this provides the interview with some structure and direction, it is still much more loosely based and is often deemed unreliable (Chen, Chen, & Lin, 2013). According to psychologists, because of the potential for subjectivity and bias, "an unstructured interview process leaves an organization particularly vulnerable to legal attack" (State of Oklahoma Office of Personnel Management, 2001, p. ix). For example, each interviewer can decide where they would like to focus their information gathering, each interviewer can use their evaluation framework for evaluating responses, and each interviewer can integrate the interview responses in their way to reach conclusions. With both structured and unstructured interviews, there are some standard formats that are utilized.

Individual interview. The individual interview involves a candidate sitting down with a single interviewer or a one-on-one approach. This tactic allows for an in-depth understanding between the candidate and the interviewer based solely on the viewpoint of one individual. For this interview, whether it is the first, second, or third round, the interview process is much faster which is beneficial for both the employer and the employee. The downside to this is that the person doing the interviewing may be the only opinion or assessment in the process of determining the candidate's success—or lack thereof—which can be a benefit or a liability. Additionally, the interviewer may not be representative of the hiring department or the employees who would be working side by side with the candidate.

Panel interview. A panel interview involves a group of interviewers asking the candidate questions. The interview questions can be developed from a variety of sources, such as the hiring department, the panelists, and/or HR; however, in local government, HR provides the final approval for the questions used (U.S. Office of Personnel Management, 2008). The positives of this method are that it allows more employees to ask questions, allowing for multiple viewpoints, and can reduce bias and subjectivity. The main drawback to this method is the lack of one-on-one communication, which can offer depth and can be a greater assessment of cultural fit. It can be understood that seeking a cultural/organizational fit is important because it allows an alignment of core values, opinions, and attitudes which can be huge for developing or maintaining a positive organizational culture (Gioaba & Krings, 2017). However, this ideology must be explored with the mindset that a highly skilled, high-performing candidate who does not seem to fit at first glance can also have many benefits (SHRM, 2017). These candidates may impact the existing culture in a positive way through being diverse in their ways of thinking, being a smart risk taker, and possessing an openness to learn and make mistakes.

Multiple round interview. On the other hand, many organizations can have multiple interviews that employ a combination of the panel and individual interviews. The advantages of this approach are that the organization reaps the benefits of the panel interview with multiple interviewers being involved in the hiring process, as well as the one-on-one interaction that allows an interviewer to get a feel for a candidate and better understand whether they are a good fit for the jurisdiction's culture. The downside, however, is that this can slow down the interview process because the candidate must complete multiple rounds of interviews. If the process takes too long, it could increase the risk of losing a candidate to another job or increase the cost of hiring.

Hiring Practices, Stereotypes, Biases, Prejudices, and Discrimination

Employment selection is one of the most critical components of organizations as the investment in human capital is paramount to the overall efficiency and effectiveness of the jurisdiction (Arvey, 1979b; Ashraf, 2017; Carnahan, 2007; Tsai et al., 2016). Despite advancements in technology, hiring managers still need to seek the professional qualifications of employees, including expert knowledge in the field, skillset, and competencies related to the department or profession (U.S. Office of Personnel Management, 2008). Selecting employees to interview is the part of the process by which an employer evaluates information about the selected applicants generated during the recruitment phase (Llorens et al., 2017). After assessing the candidates, the organization decides which applicant will be offered the position.

Attempting to avoid bias during recruitment decisions and job interviews is essential because everyone is biased in one way or another (Belle, Cantarelli, & Belardinelli, 2017; Brecher et al., 2006). Although stereotypes, biases, and prejudices can come from cultural conditioning, upbringing, experiences, or something else, organizations should try to ensure that these opinions are not discriminatory and that they do not affect the decisions which can be detrimental to the jurisdiction. HR departments and upper management have a responsibility to actively work toward removing these stereotypes, biases, and prejudices during the job interview process. This not only supports superior recruitment but also assists in saving the organization from the threat of any litigation that might ensue (Huffcutt, Van Iddekinge & Roth, 2011; Joyner, Cox, White-Harris, & Blalock, 2007; Tibbo, 1995). Some research has shown that during first encounters, interviewers make snap, unconscious judgments heavily influenced by existing unconscious biases and beliefs (Chamberlain, 2016; Dipboye, 1982; Macan, 2009). For example, it is common in an interview to change from assessing the intricacies of a candidate's competencies to looking for evidence that confirms the initial impression without realizing it (Powell et al., 2012). Psychologists call this confirmation bias. Alternatively, research has also shown that training can help reduce the bias and subjectivity of the evaluation process and provides interviewers a standard frame of reference for evaluating candidates (Alweis, Fitzpatrick, & Donato, 2015).

There are laws in place to protect discrimination related to gender, age, disability, pregnancy, marital status, veteran status, sexual orientation, nationality, religion, race, ethnicity, and numerous other issues (EEOC, 1991). The interviewer should be aware of laws pertaining to hiring practices to help reduce the threat of litigation liability (Lee Flores, 2014; Mahajan, 2007; Williamson et al., 1997).

Why Training Matters

For many organizations, it is customary to have internal employees or employees from similar agencies serve on an interview panel. However, these interviewers have their day-to-day roles and responsibilities outside of recruiting, and interviewing is not always a trade they are familiar with (Camp et al., 2011; U.S. Department of State Bureau of Human Resources, 2005; Vermont Department of Human Resources, 2009). It is the responsibility of the HR department to assist employees in preparing to conduct the interviews, and it is central for a successful recruitment process (U.S. Office of Personnel Management, 2008). The recruitment process is twofold—to identify the best candidate for the job and provide a great experience for the candidate so they will consider or accept the offer and to maintain the organization's reputation (Viswesvaran & Ones, 2004; Yahiaoui et al., 2015). Training interviewers to recognize and secure superior talent can help ensure an efficient process for all involved.

Interviewer training should begin with fundamental instruction, such as guiding panelists how to ask the right questions, how to evaluate answers to identify the best candidates, how to identify illegal interview questions that should avoid being asked, how to maintain proper documentation, and how to evaluate candidates fairly through unconscious bias training (Camp et al., 2011; U.S. Department of State Bureau of Human Resources, 2005; Vermont Department of Human Resources, 2009; West Virginia Division of Personnel Staffing, 2004). Additionally, department-specific training for questions on technical skills is encouraged, especially if the hiring department is not on the panel. Subsequently, interviewers should be trained on how to provide a great candidate experience that includes warmth, sincerity, a friendly demeanor, full attention, and respect (Chamberlain, 2016; Chen et al., 2013; Cliffordson, 2002). One common blunder is that although interviewers are focusing on evaluating candidates, they may forget that candidates are also evaluating them in return (Farago, Zide, & Shahani-Denning, 2013; Ganguly, 2017; Gousie, 1993). Hiring personnel should want all candidates to walk away from the interview with a positive impression of the organization, whether hired or rejected. This ideology can be beneficial not solely to secure the top candidate, but so others will consider the organization for future opportunities and speak highly of the business within their networks (Dose, 2003; Gholston, 2015).

It is also critical for interviewers to be familiar with the employment laws of the state in which they are operating and to be well versed in the federal and state legal provisions regulating the types of questions permissible in an employment interview. For example, some questions that appear innocent on the surface may be considered discriminatory in nature. Employers should determine in advance of the interview whether the information sought by each question is really necessary for assessing an applicant's competence or qualifications for the job. Awareness of laws, such as the PDA, ADA, and the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Title VII, can help reduce the threat of litigation liability and other unfair hiring practices that were seen in the spoils system (Lee Flores, 2014; Mahajan, 2007; Williamson et al., 1997).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore how local government organizations train or prepare raters for their role of serving on a job interview panel and to discover the best practices of this process. This study contributes to the field of public administration because the job interview is the most common method of hiring public sector employees and where the investment of human capital in the workplace begins. As raters conducting an employment interview, it is their responsibility to evaluate the qualifications of applicants and make employment selections on the basis of job-related skills, experiences, and qualifications only. Considering that raters, or interview panelists, have a legitimate power to screen candidates for employment, they must safeguard that the successful candidate has gone through a fair, equitable, and legal interview. This means providing consistency with how the interview is executed, including using the most appropriate assessment format (using structured vs unstructured interview questions), practicing note-taking, employing proper interviewing techniques, communicating effectively, minimizing bias, and adhering to the legal obligations to the hiring process.

Some government organizations offer extensive manuals and training programs focusing on developing and administering structured interviews while stressing the importance of training interviewers (Camp et al., 2011; U.S. Department of State Bureau of Human Resources, 2005; Vermont Department of Human Resources, 2009). These guides dictate the ways in which panels are to ask interview questions, establish rapport with candidates, deliver effective questioning, maintain proper documentation, practice careful evaluation of answers, apply rating scales, and provide a format to reduce the level of biases and prejudices within the interview to hire the "right" candidate. The purpose of this study was to explore the best practices of how interview panelists are trained or prepared for their role.

Research Questions

1. How are raters trained to serve on interview panels in local government organizations?
2. What are the best practices for preparing a rater to sit on an interview panel?

Significance of the Problem

The employment interview has been and remains one of the most commonly used selection methods in past years (Arvey, 1979a; Carnahan, 2007; Levashina et al., 2014; Tsai et al., 2016). The interview process allows both parties to exchange information, ask questions, and evaluate the potential for establishing a professional working relationship (Berman et al., 2016; Yahiaoui et al., 2015). This system not only enables an organization to learn more about an applicant but allows the candidate the opportunity to become familiar with the demands of a given position and determine whether they choose the organization as well (Arvey, 1979a; Jacobson & Sowa, 2015).

During this procedure it is vital for interviewers to understand the employment laws of the state in which they are operating and to be familiar with the federal and state legal provisions regulating the types of questions permissible in an employment interview to confirm procedures are being adhered to (Arvey, 1979a; Camp et al., 2011; Capman, 2017; Hennigan & Evans, 2018). HR departments are encouraged to train interviewers on the execution of the questions, friendliness, demeanor, and common/ hidden interviewer biases or any behavior that can be interpreted as discriminatory.

Despite their universality, job interviews are susceptible to various well-documented biases (Bass, 2017; Brecher et al. 2006; Dipboye, 1982; Hausdorf, 1997). For instance, applicants who share obvious surface similarities with their interviewers are more likely to be hired than those who do not (Garcia, Posthuma & Colella, 2008; Knight, 2017). Despite such potential problems, however, employers show no sign of abandoning interviews as a selection tool in part because of their average ability to predict job-related performance (Huffcutt & Arthur, 1994; McDaniel, Whetzel, Schmidt, & Maurer, 1994). The challenge then lies in improving the interview process by reducing causes of bias (Dipboye, 1982; Dipboye et al., 2001; Frazer & Wiersma, 2001; Garcia et al., 2008). Because the employment selection process is one of the most critical components of organizations, the investment in safeguarding an efficient, effective, fair, and equitable hiring practice is paramount to the overall jurisdiction (Arvey, 1979b; Ashraf, 2017; Carnahan, 2007; Tsai et al., 2016). In order to preserve the equity and fairness of hiring practices, specifically the interview process, organizations should strive to streamline policies, practices, and decisions among the whole of the institute. This system revolves around procedural justice theory which pertains to the decision-making, policy, and procedure established in the organization (Maurer, Solamon, & Lippstreu, 2008). Procedural justice works to ensure that the most respectful and fair decision is made, regardless of the situation (Levashina et al., 2014; Pulakos, 2005; Williamson et al., 1997). If a policy is being written, it needs to apply to all working employees in the organization, regardless of department, division, or rank. Equally, if there are amendments or revisions made to a policy, it cannot be altered differently for different people or circumstances—if it is, procedural justice will not be implemented fairly

(SHRM, 2015; Uhlmann & Cohen, 2007). Implementing procedural justice is beneficial to the organization in multiple ways but specifically in the investment in human capital. Employees who respect the organization's policy and implementation have trust in the organization's leadership and maintain a stronger commitment to remain with the jurisdiction (Berrey et al., 2012; Izard-Carroll, 2016; Williamson et al., 1997). Conversely, the perils of implementing unfair or unequal policies and procedures can negatively affect the behavior and performance of current employees, cost the organization fiscally because of litigation expenditures, and damage the reputation of the jurisdiction.

Definition of Terms

The employment interview has traditionally been defined as a "face-to-face interaction conducted to determine qualifications of a certain individual for a particular open position" (Levashina et al., 2014, p. 243). However, the development of advanced technology has broadened that definition to no longer only include face-to-face, but also telephone, video chat, and other media-related technologies (Oliphant, Hansen & Oliphant, 2008). According to a 2014 article by Levashina et al. in the publication, *Personnel Psychology*, the employment interview is currently defined as "a personally interactive process of one or more people asking questions orally to another person and evaluating the answers for the purpose of determining the qualifications of that person in order to make employment decisions" (p. 243).

Organization of the Study

Chapter 1 of this dissertation covered the importance of hiring practices in local government, with emphasis on the employment interview and the relationship with current laws that protect against discrimination within this system. After a reviewing the background of past and current hiring practices—how stereotypes, biases, and prejudices can lead to discrimination—and the role of the interviewer, the training of interviewers was explored in the context of procedural equity and fairness among candidates. The purpose of this study was to explore how local government organizations train or prepare raters for their role of serving on a job interview panel and to discover the best practices of this process. Because of the tremendous amount of responsibility raters have, this study was designed to discover the best practices of how these panelists are trained or prepared to sit on an interview panel. The following research questions are the foundation of this study in seeking a solid understanding of how raters are trained:

1. How are raters trained to serve on interview panels in local government organizations?
2. What are the best practices for preparing a rater to sit on an interview panel?

This chapter closed with identifying procedural justice as the significance of the study. Chapter 2 reviews the relevant literature of the study, which will begin with the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Title VII and then explore the employment selections process and the role of the interviewer and HR; discuss common stereotypes, biases, prejudices, and discrimination in the hiring process as well as threats to litigation liability; training interviewers; and ending with the connection to procedural justice theory. The literature review will combine historical laws and literature with current practices and procedures.

Chapter 3 presents the methodology used in the study, including the research design, population and sampling procedure, and the instruments and their selection or development together with information on validity and reliability. Each of these sections concludes with a rationale, including strengths and limitations of the design elements.

The chapter goes on to describe the procedures for data collection and the plan for data analysis.

Chapter 4 presents the results of the study, including a comprehensive analysis of data collected. The analyzed data determined the emerging themes based on the experiences of local government employees and their experiences with being trained as a rater on an interview panel. Chapter 4 also discusses the process of coding data, the survey dissemination process, the sample demographics, data collection procedures, and the qualitative findings.

Presented in Chapter 5 are the results of the research questions, the emerging themes from the study, the limitations of the study, recommendations for future research, and a concluding summary.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

The employment interview has been one of the most widely used selection methods in the past 100 years (Arvey, 1979b; Carnahan, 2007; Levashina et al., 2014; Tsai et al., 2016), so much so that some claim it is rare or unthinkable to hire without the implementation of this process (Huffcutt & Culbertson, 2011). This method can often be used throughout the hiring process beginning with the initial screening to the final stages in the selection process. The interview process enables an organization to learn more about an applicant, and the candidate has the opportunity to become familiar with the position and associated tasks. This process allows both the interviewer and interviewee to exchange information, ask questions, and evaluate the potential for establishing a professional working relationship. This allows an opportunity for both parties to get a feel for one another other and determine whether the chemistry is right.

However, one major but complex drawback to the panel-based interview is interviewer bias which can skew the intention to have a fair and equitable process and lead to litigation liability for the organization. The Uniform Guidelines on Employee Selection Procedures (U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission [EEOC], (1991) require that all selection criteria, including interviews, be deemed reliable by currently accepted methods of reliability testing. However, operationalizing this in a format that is deemed “acceptable” or “reliable” can mean different things to different organizations and panelists.

Civil Rights Act (Title VII)

To counteract the increasing racial tension in America President Kennedy proposed a package of legislation he called the Civil Rights Act, which would cover, among other areas, voting rights, public accommodations, discrimination in employment, and education (Posthuma et al., 2002). The proposed legal solutions, the president argued, "'are the embodiment of this Nation's basic posture of common sense and common justice,' and protect the rights most Americans take for granted" (Dreiband & Swearingin, 2015, p. 1). President Kennedy then spoke to his concerns on employment discrimination and stated that the "democratic principle that no man should be denied employment commensurate with his abilities because of his race or creed or ancestry" (Dreiband & Swearingin, 2015, p. 1). In concluding his speech, Kennedy asked the legislators to "look into [their] hearts . . . for the one plain, proud and priceless quality that unites us all as Americans: a sense of justice" (Dreiband & Swearingin, 2015, p. 1). It was justice, he said, that requires employers to "ensure the blessings of liberty for all Americans"—not only for economic efficiencies, global admiration, or public safety—"but, above all, because it is right" (Dreiband & Swearingin, 2015, p. 1). In both of President Kennedy's pleas to Congress, sex discrimination was never cited or referenced. However, a little over year after Kennedy was assassinated, Public Law 88-352, which was the provision of the Civil Rights Act that prevented discrimination on the basis of sex as well as race in hiring, promoting, and firing, passed.

In the final legislation, Section 703a made it unlawful for an employer to "fail or refuse to hire or to discharge any individual, or otherwise to discriminate against any individual with respect to his compensation, terms, conditions or privileges, or employment, because of such individual's race, color, religion, sex, or national origin" (EEOC, 1991, Section 703(a)). Through the 11 titles, the law outlined the various problems with discrimination including race, color, religion, and natural origin, which were addressed in different contexts ranging from voter rights to federal financial assistance. However, it was Title VII that specifically spoke to discrimination in employment. Although often sparking litigation, Title VII was meant “to encourage informal conciliation and to foster voluntary compliance” through “the creation of anti-harassment policies and effective grievance mechanisms” (Bond-Nelms, 2018, p. 3; see also EEOC, 1991).

> Amended several times, Title VII currently makes it unlawful for an employer
> (1) to fail or refuse to hire or to discharge any individual, or otherwise to discriminate against any individual with respect to his compensation, terms, conditions, or privileges of employment, because of such individual’s race, color, religion, sex, or national origin; or
> (2) to limit, segregate, or classify his employees or applicants for employment in any way which would deprive or tend to deprive any individual of employment opportunities or otherwise adversely affect his status as an employee, because of such individual’s race, color, religion, sex, or national origin. (EEOC, 1991, Section 703(a)).

The EEOC was established by Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and began operating on July 2, 1965. The mandate and authority of the EEOC was set forth in Title VII and expanded in later laws enacted by Congress (EEOC, 1991). During the past 52 years, the EEOC has grown and now includes the following areas:

- The Age Discrimination in Employment Act of 1967 (ADEA) which, as amended, prohibits discrimination against workers age 40 and older in employment.

- The Pregnancy Discrimination Act of 1978 (PDA), which amended Title VII to clarify that discrimination based on pregnancy, childbirth, or related medical conditions constitutes sex discrimination and requires employers to treat pregnancy and pregnancy-related medical conditions as any other medical disability with respect to terms and conditions of employment, including health benefits.
- The Equal Pay Act (EPA) of 1963 (included in the Fair Labor Standards Act), as amended, prohibits sex discrimination in the payment of wages to men and women performing substantially equal work in the same establishment.
- Titles I and V of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA), as amended, prohibit employment discrimination based on disability by private and state and local government employers.
- Title II of the Genetic Information Nondiscrimination Act of 2008 (GINA), prohibits employment discrimination based on an applicant's or employee's genetic information (including family medical history).

Together, these laws protect individuals from employment discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, disability, and genetic information. They also make it illegal to retaliate against a person for opposing employment discrimination, filing a charge of discrimination, or participating in an investigation or lawsuit regarding employment discrimination. Most of these laws apply to private and state and local government employers with 15 or more employees, labor organizations, employment agencies, and the federal government (EEOC, 1991). The ADEA applies to state and local governments and to employers with 20 or more employees; there is no minimum employee requirement under the EPA. Title VII and Executive Order 12067 also authorize the EEOC to coordinate and lead the federal government's efforts to combat workplace discrimination (EEOC, 1991).

Employment Selection Process

Employment selection is one of the most critical components of organizations because the investment in human capital is paramount to the overall efficiency and effectiveness of the jurisdiction (Arvey, 1979b; Ashraf, 2017; Carnahan, 2007; Tsai et al., 2016). Despite uprising and advancements in technology, hiring managers still need to seek the professional qualifications of employees, including expert knowledge in the field, skillset, and competencies related to the department or profession (U.S. Office of Personnel Management, 2008).

In the past 20 years, economic experts have come to recognize the significance and value of human capital for economic vitality and sustainability in 21st century America (Christensen, 2019). Some of the newly created jobs are considered high-skill jobs, which will require greater levels of talent acquisition, training, and education. On the contrary, if there are not enough skilled workers to fill those jobs or the right employees on-boarded to fill those positions, the output will suffer (Chrysler-Fox & Roodt, 2014; Pulakos, 2005). This venture begins with staffing process. The employee selection process can vary depending on the organization and what methods they use to find applicants for employment. However, most large and some small employers have a formal process that is followed to recruit and hire new employees (Dixon, Wang, Dineen, & Tomlinson, 2002; Huffcutt & Youngcourt, 2007; Levashina et al., 2014). The steps in the staffing process require discussion of the planning and acquisition functions before recruitment and selection methods can be considered. Although some of these methods can fluctuate, the standard steps of including a well-designed process can consist of the following:

1. Identifying the needs as part of the strategic plan
2. Obtain budgetary approval to hire
3. Develop a valid selection criterion
4. Decide on a method of recruitment
5. Recruit for the desired position
6. Testing process and screening applicants
7. Compile a list of qualified applicants
8. Conduct interviews with the most skilled
9. Conduct background checks and reference checks
10. Select applicant
11. Onboarding. (Llorens et al., 2017)

Another main reason to have a well-designed and implemented selection process is to optimize hiring success (Arvey, 1979b; Levashina et al., 2014; Macan, 2009). Developing a thorough job analysis helps the organization identify what is being sought. Each selection tool used to evaluate candidates should add value to the ability to effectively determine which applicant is the best match for the position. "Bad hires" can cost establishments significant money because of the need to reinvest in the hiring process and new employee training. Employees are the greatest asset of any organization, and for an organization to shine, the organizations depend on the competence and professional attitudes of the employees (Ashraf, 2016; Posthuma et al., 2002). So, it is imperative that right person for the right job is working, whether in the private or public organization, and thus the recruitment and selection process becomes most integral because, if done in an organized way, it leads to the selection of right candidates.

Planning

Before considering recruiting and hiring an applicant for a job position, an organization goes through a step-by-step hiring process. This process typically has three key phases, including planning, recruitment, and employee selection (Berman et al., 2016). Human resource (HR) planning involves the process of determining the number of employees to hire and what qualifications or skills the company is looking for (Jacobson & Sowa, 2015). It is often expected that this is met with prior administrative approval and the assurance that the hire is in line with the organization's strategic plan (Llorens et al., 2017).

Recruitment

Within the hiring process, the recruitment phase takes place when the organization tries to reach a pool of qualified candidates. This can be done through job postings, job referrals, advertisements, headhunters, or whichever method is deemed appropriate (Berman et al., 2016). According to the International City/County Management Association (ICMA, 2017), 80% of local governments find online job advertising to be the most successful in reaching qualified candidates. Other most used and successful recruitment practices include government websites (50%), employee referrals (47%), social media (40%), and job fairs (16%). It must be considered, however, that the recruitment procedures can be drastically different depending on the caliber of position—such as a department head versus an entry-level title (Jacobson & Sowa, 2015).

When entering into the recruitment process, knowing the top recruitment strategies is just as important as understanding the components an effective job advertisement typically includes (Yahiaoui et al., 2015). ICMA (2017) recommended that the announcement should not only attract applicants with the right qualifications but also

- Be specific enough to draw interest, but not so accurate that it obligates the organization to contractual arrangements prematurely.
- Avoid any mention of sex, race, religion, age, ethnic origin, and physical capabilities, unless those characteristics are considered work-related qualifications—in other words, qualifications to the successful performance of the job.
- Placed in channels outside of the geographical area and contain general information about the organization, including amenities, size, and other characteristics that might attract interested applicants. (p. 1)

Candidates who respond to these measures then come in for interviews and other methods of assessment. Subsequently, employers may check the background of prospective employees as well as references.

The Employment Interview

Interviews are a customary selection technique for employment within the public sector and continue to be one of the most frequently used methods to assess candidates for qualifications and organizational fit (Arvey, 1979a; Levashina et al., 2014; Macan, 2009). Additionally, structured interviews have been determined to be the assessment method most preferred by managers, supervisors, and HR professionals (Lievens, Highhouse, & De Corte, 2005; Topor, Colarelli, & Han, 2007).

The employment interview is defined as “a face-to-face interaction conducted to determine the qualifications of a given individual for a particular open position” (Huffcutt & Youngcourt, 2007, p. 182). With the advancement and further development of innovative technology, there have been changes in the practices of conducting interviews. Today, the employment interview is no longer limited to an in-person interview but has expanded to other media, including telephone and computer-mediated video chat (Chapman & Rowe, 2002; Oliphant et al., 2008). Since the evolvement of the employment interview has centralized its focus on interpersonal interaction, the definition has been expanded to the interactive process of one or more people asking questions verbally to another person and evaluating the responses to determine the qualifications of that person in order to make employment decisions (EEOC, 1991).

The execution of interviews in the employment setting can vary depending on the policies and guidelines implemented by HR departments. Interviews take many forms, some very informal, others more structured (Arvey, 1979b; Bell, 1986; Dipboye et al., 2001; Lee Flores, 2014). The next section explores the variances, strengths, and weaknesses of the various types of employment interviews.

Selecting Employees to Interview

Selecting employees to interview is the part of the process when the employer evaluates information about the pool of applicants generated during the recruitment phase (Llorens et al., 2017). After assessing the candidates, the organization decides which applicant will be offered the position. The process of how applicants apply for opportunities depends on the organization. Some use talent management software to receive applications and to screen and select the most qualified candidates to interview. In other cases, the job application process requires applicants to submit a resume and cover letter via e-mail. Some employers still prefer that applicants apply in person (Society for Human Resource Management [SHRM], 2018). During the application process, applicants may be tasked with taking an assessment test to see whether their background matches the organization's requirements. Afterward, the employment applications and test results will be reviewed, and selected candidates will be invited for a job interview (Levashina et al., 2014).

Job Interviews

Today, many organizations have an involved interview process often beginning with a "screening" or preliminary phone interview followed by a structured in-person interview, likely a second interview, and for some, possibly a third interview—depending on the organization and position (Posthuma et al., 2002; Thorsteinson, 2017). The next section provides an overview of some of the steps that take place in the interview process.

Screening/phone interview. When jurisdictions are hiring, much time can be spent on interviewing job candidates who do not meet the company's needs before finding one interviewee who does. One way to quicken the search is to use the screening interview via a phone call. A screening interview is a type of employment interview that is utilized to determine whether the candidate has the qualifications needed to do the job for which the organization is hiring (Green, 2014). A candidate's answers to key phone screening interview questions can allow for a quick assessment and identification of the most promising candidates. The process itself is straightforward—once the candidates' resumes have been reviewed and narrowed, a phone interview is scheduled with each of those candidates for a brief phone screen interview (SHRM, 2018). This step can save time and the trouble involved in meeting in-person and interviewing job candidates who, despite strong resumes, do not meet all the company's needs. The responses from the applicants can help determine whether a candidate is likely to have the right blend of skills and experience for the position and a work style that will fit the organization (Ekwoaba, Ikeije, & Ufoma, 2015).

First interview. The most common and widely used interview type is the employment interview or selection interview or job interview (Arvey, 1979b; Levashina et al., 2014; Macan, 2009). The first in-person job interview is typically either a one-on-one interview between the applicant and a manager or a panel of interviewers (Dipboye & Colella, 2005). The interviewer(s) will ask questions about the applicant's experience and skills, work history, availability, and the qualifications the organization is seeking in the optimal candidate for the job. This process can also be viewed as a test or conversation where both parties will end the discussion with an opinion. The interviewer will try to determine whether the candidate is right for the job, and the interviewee will try to determine whether the organization is right for them (Frieder et al., 2016).

Second interview and beyond. The second interview can be more detailed than the one-on-one interview with the original person or panel, or it can be a day-long interview that includes meetings with company staff. This process may entail meeting with management, staff members, executives, and other company employees (New Jersey Department of Personnel, n.d.; U.S. Office of Personnel Management, 2008; Vermont

Department of Human Resources, 2009). During this process, it is often the hiring manager or designee who will assess organizational fit rather than just the qualifications identified in the first interview (Llorens et al., 2017).

Besides, or in place of, a formalized second or final interview is the “lunch” interview or “dining” option. This type of interview has all of the same components of interaction between candidate and interviewee except this option replaces the formal setting to an informal setting (Swider, Barrick, & Harris, 2016). The intent is for the interviewer to gauge a professional opinion in a more casual environment. This can help hiring managers see one’s behavior and how one acts in a more casual setting. Depending on the organizations’ process, this may be the final interview in the interview process and where it may be decided whether a job offer is to come (Ashraf, 2017; Dipboye & Colella, 2005).

Legal Concerns

Another critical reason to have strong selection processes is for legal protection (Arvey, 1979a). Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 made it unlawful for an employer to “fail or refuse to hire or to discharge any individual, or otherwise to discriminate against any individual with respect to his compensation, terms, conditions or privileges or employment, because of such individual’s race, color, religion, sex, or national origin” (EEOC, 1991, Section 703(a)). When HR professionals design selection processes, they typically try to create fair and impartial procedures that give all candidates an equal opportunity to get the job. Only asking interview questions and using selection tools that relate to the position helps avoid discrimination (Jacobson & Sowa, 2015).

The Role of Interviewer

The role of an interviewer is to evaluate another person, or persons, through questions in order to evaluate them for a given employment opportunity. While job interviews can be a nerve-wracking experience for the applicant and a time-consuming exercise for the hiring organization, the interviewer plays a key role in determining whether the jurisdiction and candidate will make an effective match (Frieder et al., 2016). As such, the interviewing process provides a great deal of value for the business and candidate alike. In most organizations, interview panel members coordinate with HR to review the job description, interview questions, and resumes of the candidates. For a most interview panels, specific roles are assigned, such as follows:

- Panel chair: This person provides leadership for the panel and keeps the interviews on track. This position is usually the person who welcomes the interviewee, explains the process, keeps track of time, and sets the overall tone for the interview.
- Panel members: These individuals have the responsibility of delivering the questions determined by HR or the hiring department, take detailed notes, answer any questions the applicant may have, and provide their recommendation to HR or the hiring department.

It is recommended that interview panels have 3 to 5 persons (Frieder et al., 2016; New Jersey Department of Personnel, n.d.; U.S. Office of Personnel Management, 2008; Vermont Department of Human Resources, 2009). It is recommended that the interview panel include someone intimately familiar with the department's duties and tasks in addition to a department director, coworker, representatives of other departments, or an HR employee. All participants of the interview panel should be familiar with the duties and responsibilities of the position being filled. One critical element that should be considered when selecting interviewers is to have the panel reflect a diversely racial and mixed gendered candidate pool to reduce the potential for bias (Bell, 1986; Prewett, 1994; Wheeler, 2015).

Using a mixed panel to conduct the interviews may reduce the impact that personal biases, prejudices, and stereotypes of individual interviewers may have on the selection of an employee (Dixon et al., 2002; Knight, 2017; Lee Flores, 2014). It is also essential to use the same participants as interviewers for all of the candidates interviewing. Having the same panelists among the applicants in the pool for the same position is optimal because it provides some consistency in the ratings of candidates. This is most important when other components of the interview are unstructured because different interviewers will ask different questions, as well as evaluate candidates differently, and may consider various kinds of supplementary information such as application forms, resumes, references, transcripts, or other pieces of information differently.

The Importance of Note-Taking

Note-taking in the employment interview involves the interviewer making written notes during the employment interview in relation to a candidate's responses (see Figure 1). Taking notes is essential for conducting successful interviews (Chen et al., 2013; Middendorf & Macan 2002). The major reason for notetaking is the limitation of human memory because it is impractical to expect an interviewer to recall answers and details to a candidate's response to the questions (Bertrand & Mullainathan, 2004). As such, notes enable the interviewer to record the main points of an interview. Notes can also provide documentary evidence as to how an interviewer arrived at a decision and can be subpoenaed in lawsuits (Chen et al., 2013).

Lessen the impact of memory decay	Provides documentation for legal defensibility
Aid in recall of important information	Increase accurate documentation of what is being said
Increase consistency in ratings reliability	Reduce rating disagreement or variance
Display a sense of interest in the candidate	Stay focused
Reduce the influence of impression management	Determine and justify a candidate's rating
Focus on responses	Provide documentation to support future feedback and potential training needs

Figure 1. The benefits of note-taking.

The Role of Human Resources

Since the early 2000s, the government has faced financial challenges, and the need for effective and efficient management of public organizations' human capital has become increasingly important (Chrysler-Fox & Roodt, 2014). Municipal governments in particular have been facing an increase in the reduction of resources, workplace costs, and a higher demand of services (Ammons, Smith, & Stenberg, 2012; Martin, Levey, & Cawley, 2012). Balancing these challenges, alongside the recognition that hiring additional staff may not be a possibility, requires that municipalities think critically about how they are using their workforce. HR plays a critical role in the success of organizations; indeed, human capital can be the most critical component for maintaining a competitive advantage (Pfeffer, 1998).

Stereotypes, Biases, Prejudices, and Discrimination

Terms such as *biases, prejudices, stereotypes, and discrimination* are all social issues usually introduced in grade school and dating back to the Civil Rights Movement—and in the world today, they are more prevalent than ever (Arvey, 1979a; Brecher et al., 2006; Gousie, 1993). One of the main issues with these critical topics though is that they are used interchangeably and often lumped together as one in the same without understanding the differentiation (Keene, 2011). Regardless of the context in which they are used, it is essential to understand the differences between them, so the source, reason, and perspective can be considered.

Stereotypes in the Workplace

A "stereotype" (n.d.) is defined as a "widely held but fixed and oversimplified image or idea of a particular type of person or thing" (p. 8). What makes stereotyping different is the placing of labels on an individual by making a general assumption with little or no personal knowledge about them. Stereotypes can more specifically refer to beliefs that specific attributes, characteristics, and behaviors are typical of members of a particular group of people (Frazer & Wiersma, 2001; Thompson, 2017). The way people often categorize social groups is usually based on visible features that provide the most significant between-group differentiation and least within-group variation—for example, skin color, gender, or age. Stereotypes can be created from direct personal experiences, from other people, or more commonly, by the media (Keene, 2011; Owuamalam & Zagefka, 2014). The media has a considerable influence on stereotype formation when there are limited opportunities for meaningful exchange with people from outside a particular social group (Owuamalam & Zagefka, 2014).

In the workplace, stereotypes can be especially harmful and can lead to low morale, reduced productivity, and adverse outcomes (Dunham, 2017). Psychologically, when assumptions are made subconsciously, people start to look for things to confirm these beliefs and over time may seek incidents to confirm these assumptions. When stereotypes persist in the workplace, candidates up for promotion may be overlooked, coworkers or teams do not properly function, and the organization's culture erodes (Von Hippel, Sekaquaptewa, & McFarlane, 2015). In some cases, lawsuits can occur and cause damaging public perception of the organization. Although no organization, policy, or manager can change the way people think about other people, it is essential to understand some of the conventional casts that exist and can be legally and ethically challenging. Some of the most common examples are gender, race and ethnicity, and age (Frazer & Wiersma, 2001; Matsudaira, 2017).

Gender stereotyping occurs with men and women. There are two common misconceptions about women employees, which are (a) that emotion overrides logic and reason, and (b) that if there are few women in the workplace, the expectation may be that they will be overly assertive to compete with their male counterparts (Dunham, 2017). Male stereotyping, however, includes the misconception that men are innately passive and unemotional. Some of the more severe stereotypes of men imply cronyism among male workers, also known as the "old boys club." This stereotype claims that promotions and benefits go to friends of the male in charge as opposed to more qualified, and often female, employees (Mahajan, 2007; Marlowe, Schneider, & Nelson, 1996; SHRM, 2015). The sexual preferences of men and women may be questioned when a particular gender is scarce in a given field (Dunham, 2017).

Racial stereotypes have existed throughout history and generate persistent misconceptions. For example, racial stereotypes commonly attributed to African Americans include laziness and distrust, and Hispanic workers may be deemed incompetent (Owuamalam & Zagefka, 2014). Muslim employees may suffer from the assumption that they are inherently dangerous and threatening because of their religion or cultural background (Aziz, 2014; Sinckler, 2014). Conversely, positive stereotypes can be counterproductive and harmful. For example, the assumption that employees who are Asian are assumed to be better because of perceptions of higher intelligence and work ethic may cause supervisors to ignore actual output (Zhou & Lee, 2017). Although not necessarily insulting, stereotypes may prove harmful when a certain level of aptitude is assumed rather than confirmed independently.

Age-based stereotyping affects all groups. Young workers are considered incompetent because of a lack of experience but can result in unfair practices against individuals who have a genuine drive and a strong work ethic (Becton, Walker, & Jones-Farmer, 2014). On the other hand, older workers may be seen as disconnected or counting the days toward retirement by putting minimal effort into the organization. This stereotype ignores (a) years of hard work performed by these employees and (b) the experience and leadership these dedicated professionals can provide to younger generations. These employees in particular are more likely to face patronizing attitudes from their colleagues assuming they would struggle to pick up the new technology or work systems quickly because of their age.

These cognitive shortcuts, which allow the brain to make a snap judgment based on immediately visible characteristics, become even more problematic when those stereotypes start to apply beyond that immediate impulse. That is called *bias*, which operates on a belief that a stereotype is true.

Biases

Bias can come in a variety of forms, including race, age, gender, and ethnicity and can be widespread, vague, or location specific (Berrey, 2014; Fiske, 2000). Biased individuals believe the biases they apply to others are right without regard for the truth (Belle et al., 2017; Fiske, 2000). The difference between stereotypes and biases is that a bias is a personal preference, like or dislike, and a stereotype is a preconceived idea that attributes specific characteristics to all the members of a class or set. Within the realm of biases exist two basic, different, overarching types of bias, implicit and explicit. Explicit bias is a conscious bias that people choose to have, but implicit bias is a subconscious bias, often seen as natural, and is most often a result of environment or genetics (Berrey, 2014). Biases develop from the innate need to process an abundance of information quickly in order to make quick decisions. To process that information more efficiently, the brain uses shortcuts to find connections between bits of information (Belle et al., 2017). Unfortunately, these shortcuts often lead to harmful stereotypes when applied to people, and allowing biases and negative stereotypes to occur in the workplace is harmful and likely to reduce the diversity of the workforce (Bertrand & Mullainathan, 2004; Strand, 2015). Although there are a variety of biases that exist, some of the most common biases in the workplace are conformity bias, beauty bias, affinity bias, halo effect, horns effect, similarity bias, contrast effect, attribution bias, and confirmation bias.

Conformity bias. Conformity bias is defined as the tendency to take cues for a type of behavior from the actions of others rather than exercise independent judgment

(Posthuma et al., 2002; Swider et al., 2016). Based on Solomon Asch's famous study, the Asch conformity experiment, conformity bias relates to bias caused by group peer pressure. In the study, a group of people were asked to look at the picture on the left and determine which line in Exhibit 2 matched the line in Exhibit 1 (see Figure 2).

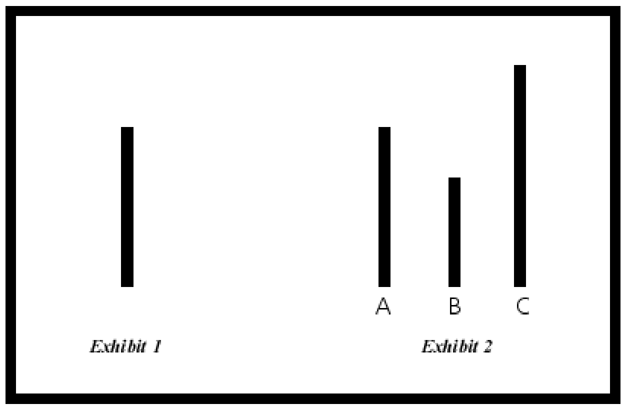


Figure 2. Conformity bias. From "Asch conformity experiment using immersive virtual reality," by C. Kyrlitsias and D. Michael-Grigoriou, 2018, *Computer Animation and Virtual Worlds*, *29*(5), e1804 (https://doi.org/10.1002/cav.1804).

One individual was prompted to say what they truly thought, and the remaining group members were told to give the wrong answer. It can be seen that line A of Exhibit 2 matches the line in Exhibit 1, but when the individual who does not know this is a test gives the correct answer only to be informed that the rest of the group has said Line B, the individual decides to scrap his or her own opinion in favor of the groups' opinion. This is a phenomenon that occurs in 75% of cases. In the workplace, if an employee feels the majority of a group is leaning toward/away from a particular decision, then according to the experiment, he or she will likely tend to go along with the group thinks rather than voice their own opinions.

Attractiveness/beauty bias. The attractiveness, or beauty bias, poses the outlook that the most attractive individual will be the most successful. This heuristic, "what is beautiful is good" further suggests that physically attractive people benefit from their appeal in a variety of settings, including the perceptions of employment interview (Bass, 2017; Johnson et al., 2010). In opposition, this bias can work in reverse, suggesting that attractiveness can be unfavorable to women in specific employment contexts (Wexler, 2017). Research has suggested that attractiveness discrimination occurs in the recruitment and selection context, meaning that more attractive people may be more likely to be hired than less attractive people (Sim, Saperia, Brown, & Bernieri, 2015). This is particularly concerning for organizations because the ultimate goal is to recruit and hire the most qualified applicant for a position, regardless of appearance-based characteristics. There is considerable empirical evidence that physical attractiveness impacts employment decision-making, demonstrating results that the more attractive the individual, the greater the likelihood that person will be hired (Sim et al., 2015). Additionally, attractiveness bias may have more substantial effects than other forms of discrimination because unlike discrimination based on race or sex, attractiveness bias is subject to neither legal nor social sanctions, and people do not try to correct for it (Shahani-Denning, 2003; Talamas, Mavor, & Perrett, 2016).

Interviewer-applicant similarity. The similar-to-me, or interviewer-applicant similarity bias, states that individuals get along with people who look and think like we do (Hersch & Shinall, 2016). It is a fact that people with like personalities tend to get along because they think, feel and act very similarly (The Pennsylvania State University, 2015). This bias is not simply restricted to personality or physical similarities in the employment interview, but this could be in the form of attending the same college, growing up in the same town, or even looking similar to one's self or someone he or she knows. This can be very problematic in the employment interview as there is no employment law against this type of unfairness. According to Sears and Rowe (2003), "higher interview ratings are given towards interviewees who possess similar attitudes and demographics as the interviewer" (p. 15). One justification for this effect is through pure similarity: "If both the interviewer and interviewee are similar, whether, in demographics or even education level, they will develop more accurate perceptions of the other's self-concepts, as the two self-concepts will be similar" (Sears & Rowe, 2003, p. 15).

Halo/horns effect. Founded by psychologist Edward Thorndike, the halo effect (n.d.) is an "error in reasoning in which an impression formed from a single trait or characteristic is allowed to influence multiple judgments or ratings of unrelated factors" (p. 1). Typically, this is when one great thing about a person is seen, and the *halo glow* of that significant thing affects the opinions of everything else about that person. This can be based on any positive assessment made of the candidate or preference, including gender, race, ethnicity, height, looks, hair color, accent, hobbies, values, behaviors, or attitudes (Belle et al., 2017). Some of the results of the halo effect include the following biases:

- Attractive people are often judged as competent and sociable.
- Inexperienced employment interviewers who ascribe to the halo effect do so within the first few minutes of a job interview.

- Charismatic interviewees tend to get noticed and promote up the organizational ladder faster than noncharismatic candidates regardless of their professional and leadership skills.

For the employment interviewer, this can lead to the inclination to let an interviewee's good qualities, or at least those the interviewer approves of, to fade the attributes or qualities that are less attractive. One of the main concerns with the halo effect is that it could blind the hiring organization to the potential risk (Wexler, 2017).

Contrasting the halo effect is the horns effect. The horns effect is when one bad thing about a person is seen by the interviewee, and the interviewer allows it to cloud his or her opinions of the other attributes. According to psychologists, if the first impression about a person is negative, then there is a high likelihood that the positive characteristics will be ignored and only the negative attributes will be concentrated on (Belle et al., 2017; Watkins & Johnston, 2000). If interviewers tend to see the interviewee in the light of the negative first impression, there is a higher probability that they will not like the person (Talamas et al., 2016). If an interview begins with a negative statement or gesture from the candidate, there is higher likelihood that they will be rejected because of the horn effect (Wexler, 2017).

Confirmation bias. Interviewers given prior information are biased to seek it from interviewees. This is the basic context of confirmation bias. Confirmation bias refers to "the seeking or interpreting of evidence in ways that are partial to existing beliefs, expectations, or a hypothesis in hand" (Powell et al., 2012, p. 126). Such bias encourages people to focus on information that they are searching for to support their beliefs and to ignore the information that does not support those beliefs (Ask & Granhag, 2005; Powell & Bourdage, 2016). This can be extremely problematic during the employment interview process because interviewers who ascribe to this bias are not likely to rate objectively. Additionally, conformity bias in recruitment can cause the organization to lose an excellent candidate for the job. One of the main reasons why people are so susceptible to the confirmation bias is that it is an efficient way to process information—not necessarily fair or equitable, but effective. Psychologists have indicated that people are overwhelmed with information in the social world which makes processing information in an unbiased way complicated (Powell & Bourdage, 2016). The decision-making process and information processing system is often biased also because people are limited to interpreting information from their own viewpoint.

Prejudices

Prejudice, however, is a preconceived opinion that is not based on actual experience or reason. It can be defined as an "irrational, preconceived opinion that leads to preferential treatment to some people and unfavorable bias or hostility against others, due to ignorance (or in direct contradiction) of facts, which means "pre-judgment" ("Prejudice," n.d., p. 1). Often the behavior that stems from this is considered to be negative or unfair toward a person or persons based on their affiliation with a particular social group. Prejudice can be based on factors like religion, gender, age, status, and race. For example, some may consider all Muslim women to be illiterate and uneducated (Aziz, 2014; Sinckler, 2014). This is considered a prejudice against religion and gender. Although prejudice can be both negative and positive, there is a tendency people have to only take the negative views toward those who do not belong to a particular social group. In contrast, studies have shown that positive attitudes are demonstrated toward people who belong to specific social groups (Chamberlain, 2016; Frazer & Wiersma, 2001). This can be attributed to ignorance or lack of trust. It is also important to note that prejudice is learned from those in our environment or in the media—it is not a bias one is born with. However, is no easy feat to change prejudices since they are usually taught during childhood, within the environment, or through personal experiences (Bell, 1986; Crowley, 2013; Tsai et al., 2016). Some researchers have claimed that an individual behaves in a prejudicial manner when he or she has an emotional reaction to another individual or group of individuals based on preconceived ideas about the individual or group (Fiske, 2000).

Research shows that African Americans can face differential treatment when searching for employment, which may be a factor in why they are not as successful in the labor market. Job applicants with African American names get far fewer callbacks for each resume they send out (Berrey, 2014; Bertrand & Mullainathan, 2004; Macan, 2009). In the article "Are Emily and Greg More Employable Than Lakisha and Jamal? A Field Experiment on Labor Market Discrimination," applicants with African American names found it hard to overcome this hurdle in callbacks by improving their observable skills or credentials (Bertrand & Mullainathan, 2004). Title VII and the judiciary have required managers in organizations to comply with the order to treat minorities equally when hiring; however, it is unclear whether legislation has affected prejudicial attitudes toward candidates.

Discrimination

Discrimination is defined as the denial of equal rights based on prejudices and stereotypes (Arvey, 1979b; Fiske, 2000; Uhlmann & Cohen, 2007). Discrimination differs from prejudice and stereotyping in that it is not a belief, but rather the application of beliefs (Fiske, 2000). An example of discrimination is a female not getting a job because the hiring manager wanted a male to fill the position or a Mexican American not getting hired because of their race. Although much has been studied and learned about the employment interview in years past, the type of discrimination in the process has morphed into a more subtle and interpersonal manner which can be challenging for legal systems (Macan & Merritt, 2011; Levashina et al., 2014). Research has shown that implicit attitudes and stereotypes can be malleable and subject to intervention-based change (Mahajan, 2007; Posthuma et al., 2002; Schneider & Goffin, 2015). One conclusion of this research indicated that organizations should be able to identify intervention strategies in an effort to reduce or eliminate implicit discrimination at its source, rather than "relying solely on the motivation and cognitive capacity of individuals to attempt to suppress the application of automatic cognition" (Macan & Merritt, 2011, p. 321). Professionals have furthered this idea that there are ways to help eliminate implicit bias in the employment interview process which is a pressing, timely, and advantageous direction for future research (Levashina et al., 2014; Macan & Merritt, 2011).

Sexism. Sexism can be largely described as discrimination against and/or hatred based on gender rather than individual merits and can also refer to any and all systemic differentiations based on the sex of the individuals. Sex discrimination involves treating someone poorly because of that individual's sex. Under Title VII, discrimination against an individual because of gender identity, including transgender status, or because of sexual orientation is prohibited.

Racism. Racism, or race discrimination, involves the treating of people unfavorably because they are of a specific race and includes aspects such as hair texture, skin color, or certain facial features (EEOC, 1991). Race discrimination in the employment interview can also involve treating someone poorly because the person is associated with, related to, or married to a person of a certain race or color. In one study, "Are Emily and Greg More Employable Than Lakisha and Jamal? A Field Experiment on Labor Market Discrimination," names were used to study how African American and White applicants were perceived in the resume review process based on their names alone (Bertrand & Mullainathan, 2004). The results indicated that for two identical individuals engaging in an identical job search, the one with an African American name received fewer interviews than the White applicant (Bertrand & Mullainathan, 2004). The conclusion of the study also implied that employers use race as a factor in the resume review process, which matches the legal definition of discrimination (Bertrand & Mullainathan, 2004).

Disability. Disability discrimination transpires when an employer covered by the ADA or the Rehabilitation Act, treats a qualified applicant with a disability critically because their disability (ADA, 2018). Researchers have examined the effects of applicant disability on interviewers' judgments across a wide variety of disabilities such as blindness, hearing impairment, leg amputee, mental illness, schizophrenia, and recovering substance abusers and have found that interviewers' ratings and hiring recommendations for applicants with disabilities depend on the type of disability (Arvey & Campion, 1982; Macan, 2009; Posthuma et al., 2002). According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2014), people with disabilities still consistently face double-digit unemployment rates—rates nearly twice as high as that of people without disabilities.

The law expects an employer to provide reasonable accommodation to a job applicant with a disability, unless doing so would cause significant problems or expense to the employer (Turner & Norwood, 2012), but also requires employers not to discriminate against a person with a disability. However, it has also been found that a person with disabilities can present disability-related information in a way that will be well received and reflect positively on them from the employer's perspective (Strand, 2015).

Pregnancy. During job interviews, a visible pregnancy operates as both a situational stigma to be managed and a topic to be avoided. Although employers are advised not to bring it up, candidates are provided few guidelines for managing their identities. Pregnancy discrimination involves the treatment of a woman in an unfavorable way because of their pregnancy, childbirth, or any medical condition related to pregnancy or childbirth. According to the Pregnancy Discrimination Act, "discrimination based on pregnancy when it comes to any aspect of employment, including hiring, firing, pay, job assignments, promotions, layoff, training, fringe benefits, such as leave and health insurance, and any other term or condition of employment" (p. 1). In one study of pregnant and nonpregnant applicants, Cunningham and Macan (2007) found that when participants were required to decide which of the two applicants would be offered the job, significant hiring discrimination was evident against pregnant applicants. Furthermore, it has been found that women, when compared with men, may be more likely to make the “shortlist” for a job opening but less likely to receive the job offer (Biernat, Fuegen, & Kobrynowicz, 2010).

Alternative lifestyle. Throughout history, lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) individuals have been the focus of bias, harassment, discrimination, and crime and are not always socially and legally acceptable (Nadler & Kufahl, 2014). Stereotypes directly affect the development of attitudes and beliefs regarding the LGBT community and often have negative perceptions. Terms such as a person being *queer* or *funny* often push society to criticize and reject LGBT individuals, which can also be true during the employment interview. For employers, this can be especially problematic as negative attitudes, both implicit and explicit, can drive behaviors that often lead to disapproval, prejudice, and discrimination (Macan & Merritt, 2011; Nadler, Lowery, Grebinoski, & Jones, 2014). Common practice during the hiring process is for employers to compare the candidate’s traits with the traits required for a particular job. However, when it comes to the LGBT community, biases and stereotypes of candidates can assume that lesbians carry masculine traits and gay men can be viewed as feminine (Ahmed, Anderson, & Hammarstedt, 2013). These types of biases can create problems for these candidates because these are assumed traits and can keep an otherwise successful and qualified candidate from getting hired.

Other Influential Factors in the Employment Interview

There are many additional factors that have a place within the employment interview process. From the perspective of the interviewee, there is interview anxiety, which refers to having unpleasant feelings before or during a job interview (Huffcutt et al., 2011). This is natural when applicants are about to be scrutinized for their appearance, mannerisms, what is said, and how it is said. Research has suggested that applicants typically feel an increased sense of anxiety because there is little to no control over the interview process itself plus the nervousness in speaking to people they do not know (Swider et al., 2016). As a result of this anxiety and fear, candidates can display certain behaviors or traits that make them seem undesirable or incapable. The interviewees' reactions to the employment interview process include specific factors such as fairness, emotional responses, and attitudes toward the interviewer or the organization (Fasbender & Wang, 2017; Swider et al., 2016).

Impression Management

Almost every organization uses an interview for making employment decisions (Arvey, 1979b; Carnahan, 2007; Levashina et al., 2014; Tsai et al., 2016). HR, hiring managers, and others conducting interviews are usually aware of the interviewee's use of impression management. This is when applicants attempt to create a favorable impression of themselves, such as verbal self-promotion—"I'm a very hard worker," adjustment of nonverbal behaviors—smiling, welcoming body posture, and "looking the part"—and wearing professional clothing (Strand, 2015; Swider et al., 2016). The most frequently used and identifiable type of impression management is verbal self-promotions—the statements applicants make regarding their skills and abilities. Candidates typically try to get the interviewer to feel good about them by trying to illustrate that they hold similar values and beliefs and attempt to build rapport and familiarity with the interviewer. Defensively, candidates try to repair their image when an interviewer appears to be dissatisfied or offended by something the applicant has said or done. For example, interviewees may try to over justify or explain a gap in the employment history on their resume or rephrase their response—"What I really meant was"—to a question if they get the feeling their answer was not what the interviewer or panel wanted to hear (Gholston, 2015; Macan & Dipboye, 1990). Research on employment interviews has indicated that personality is related to the way an applicant will think and act, and depending on the situation, some personality traits may be more pronounced and influence impression management strategies (Frieder et al., 2016; Macan & Dipboye, 1990; Shropshire & Kadlec, 2012).

Information Exchange Between Interviewer and Interviewee

An employment interview is a mutual exchange of information because it provides the applicant with an opportunity to both gain information about the department and position and to discuss their own skills, qualifications, and career goals in relation to the job (Arvey, 1979b; Ashraf, 2017; Carnahan, 2007; Tsai et al., 2016). Another element to consider during this process is the information exchange between the interviewer and interviewee. During this process, it is paramount that the interviewee feels as though he or she has been treated fairly even if they had not been selected for the job (Arvey, 1979b; Bell, 1986; Farago et al., 2013). This can be attributed to the overall communication, verbal and nonverbal, of the interviewer, and how the questions are asked, the intonation and voice inflection of the interviewer, for example.

In other scenarios, there can be signs of unengaged interviewers in which their interactions can be cold and unfriendly wherein they give short answers, check the time, yawn, exhibit a lack of eye contact, check their phone, or simply appear to be in an overall bad mood (Farago et al., 2013). Researchers have argued that interviewer mood is paramount because it can influence interviewer ratings and often serves as a source of potential bias in the interview process (Chen et al., 2013). Because the employment interview process is a “get to know you” from both perspectives, interviewers and panelists need to remain cognizant of how they act and communicate and strive to represent the organization in the best manner possible (Dose, 2003; Jablin & Miller, 1990).

Preinterview Impressions

Preinterview impressions can come in a variety of formats, including searching an applicant on the Internet, looking them up on social media platforms, asking other professionals about the candidate prior to the interview, or being offered unsolicited information about the candidate. These preinterview impressions of applicants may shape the interviewer’s expectations for interviewee’s performance and subsequent processing and behavior (Jablin & Miller, 1990; Macan & Merritt, 2011). Review of the candidate’s application, resume, and qualifications are expected of the panelists before the interviews commence and is usually provided or approved by HR (Caers & Castelyns, 2011). However, there are additional factors such as social media, word of mouth, and personal/professional relationships can and will alter perceptions of the candidate and can create an unfair process. Organizations need to be aware that preinterview impressions have been proven to be positively related to postinterview impressions, which can lead to unfair hiring or discrimination (Capman, 2017; Macan & Dipboye, 1990).

Unfair Hiring Practices/Litigation Liability

Litigation liability is one of the focal points for HR departments in terms of hiring practices because the threats of unfair hiring practices of potential plaintiffs who may sue an organization for alleged discrimination extends beyond current and former employees and includes rejected job applicants (Bell, 1986; Camp et al., 2011; Williamson et al., 1997). Before organizations can adequately try to minimize the risks associated with the hiring process and make it a clear, well-defined process, it is important to understand the existing major antidiscrimination laws that could be implicated during the hiring process.

Congress passed the Civil Rights Act in 1964, and Title VII of this act prohibits discrimination against individuals in employment settings based on factors of race, national origin, religion, or sex. The agency charged with the interpretation and enforcement of this act was the EEOC. In 1970 and again in 1978, this commission issued revelatory guidelines concerning the use and validation of employment tests in organization settings to ensure the fairness of selection devices. As mentioned, the employment interview was explicitly included under the rubric of tests and was subject to these same guidelines (Arvey, 1979b; Camp et al., 2011; Constitutional Rights Foundation, 2018). Few people, regardless of rank in the organizational structure, gain employment without first being interviewed. Although interviews serve multiple purposes, including applicant recruitment (Prewett, 1994), employers primarily use interviews to assess applicant talent and to predict job performance.

Despite their universality, job interviews are susceptible to various well-documented biases (Bass, 2017; Brecher et al., 2006; Dipboye, 1982; Hausdorf, 1997). For instance, applicants who share obvious surface similarities with their interviewers are more likely to be hired than those who do not (Garcia et al., 2008; Knight, 2017). Despite such potential problems, however, employers show no sign of abandoning interviews as a selection tool because of, in part, their average ability to predict job-related performance (Huffcutt & Arthur, 1994; McDaniel et al., 1994). The challenge then lies in improving the interview process by reducing causes of bias (Dipboye, 1982; Dipboye et al., 2001; Frazer & Wiersma, 2001; Garcia et al., 2008).

It has been observed that the many aspects of interview structure can be summarized into three segments, all of which contribute to effective interview processes. The first consists of interview neutrality and job relatedness, such as objective and specific criteria, trained interviewers who are familiar with job requirements, and proof of experience and skillset (Macan, 2009; Maurer et al., 2008; Powell & Bourdage, 2016). The second segment consists of consistent administration, such as established guidelines, minimal discretion, standardized questions, and equity and fairness. The final segment consists of multiple interviewers, such as panels and reviews of interviewer decisions (Chrysler-Fox & Roodt, 2014; Joyner et al., 2007; Posthuma et al., 2002).

Cases of Unfair Hiring Practices

In August 2016, San Diego Public Utilities Department entered into litigation on the basis of unfair hiring practices attributed to cronyism. The utility department was accused of damaging the hiring processes with inequalities that benefited the applicants with inside information (San Diego Tribune Editorial Board, 2016). Among the allegations, the department interviewed 41 applicants who should not have been interviewed under the City of San Diego rules, the department failed to properly document hiring decisions, and in at least one case, the decision was based on criteria written to give advantages to current employees and candidates who were made aware of the opportunity and internal processes (San Diego Union-Tribune Editorial Board, 2016). At the time of this study, the outcome of the case had yet to be determined.

In early 2010, a Pima County employee filed an age and gender discrimination lawsuit against the county elections department. The plaintiff claimed that she was denied a job in the Pima County Elections Division despite being more qualified for the position than the selected candidate, who was a 25-year-old male. The accuser was employed as a certified elections officer, then a senior administrative specialist with the Pima County Superintendent of Schools and managed school elections for over 10 years. With the combination of her positions and experience, she allegedly exceeded the minimum qualifications for the elections job although her competitor, the young male who was hired, marginally satisfied the minimum job qualifications. During the investigation, the elections director twice cited the successful applicant's youth as an asset when questioned about the hiring process and omitted some scored questions in the complainant's interview that were asked of the winning applicant, which put her at an "extreme disadvantage" (Kelly, 2010).

Training Interview Panelists

As an interviewer conducting an employment interview, the main objective is to evaluate the qualifications of applicants and make employment selections on the basis of job-related criteria only (Arvey, 1979b; Carnahan, 2007; Levashina et al., 2014; Tsai et al., 2016). The interview process must also be conducted in accordance with legal requirements to secure a fair, equitable, and legal process. Fair hiring laws were enacted to give every candidate a fair opportunity in the interview and selection process (Arvey, 1979a; Capman, 2017; Viswesvaran & Ones, 2004; Williamson et al., 1997). Traditionally, this is a role and responsibility of the HR department in an organization to train and guide hiring managers and other panelists/interviewers in fair hiring practices.

However, there are also many reputable private organizations that offer training for raters on interview panels. Some agencies direct a formal training program before any employee is permitted to interview candidates; however, it is not always required. HR also assumes the responsibility of staying current with new laws and legal interpretation affecting recruitment and selection (SHRM, 2017; U.S. Department of State Bureau of Human Resources 2005; Vermont Department of Human Resources, 2009).

It is important to equip hiring managers and interviewers with the right training and tools in order to find the best people to fill open positions in an equitable, fair, and legal manner (ICMA, 2017; U.S. Office of Personnel Management, 2008). By providing simple tools, interview training, and competency-based interview guides, interviewers will be better prepared to conduct the interview (New Jersey Department of Personnel, n.d.; State of Oregon, n.d.; U.S. Office of Personnel Management, 2008). During the employment interview process, it is critical that interviewers not only identify the skills and qualifications needed to perform the job but also how to assess the competencies that may not be identified on paper. The U.S. Office of Personnel Management created a formal document specifically to train the person who will administer the structured interview, which should emphasize the importance of notetaking, discuss the impact of the interviewer's nonverbal behavior, and review common rating biases and errors.

Note-Taking

An important element of the employment interview process is to take regular and detailed notes of observable behaviors and verbal responses during each applicant's interview. Proper notetaking can and will reduce the burden on the interviewer to remember details about multiple candidates, which can ultimately be beneficial if the threat of unfair hiring practices is apparent (Biezang, Neuberg, Judice, & Smith, 1999; Camp et al., 2011). Additionally, interviewers can often overlook many key points from the interview and also fail to take the most effective notes (Olson & Bilgen, 2011).

Some of the parts of good note-taking during the employment interview can help with the following:

- Summarization of the content and delivery of the candidate's responses;
- Documentation of the candidate's grammar, body language, and other non-verbal factors;
- Interviewers focus on pertinent information during the interview;
- Quality and quantity of the interviewer's reasoning for each rating on each competency;
- Support of the employment decision that is made.

Nonverbal Behavior During the Interview

As aforementioned, an interviewer's body language, such as facial expressions and body movements (i.e., nodding, staring blankly, frowning, sighing), can communicate a large negative message to the candidate (Dose, 2003; Jablin & Miller, 1990). This type of behavior can distract and derail interviewees to where they are unable to communicate favorably (Chen et al., 2013; Degroot & Gooty, 2009). Additionally, while note-taking during the interview, interviewers should make eye contact periodically with the candidate to show their interest and to provide opportunities to observe the candidate's nonverbal behavior. There are also the instances when untrained interviewers go on intuition or gut feelings about the candidate being interviewed; this can lead to an overconfidence about their judgments and a tendency to overestimate how much they know (Dipboye, 1982; Dose, 2003; Farago et al., 2013).

Procedural Justice Theory

The Civil Rights Act of 1964, Title VII, is the cornerstone of the government's effort to discourage employment discrimination and has focused the attention of HR professionals on certain employment selection and promotion practices (Berrey et al., 2012). This act, signed by President Lyndon Johnson, prohibits discrimination throughout the employment process of the public sector and made employment discrimination illegal (Levashina et al., 2014). This law now extends to not only discrimination, but also prejudices and biases, which can often cause a threat of litigation liability because of unfair hiring practices in the public workplace. To safeguard organizations from this threat, it is imperative that HR departments are not only aware of current laws, but that they are being applied procedurally in an equitable and fair way. During the employment selection process, interviewers or panelists are tasked with making seemingly quick assessments and decisions on whether an applicant is qualified for a position or not. This comes with assessing and understanding their resumes, evaluating their appearance, assessing how questions are answered, recognizing what is being said and what is not said, judging the potential organizational fit, and accounting for diversity, all while remaining unbiased, unprejudiced, and nondiscriminatory. To say that interviewers have a large task and responsibility is an understatement.

Organizational justice refers to fairness practices an organization's leaders exhibit or fairness of established procedures of the organization (Uhlmann & Cohen, 2007). However, within the realm of organizational justice lies procedural justice (Izard-Carroll, 2016). Procedural justice refers to a situation in which employees perceive the decision-making process to be fair. Procedural justice further depicts the idea that how individuals regard the justice system is tied more to the perceived fairness of the process and how they were treated rather than to the perceived fairness of the outcome (Judge & Colquitt, 2004). Standardizing the organization, processing, and administration of the hiring process can increase consistency across candidates and help justify decisions made within hiring practices. Conceptually, interview structure may be linked to litigation outcomes through a variety of mechanisms. For instance, experts agree that procedures are considered fair when they are consistent, suppress bias, collect the most accurate information, and obey ethical standards (Berrey et al., 2012; Gilliland, 1993; Judge & Colquitt, 2004).

Chapter Summary

The review of literature within this chapter covered a progressive look into the employment interview and the raters involved on the panels. The crux of this evaluation rests within the methods of planning, recruiting, interviewing, and selecting a candidate to fill a position in government—specifically local government—in an equitable and fair manner. This HR-led process contains several elements, ranging from standard structured activities to legal matters to intangible/intrinsic values sought by the organizations. Some of the structured components include the standard planning procedures of having a vacant position; ensuring the job description is written including the minimum qualifications; deciding how long, when, and how to open recruitment; selecting a panel of raters for the interviews; developing applicable questions to ask during the interview; ascertaining the need for multiple interviews; and selecting a successful candidate. Legal concerns and adherence to laws are procedurally woven throughout the entire process to ensure stereotypes, biases, prejudices, and discrimination are not involved. Some key examples of these acts can be found in racism, sexism, preinterview impressions via word of mouth or social media, and information exchange between the interviewer and interviewee.

To safeguard municipalities from litigation liability and work toward an equitable and fair process, research offers glimpses into training raters as a mechanism to combat accusations. This begins with the understanding of the laws that currently exist surrounding the process of hiring. This process includes acknowledging what biases personnel involved in the hiring process possess and learning how to remain objective; educating on the applicable laws and current cases of litigation liability; defining prejudices and discrimination and differentiating those from biases and stereotypes; practicing proper note-taking skills during the interview; understanding the role of a rater and what the hiring department is seeking in a successful candidate; and considering the organization's culture. The components combined add up to the essence of procedural justice in local government by striving for a fair and equitable process.

The foundation of this study was to determine the best practices for training raters on the employment interview panel in local government. The following chapter, Chapter 3, attempts identify how raters are currently being trained in a centralized region and determine what the best practices are for local government. This next chapter identifies the research design, appropriateness of the design, the role of the researcher, the participants and population, the data collection process, data analysis procedures, protection of the participants, the validity and reliability of the methodology, and the required approvals for this study.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Unless one is an appointed official, almost all organizations, private or public, hire employees from a panel-based interview process. In public sector, the process classically entails a submittal of an application and/or resume; a testing process (i.e., typing, supplemental questions, or computer skills); an interview with selected first round panelists followed by a second round of interviews with the hiring department's administration; and concludes with an offer to the successful candidate (Dose, 2003; Swider et al., 2016). Although a standard interview model is still utilized and beneficial to the selection process, the composition and training of the interview panelists are of specific interest. From this process, the focus of this methodology chapter will be on the interview panel itself and attempting to identify how interviewers are professionally prepared to serve as raters.

The in-person interview process is one of oldest recruiting methods for employment opportunities because it provides a personal exchange between the incumbent and organization (Arvey, 1979b; Lee, 2005; Stycos, 1955). This method allows employers to communicate, evaluate, clarify, and ascertain a judgment for the interviewee to determine their qualifications and overall fit for the position. Researchers have suggested that because interviews are a personal exchange between people, there is big opportunity for social factors that are not related to the candidate's ability to do the job that unintentionally influences the evaluation of that candidate and the hiring decision (Sears & Rowe, 2003).

Considering the human factor, there are recruitment decisions susceptible to subjectivity, biases, and prejudices which interview panelists should be both aware of and take steps to neutralize to create more objectivity. Training and self-awareness can help to make better and more predictive hiring assessments and decisions for local government jurisdictions and potential candidates.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to explore how local government organizations train or prepare raters for their role of serving on a job interview panel and to discover the best practices of this process. This study contributes to the field of public administration because the job interview is the most common method of hiring public sector employees and is where the investment of human capital in the workplace begins. As raters conducting an employment interview, it is their responsibility to evaluate the qualifications of applicants and make employment selections on the basis of job-related skills, experiences, and qualifications only (Arvey, 1979b; Carnahan, 2007; Levashina et al., 2014; Tsai et al., 2016). Considering raters, or interview panelists, have a legitimate power to screen candidates for employment, they must safeguard that the successful candidate has gone through a fair, equitable, and legal interview. This means providing consistency with how the interview is executed, including the assessment format (using structured vs unstructured interview questions), note-taking practices, proper interviewing techniques, effective communication, minimizing bias, and adhering to the legal obligations of the hiring process.

Research Questions

Panel interviews are a known as a common practice and a popular selection technique from many perspectives. In public sector organizations throughout the nation, employment interviews continue to be one of the most commonly used systems to assess candidates for employment (Macan, 2009; Posthuma et al., 2002; Stycos, 1955). Among administrative decision makers, panel-based interviews have been found to be the assessment method most preferred by administrators (Capman, 2017; Lievens et al., 2005) and human resources (HR) practitioners (Society for Human Resource Management [SHRM], 2015). Additionally, applicants perceive interviews as fair in comparison to other selection procedures, and applicants expect interviews as part of the selection process (Arvey, & Campion 1982). In fact, from an applicant's perspective, obtaining a job interview is fundamental to job search success (Arvey & Campion 1982). However, no interview process is complete without the raters who sit on the other side of the table. The rater, or interview panelist, accepts a huge undertaking when selected to fulfill this role. Raters are responsible for the evaluation of candidates to determine the best person for the position. This requires a great deal of "know-how," such as practicing proper communication techniques (both verbal and nonverbal), note-taking, decreasing the risk of biases, and adhering to legal requirements set forth by the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), and the individual local government organization.

Because of the tremendous amount of responsibility raters have, this study was designed to discover the best practices of how these panelists are trained or prepared to sit on an interview panel. The following research questions are the foundation of this study seeking a solid understanding of how raters are trained.

1. How are raters trained to serve on interview panels in local government organizations?
2. What are the best practices for preparing a rater to sit on an interview panel?

Research Design and Approach

A qualitative grounded theory design method was selected as the design for this study. A qualitative research design was defined by Creswell (2014) as a "systematic approach used to describe life experiences and give them meaning" (p. 183). This research design can seek to gain insight or explore the depth, richness, and a natural experience. Some of the characteristics of a qualitative research design are individual interpretation; basis of knowing, meaning, and discovery; theory development; communication and observation; word analysis; and inductive reasoning. This type of research design was selected because it provides a naturalistic approach to the research problem. The exploration of how raters are trained to partake in the interview process offers a natural study of real-world situations and analysis as they organically unfold. A qualitative study allows the researcher to be open to whatever emerges through a noncontrolling, nonmanipulated setting (Creswell, 2014).

This study examined the experiences of local government employees who have served as a rater on an interview panel in order to determine what training they received in preparation of this role. The qualitative data collection process was conducted using a multiple-choice survey that was distributed through social media monitoring. Each participant was asked five multiple-choice questions. The survey was structured and coded to protect the participants and did not allow for follow-up questions or clarification of responses.

Appropriateness of Methodology and Design

When selecting the design, distinction of differences between quantitative and qualitative methodologies needed to be weighed for the appropriateness of this study. A quantitative research method is used to quantify opinions, attitudes, behaviors, and other defined variables with generating numerical data. Quantitative research is basically about numbers and figures and uses measurable data to formulate facts and uncover patterns in research (Creswell, 2014). As quantitative research clearly specifies what is measured and how it is measured, quantitative data collection is often considered to be much more structured than qualitative methods. Another distinction of quantitative research is that it gathers data in a numerical form, which can be put into categories, in rank order, or measured in units of measurement that can be used to construct graphs and tables of raw data. Quantitative researchers aim to establish general laws of behavior and phenomena across different settings/contexts, and this research is used to test theories to ultimately support or reject it (Levashina et al., 2014).

Qualitative research is appropriate for researchers who seek to gain an in-depth understanding about a social or human problem that cannot be achieved in other ways with the features, attributes, and characteristics of a phenomenon that can be thematically interpreted (Maxwell, 2012). Qualitative studies maintain the following characteristics: (a) seek an understanding of human behavior from the informant's perspective; (b) maintain an interactive process; (c) seek to understand and interpret social phenomena. Data collection in qualitative research is seldom based on unstructured or semistructured approaches but uses methodologically flexible techniques (i.e., individual depth interviews or group discussions) that are suited to produce details and a comprehensive view (Frieder et al., 2016). Quantitative research uses highly structured, firm techniques, such as online questionnaires and on-street or telephone interviews.

Unlike qualitative research, which allows unlimited communication from participants, quantitative research relies on responses to preformulated questions.

Qualitative Design

The design of the data within the qualitative methodology focuses on data collection, analysis, and writing which can be offered in a variety of approaches (Creswell, 2014). These traits deposit into the specific qualitative approaches, which include the following:

1. Phenomenology: describes the experiences as they are lived through the examination of an individuals lived experiences;
2. Ethnography: describes a culture's characteristic(s);
3. Historical: describes and examines events of the past to understand the present and anticipate potential future effects;
4. Case study: describe the in-depth experience of one person, family, group, community, or institution; and
5. Grounded theory: develops theories that are supported by examples of what problems exist in a social scene.

A grounded theory design was selected for this study.

Grounded Theory

Grounded theory was originally developed by sociologists Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss in 1967 and was proposed to allow for the development of new, contextualized theories (Maxwell, 2012). Grounded theory involves the progressive identification and integration of meaningful categories from data. It is a combination of the process of category identification and integration, the method, and its product that produces the theory. Grounded theory, as a method, provides a guideline on how to identify categories, how to make links between categories, and how to establish relationships between them (Pulla, 2016). Grounded theory as theory is the end-product of this process and it provides an explanatory framework with which to understand the occurrence under exploration. Basic features of grounded theory methodology include theoretical sampling, specific coding procedures with a comparative approach to analysis, and memo writing.

Grounded theory subscribes to the notion that the way human beings act toward things is based on the meanings that these things have for them (Pulla, 2016). The meaning of this principle is derived from and arises out of the social interactions that one has with one's associates, which are then handed in and modified through an interpretive process used by the person in dealing with the experiences encountered (Aldiabat & Le Navenec, 2018). Although the ideologies of this method have been molded over the years, the features have predominantly stayed the same. To identify, refine, and integrate categories, and ultimately to develop theory, grounded theory researchers use a number of key strategies, including constant comparative analysis, theoretical sampling, and theoretical coding. Theorists in this field are interested in the ways in which people negotiate and manage social situations and how their actions contribute to the unfolding of social processes (Creswell, 2014). Grounded theory assumes that social events and processes have an objective reality in the sense that they take place and can be observed and documented by the researcher.

Grounded theory methodology is one of the most widely used approaches to collect and analyze data within qualitative research (Creswell, 2014). It can be simply characterized as a framework for study design, data collection, and analysis, which aims at the development of middle-range theories. Basic features of grounded theory methodology include theoretical sampling, specific coding procedures with a comparative approach to analysis, and memo writing. The final result of such a study is called a grounded theory, and it consists of categories that are related to each other. The strategy of theoretical sampling requires that theoretical insights gained from the analysis of initially collected data guide subsequent data collection (Birks & Mills, 2015). Consequently, during the research process, data collection and analysis are conducted simultaneously. For data analysis, different ways of coding enable the researcher to develop increasingly abstract conceptual ideas and reflections, first embodied in codes, later in categories (Stern & Porr, 2011). This analytical process allows for a step-by-step development of categories that are grounded in data. Category development entails comparisons at all stages, for example, of different cases during sampling, of different data pieces, and of different codes and categories during analysis (Birks & Mills, 2015; Creswell, 2014). As a result, grounded theory methodology is also known as the constant comparative method. Throughout the research process, the researcher writes memos and keeps track of the development of conceptual ideas, methodological reflections, and practical to-dos.

The grounded theory approach, however, involves constant comparative analysis which involves the researcher moving in and out of the data collection and analysis process. This back and forth movement between data collection and analysis is known as an iteration (Birks & Mills, 2015; Creswell, 2014). Grounded theory research involves multiple iterations. The process begins with the researcher asking a question or series of questions designed to lead to the development or generation of a theory regarding some aspect of social life. This question(s) leads to the first iteration of theoretical sampling, which includes identifying an initial sample of people to observe or talk to (i.e., local government employees). After collecting some data, the researcher analyzes them. The process of analysis allows the researcher to begin to develop a theory with regard to the research questions. This process of continually collecting and analyzing data and engaging in a theoretical sampling process are critical features of the constant comparative analysis that Glaser and Strauss (1967) described. The comparative process continues until the researcher reaches saturation—the point at which there are no new ideas and insights emerging from the data (Aldiabat & Le Navenec, 2018). Instead, the researcher sees strong repetition in the themes he or she has already observed and articulated. The process of analyzing the data also involves three levels or types of coding:

- Open coding—where the researcher begins to segment or divide the data into similar groupings and forms preliminary categories of information about the phenomenon being examined.
- Axial coding—following intensive open coding, the researcher begins to bring together the categories he or she has identified into groupings. These groupings resemble themes and are generally new ways of seeing and understanding the phenomenon under study.
- Selective coding—the researcher organizes and integrates the categories and themes in a way that articulates a coherent understanding or theory of the phenomenon of study.

Role of the Researcher

The role of a qualitative researcher is to seek understanding in the phenomenal world through the study of events, actions, talk, and interactions. The researcher's role in qualitative research is paramount to the legitimacy of the study and can be considered the human instrument of how the data are collected and implements the analysis of the data (Creswell, 2014), meaning that the data are mediated by a human being rather than quantified through secondary sources, databases, or research departments as conducted in a quantitative study. In order to fulfill this role, users of the research need to know about the researcher, including experiences, expectations, biases, or assumptions. With the role of the researcher, there is the potential for bias or subjectivity which could impact the outcome of the study, making this a very challenging balancing act of being objective and nonjudgmental in observations and actions (Garcia et al., 2008; Sears & Rowe, 2003).

In this study, the researcher has made a career in government for the past 14 years working for county and local government jurisdictions in Southern California. The professional makeup of the researcher has ranged from entry-level positions in administrative roles and midlevel management in economic and community-based departments to an executive-level position in the financial and public safety realm. Additionally, the researcher has participated as a rater in over 35 interview panels for various governmental and nongovernmental organizations and positions of all ranks, including volunteers, entry-level, professional, midlevel management, and executive levels. The role for this researcher in this study was to introduce the study to government professionals who have served as raters for a governmental organization within the past

12-18 months. Subsequently, the researcher functioned as the data collector, a position that required analyzing and validating the data.

Participants and Population

One of the most critical tasks a qualitative researcher can undertake is identifying the population and the selection of participants for the study. Because of the nature of a qualitative study, there can often be difficulty with the design of this part of the study for a number of reasons: (a) narrow candidate pool, (b) lack of willing participants, (c) the validity of the participants, and (d) subjectivity and bias, to name a few (Posthuma et al., 2002; Rudestam & Newton, 2007). A qualitative researcher must ensure he or she can access the target population and that the participants have experience within the scope of their study. As most qualitative data are collected through interactions with participants through the use of interviews, surveys, questionnaires, or focus groups, a researcher must find participants who are willing to speak about their experiences (Asiamah, Mensah, & Oteng-Abayie, 2017). As a result, finding prospective participants who have experience with the scope of the study and who are willing to share their thoughts can be challenging—and without participants, even the best topic cannot be explored without willing participants (Sikkens, Van San, Sieckelinck, Boeije, & De Winter, 2016).

Population

Population specification is a necessity in the documentation of both qualitative and quantitative studies (Asiamah et al., 2017). Likewise, the models of target, accessibility, and general population often apply to both designs. However, population specification is not guided by the same principles in qualitative and quantitative studies (Asiamah et al., 2017; Creswell, 2014; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). For example, qualitative studies focus on somewhat fewer participants who possess the ability to describe their experiences and/or knowledge with respect to the research questions (Creswell, 2014; Rudestam & Newton, 2007). The population of a study is an entire group of people to which a researcher intends the results to apply or the larger group to which inferences are made on the basis of the particular set of people (sample) studied (Aron, Coups, & Aron, 2013). In other words, the population of a research project is a well-defined collection of individuals that usually have a common, binding characteristic or trait.

Typically, the description of the population and the common binding characteristic of its members are the same—such as *government employees*. This is a well-defined group of people who can be considered a population, and all the members of this population are indeed employees of the government. For this study, the sought population was local government employees in the state of California who have participated as raters, or interview panelists, for a local government position. By definition, local government (n.d.) is the government of a specific local area and can include a city or county jurisdiction.

The State Controller's government compensation in California provides information on employee pay and other information for approximately 5,000 public employers including cities and counties. According to statistics about California cities, there are approximately 330,000 city employees as of the end of 2017 and 358,196 county employees as of 2017 (California State Controller, n.d.-a, n.d.-b). See Figure 3 and Figure 4.

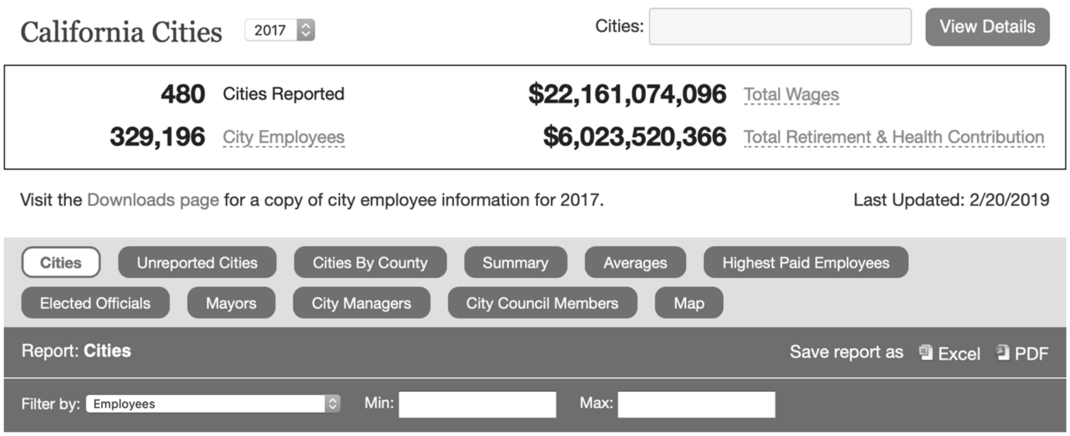


Figure 3. State controller's government compensation in California, California cities employee base as of 2017. From "Government Compensation in California: California Cities: 2017," by California State Controller. (n.d.-b). (2017) (https://publicpay.ca.gov/Reports/Cities/Cities.aspx).

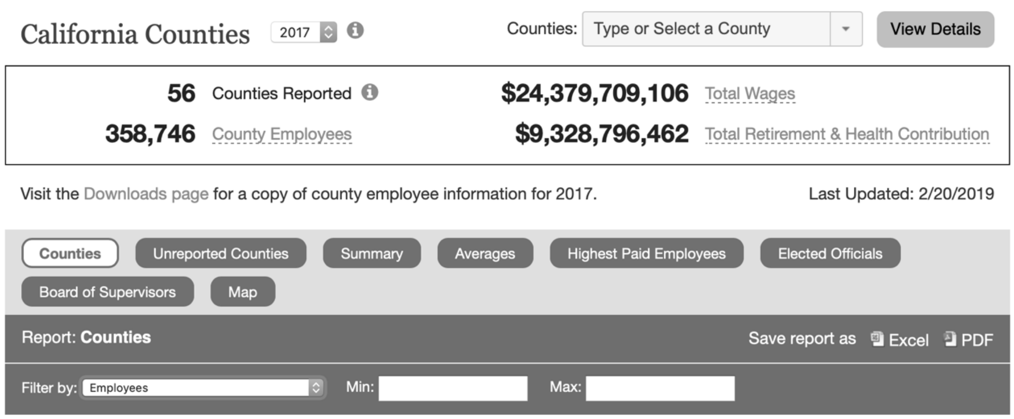


Figure 4. State controller's government compensation in California, California counties employee base as of 2017. From "Government Compensation in California: California Counties: 2017," by California State Controller. (n.d.-b). (2017) (https://publicpay.ca.gov/Reports/Counties /Counties.aspx).

According to an article by Sauter (2018) in *USA Today*, public sector government jobs have remained static since the rise of the economy in 2010. This means that there has not been a major reduction or increase in the employee base in the aggregate. As a result, government employment as a share of total employment has declined from 17.3% to 15.2% (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2014). In some states, state and local government employees account for anywhere between 12% and 25% of total employment. Based on 2017 employment figures from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, all 50 states were ranked based on federal, state, and local government employees as a share of total employment where California ranked number 32 (see Figure 5).

32. California

- **Gov't. employees, 2017:** 15.2% of workforce
- **Gov't. employment change, 2007-2017** +2.4% (2,494,600 to 2,553,500)
- **State gov't. spending per capita:** $8,168 (11th most)
- **Population density:** 239.1 per sq. mi. (11th highest)

Figure 5. U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics ranked government employee statistics. *2014 Archive,* by U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics,2014 (https://www.bls.gov/opub /mlr/2014/).

The figures demonstrated that employment in government is maintaining high levels, and in conjunction with research claiming that interview panels are the preferred method for hiring, a strong population can be identified (Arvey, 1979b; Carnahan, 2007; Levashina et al., 2014; Tsai et al., 2016).

Participants

The participants of a qualitative research project can be identified as the specific subset of the population who has the outlined experience in the desired subject field as it pertains to the study. It is paramount that the researcher identified what those desired experiences, or traits, were in order to support the research questions. For this study, the participants sought were required to meet the following criteria:

- Must be at least 18 years of age or older

- Must have served as a rater on an interview panel in a county or local government municipality in the state of California
- Must have been an employee of a state, county, or local government at the time of serving as a rater in the state of California
- Must be a voluntary participant

Data Collection

The advancement of technology has supported various social and shared applications—such as social media. Social media, or defined as an Internet-based application, provides numerous platforms for users to express their thoughts, opinions, and knowledge in an online capacity, which can offer anonymity or known identity (Kern et al., 2016). Some of the current common platforms used in research studies are LinkedIn, Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram. For researchers, this outlet offers an extensive research setting that can generate data in an expanded environment. As a result, researchers have begun to utilize this setting in qualitative studies as a method to improve analysis, save time, and reach increased participants (Andriani, Kusnanto, & Istiono, 2017).

Setting

For this study, the setting was the utilization of on online evaluation tool through the social networking sites approach, and via social media networks such as LinkedIn, Facebook, and Instagram. The breakdown of connections is shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Social Networking Service

Social media network	# of connections
LinkedIn	783
Facebook	370
Instagram	230

Sample Size

For this study, the Raosoft (2004) sample size calculator was utilized to determine the sample size derived from the study population. The sample size calculator required the input of the following components to determine the sample size for the study. First, it was necessary to input the margin of error, which according to Frankfort-Nachmias and Nachmias (2008) "is one of the statistical measures that indicates how closely sample results reflect the true value of the parameter" (p. 42). According to Hunter (2016), margin of error reveals the imprecision inherent in survey data. Survey data provide a range, not a specific number. Therefore, a margin of error of 5% was utilized in the Raosoft calculation. Second, the confidence level is the level of confidence in the margin of error that the results will not fall outside the margin of error. A larger sample size can increase the strength of confidence level. Confidence levels of 90%, 95%, and 99% were inputted. Third, knowing or closely estimating the population size was necessary (Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias, 2008).

To reach maximum participants, the researcher utilized snowball sampling, which is a nonprobability sampling technique that is used by researchers to identify potential subjects in studies where subjects can be difficult to locate or find it challenging to participate (Andriani et al., 2017). The process of snowball sampling through social media networks is asking the subjects to either share the post or tag specific individuals who share the required criteria on their social media networks. This allows the original post to be seen by a wider group of individuals with a higher probability of yielding the desire sample size. In order to reach enough data to make the study legitimate, the researcher sought a sample size of 267 participants. As described by Aldiabat and Le Navenec (2018), this concept refers to "the phase of qualitative data analysis in which the researcher has continued sampling and analyzing data until no new data appear and all concepts of the theory are established and consequently data collection can cease" (p. 247). With this type of qualitative study, snowball sampling offers many advantages such as (a) allowing the researcher to reach populations that are difficult to sample when using other sampling methods, (b) employing a process that is cost-effective and simple, and (c) requiring little planning in comparison to other sampling techniques (Izard-Carroll, 2016).

Data Instrument

The instrument for obtaining and collecting the data can be identified in two modes: a survey as the sole method of gathering data from the participants and the researcher as the key instrument collecting data. Research conducted through a survey can be defined as the collection of information from a sample of individuals through their responses to questions (Ponto, 2015). This type of research allows for a variety of methods to recruit participants, collect data, and utilize various methods of instrumentation. Survey research can use qualitative research strategies, such as open-ended questions or semistructured questions, to obtain data. As it is often used to identify and explore human behavior, surveys are regularly used in social and psychological research (Ponto, 2015).

Although there are various types of survey tools, the selected instrument was Qualtrics, which can be described as an interactive, web-based, conversational-type tool used to increase engagement and participation. Qualtrics is a simple to use, web-based survey tool to conduct survey research, evaluations, and other data collection activities. Qualtrics is a customer experience management (CXM) platform that focuses on collecting, organizing, and understanding important data relative to customers and employees. The survey consisted of 10 questions that included both open-ended and structured multiple-choice questions that were sent out on the researcher's social media platforms for 2 weeks. If followers on the social media networks did not participate immediately, then the researcher reposted the survey as often as needed to attract participants. This included a resharing of a post every day, several times a day, and every few days. If the ideal sample size was not reached after 2 full weeks on social media networks, then the researcher extended the survey by 1 to 2 additional weeks.

Since qualitative studies are used to conduct research through the lived experiences of people, the characteristics of the research differ greatly from those of a quantitative study. First, the study is performed in a natural setting as opposed to a lab, and in this case, social media. Second, and most importantly, the researcher becomes the key instrument throughout the data collection process. This means that the scholar is the one to actually gather the information provided by the participants, interpret the data, and serve as the gatekeeper for protecting the data (Creswell, 2014).

Survey Questions

Qualitative surveys tend to ask open-ended questions to find out more; however, designing survey questions require thoughtful analysis, considering the dynamics of the study. A total of 10 questions were asked through Qualtrics. To ensure uniformity to all participants, a quick video was disseminated identifying the introduction of the survey, the intent, the voluntary status, and an overview of how to take the survey. The questions on the survey were as follows:

1. You are being asked to take part in an academic research study that will explore **how** local government organizations **train** raters/interview panelists for their role of serving on a job interview panel and to discover the best practices of this process. The study is seeking participants who are 18 years of age or older that are local government employees (city or county) in the state of California who have participated as a rater, or interview panelist, for a local government position. In order to participate, you will be required to agree to an informed consent. Please read the following information carefully. Please ask the researcher if there is anything that is not clear or if you need more information. Would you like to continue?
2. The study you will be participating in includes a total of eight questions via Qualtrics Research Core and should take no more than 10 minutes to complete. The questions are a combination of standardized multiple-choice and open-ended explanation type questions. You will not be asked your age, gender or any agency information. The study is being conducted on a strictly volunteer basis, and you will not be compensated for taking the survey. The information gathered in this study will be

published; however, no identity or organizational information will be used—therefore confidentiality is ensured. The survey should take no more than 10 minutes to complete; however, if at any time you feel uncomfortable or would like to stop the survey, you may do so without penalty.

3. Identify your employment status:
4. How many times have you served as a rater on an interview panel for a local government organization?
5. Have you ever received **training** by the hiring organization to prepare you as a rater on an interview panel? For the purposes of this study, **training** is identified as instruction on how to ask the interview questions (i.e., voice inflection, eye contact, overall demeanor); how to evaluate answers to identify the best candidates; identify illegal interview questions that should avoid being asked; the importance of proper documentation and note-taking; and awareness of rater biases.
6. What type of **training** did you receive? For the purposes of this study, **training** is identified as instruction on how to ask the interview questions (i.e., voice inflection, eye contact, overall demeanor); how to evaluate answers to identify the best candidates; identify illegal interview questions that should avoid being asked; the importance of proper documentation and note-taking; and awareness of rater biases.
7. How frequently were you trained for your role as a rater on an interview panel?
8. Do you feel that you have been adequately trained as a rater to serve on an interview panel?
9. What type of training do you feel would be beneficial for raters on interview panels to receive?

10. Is there anything else about training raters for their roles as interview panelists that you would like to add?

Data Analysis

Grounded theory provides a method of qualitative data analysis that begins with an analysis of a single case to develop a theory where the analysis of subsequent data is examined to determine a theory. With this particular qualitative study, the researcher collected and analyzed data at the same time and on a continual basis to determine whether saturation was reached, to see whether the study was reaching the desired participants, and to determine any emerging theories (Creswell, 2014). As the data were being collected, they had to be organized and categorized—also known as coding (Snelson, 2016). Coding can be explained as categorization of data by a word or a short phrase that represents a theme or an idea (Pulla, 2016). All codes require an assignment of meaningful titles with a broad scope of nonquantifiable elements, such as events, behaviors, activities, or meanings. For example, the term *training* can be identified as the title with the codes being *outsourced*, *internal*, or *autonomous*. There are three types of coding:

- *Open coding:* The initial organization of raw data to try to make sense of it
- *Axial coding:* Interconnecting and linking the categories of codes
- *Selective coding:* Formulating the story through connecting the categories

The next step in the process is the line-by-line coding, which carefully examines words, phrases, or sentences for relevancy to the overall research questions (Creswell, 2014; Izard-Carroll, 2016). The data were also cleaned for surveys returned that were incomplete, not germane to the study, or otherwise obviously not valid. There may be several significant pieces of data per survey question or perhaps none; however, when found, the data were organized into codes which ultimately served as an interpretation of emerging insights. Following line-by-line coding, categorization took place, which is the grouping of abstracted codes in a *like with like* fashion—or logical grouping—with a tentative label identified (Creswell, 2014; Izard-Carroll, 2016). This may commence quite early or might only be done after all data are coded. The program used for data coding was done through a survey tool called Qualtrics and organized through Microsoft Excel. During the continual process of data collection and coding, categories may have changed slightly with the additional responses from participants and as new information was gathered. The next step was to interrelate themes to establish relationships in the data and build a theoretical model (Creswell, 2014). If the responses from the participants were not yielding the desired results, the survey made several attempts to reach out on social media and sought e-mail distribution from local government professionals as an alternate. Once the themes were determined through the coding and categorization process, a process model was identified and supported by a narrative of the findings (Creswell, 2014; Guest et al., 2012). The final step included the overall interpretation of the findings, the lessons learned, the connections to procedural justice and literature, and finally, recommendations for future research.

Approvals

Prior to the execution of this study, the study was submitted to the California Baptist University (CBU) Institutional Review Board (IRB) for approved consent. The purpose of the IRB is to "protect the rights and welfare of human research subjects recruited to participate in research activities conducted under the auspices of the institution with which it is affiliated" (CBU, 2018, p. 11). The IRB is tasked with the responsibility of reviewing all research projects involving human participants prior to the execution of the study and is focused on protecting the welfare, rights, and privacy of human participants. The IRB has the authority to approve, disapprove, monitor, and require modifications in all research activities that fall within its jurisdiction, as specified by both the federal regulations and institutional policy (CBU, 2018). Once IRB approval was given and finalized, the survey was disseminated via social media networks. Each participant was required to acknowledge the information package provided within the survey. The information package contained a copy of the informed consent, a confidentiality statement, and the research participant's bill of rights.

Informed Consent

One of the most important ethical rules governing qualitative research is that individuals must voluntarily give their informed consent before participating in a study. However, the conditions under which one may be required to obtain permission from those being observed varies. The informed consent process is a basic ethical obligation for researchers. It consists of providing ample information to the potential participant about the study, giving the subject the opportunity to contemplate options, replying to questions the subject may have, and ensuring that the subject or the legal representative understands the information (Giroir, 2020). Consent must be obtained from the research subjects before participation in research begins. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services regulations refer to a signed consent statement (45 CFR 26.117(a)), which can be found in the CBU's bill of rights (CBU, 2018). The university's bill of rights provides a list of bullet points to the research participant identifying all of their rights in order for the subject to make the decision whether to participate in the study or not. Presenting this to the subjects provides more than simply handing over a document—it builds trust between the researcher and the subject and allows for transparency of the study. In addition to the subject's rights and researchers' responsibilities, the informed consent provides a summary of the study, the approximate time commitment, the procedures involved for the participant, and overall confidentiality.

Confidentiality

Confidentiality pertains to the treatment of information that an individual has disclosed in a relationship of trust and with the expectation that it will not be divulged to others without permission in ways that are inconsistent with the understanding of the original disclosure. During the informed consent process, if applicable, subjects must be informed of the precautions that will be taken to protect the confidentiality of the data and be informed of the parties who will or may have access (i.e., researcher, etc.). This will allow subjects to decide the adequacy of the protections and the acceptability of the possible release of private information to the interested parties. Protocols should be designed to minimize the need to collect and maintain identifiable information about research subjects. If possible, data should be collected anonymously, or the identifiers should be removed and destroyed as soon as possible, and access to research data should be based on a "need to know" and "minimum necessary" standard. When it is necessary to collect and maintain identifiable data, the IRB ensures that the protocol includes the necessary safeguards to maintain confidentiality of identifiable data and data security appropriate to the degree of risk from disclosure.

Protection of Human Participants

Research with human participants has been both common and valuable, especially in advancing knowledge in the social sciences and behavioral sciences. However, with this type of research, it is imperative that certain regulations are operationalized at the federal, state, and local levels (Giroir, 2020). Additionally, professional and educational organizations have developed discipline-specific standards, policies, and guidelines for ensuring that the rights and welfare of research participants are protected (Giroir, 2020). In the early 1970s, the National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research (NCPHSBBR) was developed to analyze issues involving the protection of humans in research, which provided the ethical framework for the protection of human participants in research (CBU, 2018).

This study was conducted under the approval of CBU's IRB. The role of IRB is to assess potential risks of the study, explore the mitigation strategies the researcher has taken to protect the participants, and to balance the risks versus gains. One of the mitigation strategies resides in the development of a sound research design. This means asking well-developed and ethically sound questions, being transparent about the study in general, ensuring the potential participants have read and signed the informed consent, and allowing availability of the researcher to the participants to answer any questions or concerns. With these strategies, in conjunction with the survey being anonymous, the protection of human participants was certain.

Validity and Reliability

The validity and reliability of any research project correlate directly into the legitimacy, trustworthiness, credibility, and authenticity of the study (Creswell, 2014).

Validity is not a straightforward concept, and the elements can be defined differently by different authors. The definition of validity that is represented for this study can be defined, as Creswell (2014) stated, that the "researcher checks for accuracy of the findings by employing certain procedures" (p. 201). Reliability in a qualitative research project, however, is the notion of being comprehensive and honest in conducting the research while instilling consistency (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). From a procedural perspective, the researcher is required to identify a valid and reliable strategy in order to ensure the study is legitimate, trustworthy, credible, and authentic.

Validity and Reliability Strategies

When developing strategies to safeguard validity and reliability in the study, it is critical to first identify the threats that can compromise the project. One of the most common threats to a qualitative study is the idea of researcher bias. The term *researcher bias* represents any kind of influence of the researcher's knowledge or assumptions of the study, which may be negative or positive, including the assumptions of the sampling strategy, design, or analysis (Brecher et al., 2006). With the role of the researcher being identified as having had a vested interest in the training of interview panelists and years of experience in this area in the local government realm, it was paramount that the researcher relied solely on the facts of the data and did not insert any bias or subjectivity. In order to save the study from researcher bias, the following prevention and mitigation measures were taken.

Staying focused on the purpose of the study and the "why." The purpose of qualitative research is for researchers to gain an in-depth understanding about a social or human problem that cannot be achieved in other ways with the features, attributes, and characteristics of a phenomenon that can be thematically interpreted (Maxwell, 2012). Injecting bias would only serve to minimize the donation of viable information into the academic and professional worlds and reduce the opportunity for a truly organic study. These reasons alone provide the researchers the assurance to remaining unbiased and objective.

Asking the right survey questions. Bias during a research project can be subtle or be painfully obvious depending on how a question is worded both verbally and written. It is the researcher's responsibility to remain impartial and avoid writing questions that lead or confuse the respondent (Knight, 2017). In order to minimize this risk, the researcher should keep a balance between wording the questions generic enough to allow room for interpretation from the respondent but detailed enough to ensure the questions are answered fully. For example, rather than asking whether the participant has been trained as rater in the form of videos or books, it was best to ask the participants to describe any rater training they have received.

Identifying the most appropriate target population. Clearly identifying and defining the target population can also help reduce the risk in validity by providing the survey a proper scope. What this accomplishes is the lessening of researcher interpretation of responses from participants who are not ideal for completing a survey. Additionally, incorrectly excluding or including certain participants may inadvertently skew data results.

Having a clear data analysis plan. In some research projects, the data collection process can operate in reverse in that the information gathering occurs first and then data analysis strategy is developed later. For this study, the data collected were organized and categorized—also known as coded. Coding can be explained as categorization of data by a word or a short phrase that represents a theme or an idea (Pulla, 2016). All codes were assigned meaningful titles with a broad scope of nonquantifiable elements such as events, behaviors, activities, or meanings. For example, the term *training* can be the identified as the title with the codes being *outsourced*, *internal*, or *autonomous*.

Negative or discrepant information. According to Creswell (2014), negative or discrepant information is a process of analyzing cases, or sets of data collected from a single participant, that do not match the patterns emerging from the rest of the data (p. 202). This differentiation from the common emerging theme demonstrates contradictory evidence that can support the validity of the study.

Summary

This chapter identified and outlined the step-by-step process in the methodology for this study. The primary method used for this research project was a qualitative study rooted in grounded theory. The combination of this approach allowed the researcher to obtain information on the participants who have served as raters on interview panels in local government and their experiences with rater training, which will lead to an emerging theme or theory. The targeted audience was employees of local government organizations in California who were over the age of 18 and who had served as a rater on an interview panel within a city or county jurisdiction. The ideal sample size to make the study viable was 267 participants gained through an online survey via the social media networks of LinkedIn, Facebook, and Instagram. Snowball sampling was also utilized to obtain the optimal number of participants. The data collection was captured within Qualtrics, the online survey company this study used, and password protected by the single researcher. Data analysis was performed by both Qualtrics and the researcher on a continual and routine basis until the sample size was obtained. To protect the integrity of the study and ensure validity and reliability, the researcher followed a strict process that was organic and transparent. A comprehensive review of the findings follows in Chapter 4 of this study.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

Chapter 4 includes a comprehensive analysis of surveys with local government employees within the state of California. The analyzed data determined the emerging themes based on the experiences of local government employees and their experiences with being trained as a rater on an interview panel. The analysis presented in Chapter 4 includes an explanation of the data analysis method used and how these results related directly to the research questions of the study. Chapter 4 examines how these questions provided the structure for the study and were the foundation for the research and results. Chapter 4 also discusses the process of coding data, the survey dissemination process, the sample demographics, data collection procedures, and the qualitative findings.

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore how local government organizations train or prepare raters for their role of serving on a job interview panel and to discover the best practices of this process. This study contributes to the field of public administration because the job interview is the most common method of hiring public sector employees and is where the investment of human capital in the workplace begins. As raters conducting an employment interview, it is their responsibility to evaluate the qualifications of applicants and make employment selections on the basis of job-related skills, experiences, and qualifications only (Arvey, 1979b; Carnahan, 2007; Levashina et al., 2014; Tsai et al., 2016). Considering raters, or interview panelists, have a legitimate power to screen candidates for employment, they must safeguard that the successful candidate has gone through a fair, equitable, and legal interview. This means providing consistency with how the interview is executed, including the assessment format (using structured vs unstructured interview questions), note-taking practices, proper interviewing techniques, effective communication, minimal bias, and adherence to the legal obligations to the hiring process.

Hire the "Right" Candidate

Panel interviews are known as a common practice and are a popular selection technique from many perspectives. In public sector organizations throughout the nation, employment interviews continue to be one of the most commonly used systems to assess candidates for employment (Macan, 2009; Ryan et al., 1999; Stycos, 1955; Wilk & Cappelli, 2003). Among administrative decision-makers, panel-based interviews have been found to be the assessment method most preferred by administrators (Capman, 2017; Lievens et al., 2005) and human resources (HR) practitioners (Society for Human Resource Management [SHRM], 2015). Additionally, applicants perceive interviews as fair in comparison to other selection procedures, and applicants expect interviews as part of the selection process (Bauer et al., 2012). In fact, from an applicant's perspective, obtaining a job interview is fundamental to job search success (Saks, 2006). However, no interview process is complete without the raters who sit on the other side of the table. The rater, or interview panelist, accepts a huge undertaking when selected to fulfill this role. Raters are responsible for the evaluation of candidates to determine the best person for the position. This requires a great deal of know-how, such as practicing proper communication techniques (both verbal and nonverbal), note-taking, decreasing the risk of biases, and adhering to legal requirements set forth by the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) and the individual local government organization.

Because of the tremendous amount of responsibility raters have, this study was designed to discover the best practices of how these panelists were trained or prepared to sit on an interview panel. The following research questions were the foundation of this study seeking a solid understanding of how raters are trained.

1. How are raters trained to serve on interview panels in local government organizations?
2. What are the best practices for preparing a rater to sit on an interview panel?

Survey Questions

1. You are being asked to take part in an academic research study that will explore **how** local government organizations **train** raters/interview panelists for their role of serving on a job interview panel and to discover the best practices of this process. The study is seeking participants who are 18 years of age or older that are local government employees (city or county) in the state of California who have participated as a rater, or interview panelist, for a local government position. In order to participate, you will be required to agree to an informed consent. Please read the following information carefully. Please ask the researcher if there is anything that is not clear or if you need more information. Would you like to continue?
2. The study you will be participating in includes a total of eight questions via Qualtrics Research Core and should take no more than 10 minutes to complete. The questions are a combination of standardized multiple-choice and open-ended explanation type questions. You will not be asked your age, gender or any agency information. The study is being conducted on a strictly volunteer basis, and you will not be compensated for taking the survey. The information gathered in this study will be

published; however, no identity or organizational information will be used—therefore confidentiality is ensured. The survey should take no more than 10 minutes to complete; however, if at any time you feel uncomfortable or would like to stop the survey, you may do so without penalty.

3. Identify your employment status:
    a) I am currently an employee of a city government in the state of California
    b) I am currently an employee of a county government in the state of California
    c) I am recently retired from a city or county government in the state of California
4. How many times have you served as a rater on an interview panel for a local government organization?
    a) 1-3 times
    b) 3-5 times
    c) 5-10 times
    d) 11+ times
5. Have you ever received **training** by the hiring organization to prepare you as a rater on an interview panel? For the purposes of this study, **training** is identified as instruction on how to ask the interview questions (i.e., voice inflection, eye contact, overall demeanor); how to evaluate answers to identify the best candidates; identify illegal interview questions that should avoid being asked; the importance of proper documentation and note-taking; and awareness of rater biases.
    a) Yes
    b) No
    c) Partially

6. What type of **training** did you receive? For the purposes of this study, **training** is identified as instruction on how to ask the interview questions (i.e., voice inflection, eye contact, overall demeanor); how to evaluate answers to identify the best candidates; identify illegal interview questions that should avoid being asked; the importance of proper documentation and note-taking; and awareness of rater biases.
   a) I watched videos or did online training
   b) I read a manual, handbook, etc.
   c) I had a briefing from human resources
   d) I attended a class in person
   e) I did not receive training
   f) Other. Please explain.
7. How frequently were you trained for your role as a rater on an interview panel?
   a) Regular annual training
   b) Whenever I am asked to be a rater
   c) I rarely receive training as it is assumed that I know what to do
   d) I have never received official training
8. Do you feel that you have been adequately trained as a rater to serve on an interview panel?
   a) I feel adequately trained
   b) I feel partially trained
   c) I feel mostly trained
   d) Not really, but I have had plenty of experience
   e) I do not feel adequately trained

9. What type of training do you feel would be beneficial for raters on interview panels to receive?

    a) Training videos

    b) Manuals or books

    c) In-class training

    d) Online training

    e) Other. Please explain

10. Is there anything else about training raters for their roles as interview panelists that you would like to add?

Appropriateness Methodology and Design

When selecting the design, distinction of differences between quantitative and qualitative methodologies needed to be weighed for the appropriateness of the study. A quantitative research method is used to quantify opinions, attitudes, behaviors, and other defined variables with the by way of generating numerical data. Quantitative research is basically about numbers and figures and uses measurable data to formulate facts and uncover patterns in research (Creswell, 2014). Qualitative research, however, is appropriate for researchers who seek to gain an in-depth understanding about a social or human problem that cannot be achieved in other ways with the features, attributes, and characteristics of a phenomenon that can be thematically interpreted (Maxwell, 2012). Qualitative studies typically maintain the following characteristics: (a) understanding human behavior from the informant's perspective, (b) employing an interactive process, and (c) seeking to understand and interpret social phenomena. Data collection in qualitative research is seldom based on unstructured or semistructured approaches but is instead based on methodologically flexible techniques (i.e., individual depth interviews or group discussions) that are suited to produce details and a comprehensive view (Frieder et al., 2016).

Quantitative research uses highly structured, firm techniques such as online questionnaires and on-street or telephone interviews. Unlike qualitative research, which allows unlimited communication from participants, quantitative research relies on responses to preformulated questions. A qualitative method was selected as the most appropriate design for this study because the data were dependent on the personal experiences of people who have sat on interview panels in local government. A mix of structured, multiple-choice, and open-ended questions were asked of participants to help the researcher understand what type and/or level of training they had received to prepare for their role as a rater on an interview panel.

Grounded theory was originally developed by sociologists, Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss in 1967 and was proposed to allow for the development of new, contextualized theories (Maxwell, 2012). Grounded theory is meant to develop a theory that is supported by examples of what problems exist in a social scene. Grounded theory involves the progressive identification and integration of meaningful categories from data (Pulla, 2016). It is a combination of the process of category identification and integration, the method, and its product that produces the theory. Grounded theory was selected for this study because of the assumption that social events and processes have an objective reality and can be observed and documented by the researcher.

The objective of this study was to provide local government employees an opportunity to share their experiences with how their organizations trained or prepared them as raters for their role in serving on job interview panels and to discover the best practices of this process. The goal was to develop various codes with which to describe the data and lead to understanding the best practices for interview panelist training/preparation. This study contributes to the field of public administration because the job interview is the most common method of hiring public sector employees and is where the investment of human capital in the workplace begins. As raters conducting an employment interview, it is their responsibility to evaluate the qualifications of applicants and make employment selections on the basis of job-related skills, experiences, and qualifications (Arvey, 1979b; Carnahan, 2007; Levashina et al., 2014; Tsai et al., 2016).

Data Collection

Surveys are defined as the act of examining a process or questioning a selected sample of individuals to obtain data about a service, product, or process. Data collection surveys collect information from a targeted group of people about their opinions, behavior, or knowledge. Common types of example surveys are written questionnaires, face-to-face or telephone interviews, focus groups, and electronic (e-mail or website) surveys. The data collection process in this study included the identification of the desired population, a method of recruitment in seeking participants, the determination of the appropriate sample size, and the data instrument.

Population

For this study, the sought population was local government employees in the state of California who had participated as a rater, or interview panelist, for a local government position. By definition, local government is the government of a specific local area constituting a subdivision in a city or county jurisdiction. It was paramount that the researcher identified what those desired experiences or traits were in order to support the research questions. For this study, the participants sought were required to meet the following criteria:

- Must be at least 18 years of age or older
- Must have served as a rater on an interview panel in a county or local government municipality
- Must have been an employee of a state, county, or local government at the time of serving as a rater in the state of California
- Must be a voluntary participant

Survey Question 1

You are being asked to take part in an academic research study that will explore **how** local government organizations **train** raters/interview panelists for their role of serving on a job interview panel and to discover the best practices of this process. The study is seeking participants who are 18 years of age or older that are local government employees (city or county) in the state of California who have participated as a rater, or interview panelist, for a local government position. In order to participate, you will be required to agree to an informed consent. Please read the following information carefully. Please ask the researcher if there is anything that is not clear or if you need more information. Would you like to continue? (see Figure 6).

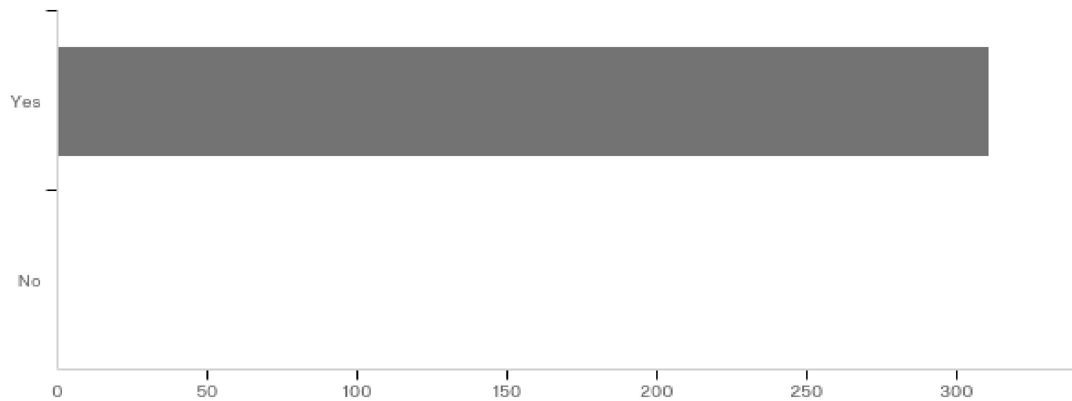


Figure 6. Data chart from Qualtrics for participant approval.

Survey Question 2

The study you will be participating in includes a total of eight questions via Qualtrics Research Core and should take no more than 10 minutes to complete. The questions are a combination of standardized multiple-choice and open-ended explanation type questions. You will not be asked your age, gender or any agency information. The study is being conducted on a strictly volunteer basis, and you will not be compensated for taking the survey. The information gathered in this study will be published; however, no identity or organizational information will be used—therefore confidentiality is ensured. The survey should take no more than 10 minutes to complete; however, if at any time you feel uncomfortable or would like to stop the survey, you may do so without penalty (see Figure 7).

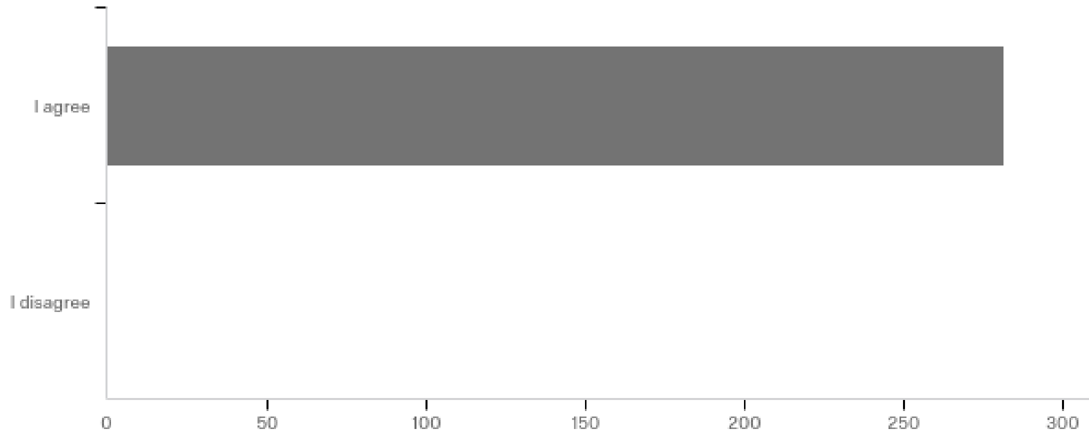


Figure 7. Data chart from Qualtrics for participant confidentiality.

Survey Question 3

Identify your employment status:

a) I am currently an employee of a city government in the state of California

b) I am currently an employee of a county government in the state of California

c) I am recently retired from a city or county government in the state of California (see Figure 8).

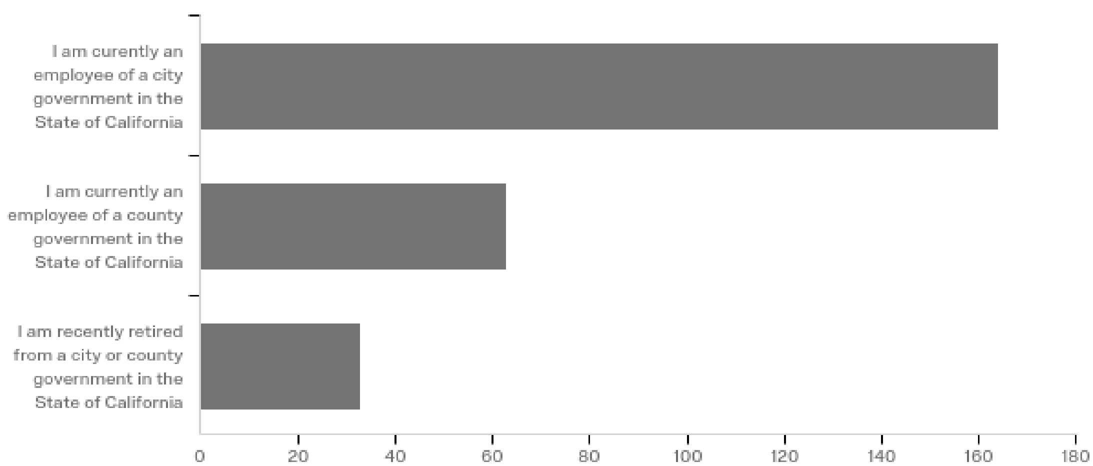


Figure 8. Data chart from Qualtrics of participant employment status.

Survey Question 4

How many times have you served as a rater on an interview panel for a local government organization?

a) 1-3 times

b) 3-5 times

c) 5-10 times

d) 11+ times (see Figure 9).

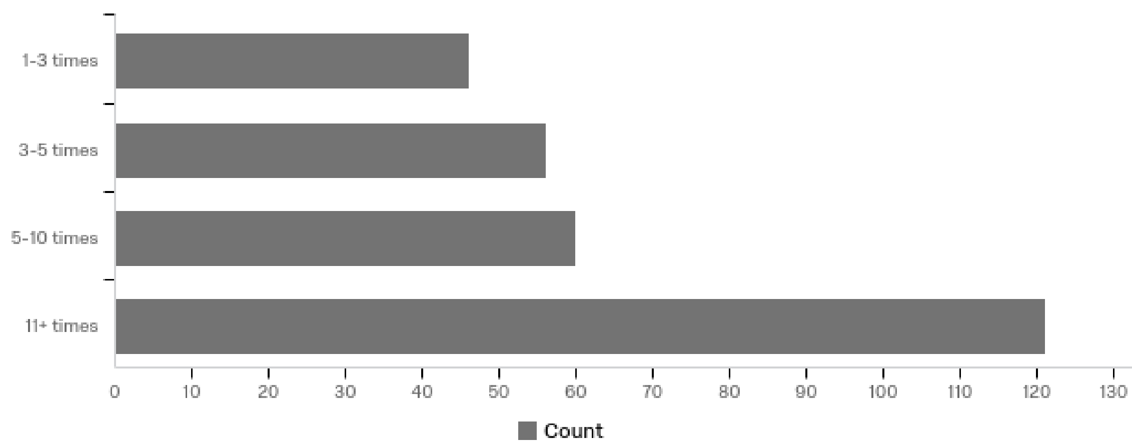


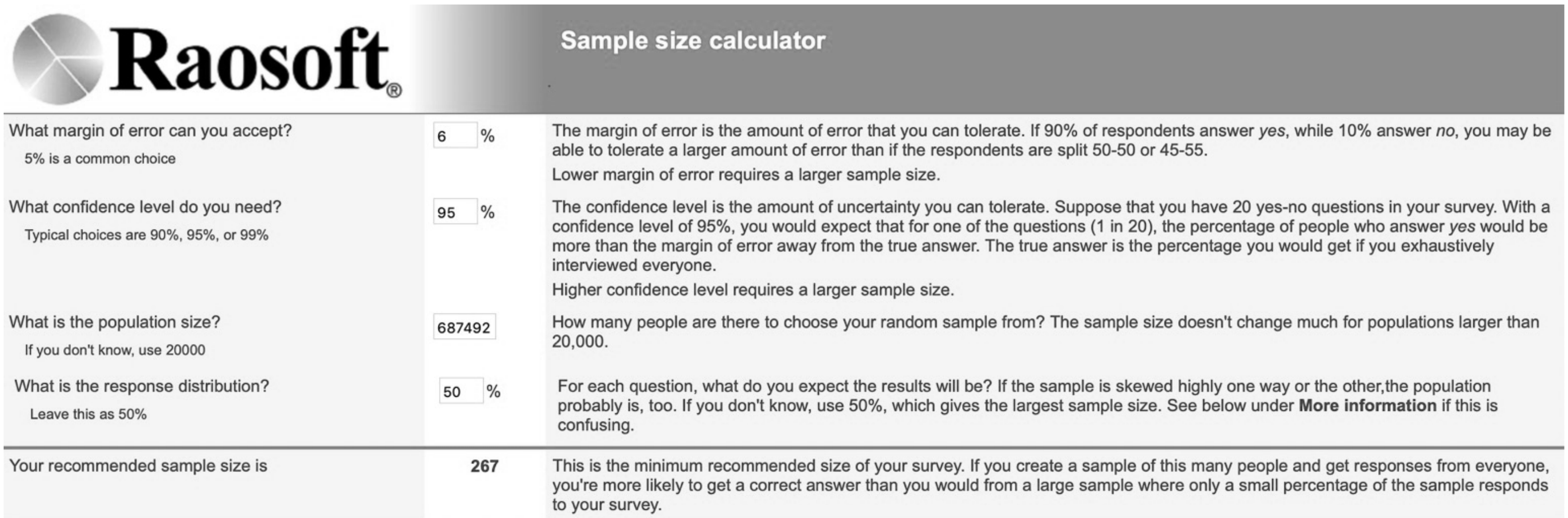
Figure 9. Data chart from Qualtrics for number of interview panels participated.

Method of Recruitment

The method of recruitment for this study was the utilization of on online evaluation tool disseminated through the social media networks LinkedIn, Facebook, and Instagram. To reach maximum participants, the researcher utilized snowball sampling, which is a nonprobability sampling technique used by researchers to identify potential subjects in studies where subjects can be difficult to locate or participate. The process of snowball sampling through social media networks was to first ask the participants to take the survey, then to either share the post and tag specific individuals who shared the required criteria on their social media networks. This allowed the original post to be seen by a wider group of individuals with a higher probability of yielding the desired sample size. To ensure uniformity to all participants, a quick video was disseminated introducing the survey, the intent, the voluntary requirement, and an overview of how to take the survey.

Sample Size

For this study, the Raosoft (2004) sample size calculator was utilized to determine the sample size derived from the study population (see Figure 10). The Raosoft (2004) sample size calculator required the input of the following components to determine the sample size for the study. First, it was necessary to input the margin of error, which according to Frankfort-Nachmias and Nachmias (2008) "is one of the statistical measures that indicates how closely sample results reflect the true value of the parameter" (p. 42). According to Hunter (2016), margin of error reveals the imprecision inherent in survey data. Survey data provide a range, not a specific number. Therefore, a margin of error of 5% was utilized in the Raosoft calculation. Second, the confidence level is the level of confidence in the margin of error that the results will not fall outside the margin of error. A larger sample size can increase the strength of confidence level. Confidence levels of 90%, 95%, and 99% were inputted. Third, knowing or closely estimating the population size was necessary (Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias, 2008).



Raosoft®

Sample size calculator

What margin of error can you accept? 5% is a common choice	6 %	The margin of error is the amount of error that you can tolerate. If 90% of respondents answer *yes*, while 10% answer *no*, you may be able to tolerate a larger amount of error than if the respondents are split 50-50 or 45-55. Lower margin of error requires a larger sample size.
What confidence level do you need? Typical choices are 90%, 95%, or 99%	95 %	The confidence level is the amount of uncertainty you can tolerate. Suppose that you have 20 yes-no questions in your survey. With a confidence level of 95%, you would expect that for one of the questions (1 in 20), the percentage of people who answer *yes* would be more than the margin of error away from the true answer. The true answer is the percentage you would get if you exhaustively interviewed everyone. Higher confidence level requires a larger sample size.
What is the population size? If you don't know, use 20000	687492	How many people are there to choose your random sample from? The sample size doesn't change much for populations larger than 20,000.
What is the response distribution? Leave this as 50%	50 %	For each question, what do you expect the results will be? If the sample is skewed highly one way or the other,the population probably is, too. If you don't know, use 50%, which gives the largest sample size. See below under **More information** if this is confusing.
Your recommended sample size is	**267**	This is the minimum recommended size of your survey. If you create a sample of this many people and get responses from everyone, you're more likely to get a correct answer than you would from a large sample where only a small percentage of the sample responds to your survey.

Figure 10. Sample size calculator from Raosoft. (https://www.raosoft.com/samplesize.html).

Data Instrument

The instrument for obtaining and collecting the data was identified in two modes: a survey as the sole method of gathering data from the participants and the researcher as the key instrument collecting data. Research conducted through the survey can be defined as the collection of information from a sample of individuals through their responses to questions. This type of research allowed for a variety of methods to recruit participants, collect data, and utilize various methods of instrumentation. Survey research can use qualitative research strategies such as using open-ended questions or semistructured questions to obtain data. As survey research is often used to identify and explore human behavior, surveys are regularly used in social and psychological research.

Although there are various types of survey tools, the selected instrument was Qualtrics which can be described as an interactive, web-based, conversational-type tool used to increase engagement and participation. Qualtrics is a simple-to-use, web-based survey tool used to conduct survey research, evaluations, and other data collection activities. Qualtrics is a customer experience management (CXM) platform that focuses on collecting, organizing, and understanding important data relative to customers and employees. The survey consisted of 10 questions that included both open-ended and structured multiple-choice questions which were sent out on the researcher's social media platforms for 2 weeks. While the data came in, the researcher evaluated the number of responses and quality of responses and determined that the number of participants exceeded the required sample size in the first 10 days.

Coding

The grounded theory methodology involves constant comparative analysis or what is now known as the constant comparative method. This involves the researcher moving in and out of the data collection process and analysis process, otherwise known as an iteration (Aldiabat & Le Navenec, 2018). Grounded theory research involves several iterations which start with the researcher asking a question or series of questions intended to lead to the development of a theory. This type of question leads to the first iteration, which is to identify a sample of people to participate (Koenigsknecht, 2003). After collecting some data, the researcher analyzes it, and the process of analysis allows the researcher to begin to develop a theory with regard to his or her question. This process of continually collecting and analyzing data and engaging in a theoretical sampling process is a critical feature of the constant comparative analysis that Glaser and Strauss (1967) described.

With this particular qualitative study, the researcher collected and analyzed data at the same time and on a continual basis to determine any emerging theories/themes (Creswell, 2014). As the data were being collected, they were organized and categorized—also known as coding (Snelson, 2016). Coding can be explained as categorization of data by a word or a short phrase that represents a theme or an idea (Pulla, 2016). All codes require an assignment of meaningful titles with broad scope of nonquantifiable elements such as events, behaviors, activities, or meanings. For example, the term *training* can be the identified as the title with the codes *outsourced*, *internal*, or *autonomous*. There are three types of coding:

- *Open coding:* The initial organization of raw data to try to make sense of it

- *Axial coding:* Interconnecting and linking the categories of codes
- *Selective coding:* Formulating the story through connecting the categories

The next step in the process was the line-by-line coding, which carefully examined words, phrases, or sentences for relevancy to the overall research questions (Creswell, 2014; Marshall & Rossman, 2011). In this study, the researcher combed through the data (i.e., text) to break them down into pieces to examine closely and compare for relations, similarities, and dissimilarities. Different parts of the data were marked with appropriate labels or codes to identify them for further analysis. A concept is a labeled section of data that a researcher identifies as significant to some facts that data represent, and in this case, themes. Qualtrics was utilized to capture the data, which were then exported into Microsoft Excel for the coding process.

Findings

Data from the Qualtrics survey helped to determine how interview panelists were trained for their roles as raters and what they felt were the best practices for training raters. By understanding the lived experiences of local government professionals as interview panelists, this study may help the public sector develop trainings or strategies for training raters for their role so that they can hire the best candidate for the job and reduce litigation liability. Improved hiring practices can help support employee longevity, positive organizational culture, productivity, and overall efficiency and effectiveness (Levashina et al., 2014; Tsai et al., 2016).

Survey Question 1

> You are being asked to take part in an academic research study that will explore **how** local government organizations **train** raters/interview panelists for their role

of serving on a job interview panel and to discover the best practices of this process. The study is seeking participants who are 18 years of age or older that are local government employees (city or county) in the state of California who have participated as a rater, or interview panelist, for a local government position. In order to participate, you will be required to agree to an informed consent. Please read the following information carefully. Please ask the researcher if there is anything that is not clear or if you need more information. Would you like to continue? (see Figure 11)

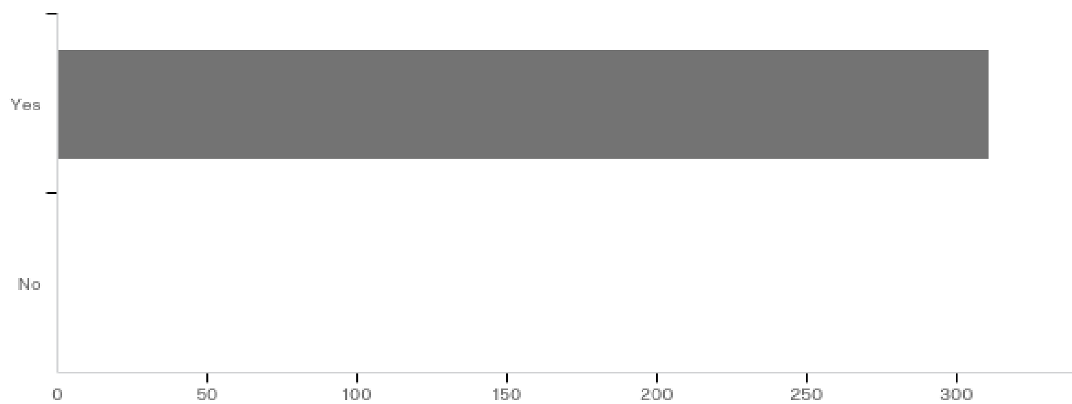


Figure 11. Data chart from Qualtrics for participant approval.

One of the most important ethical rules governing qualitative research is that individuals must voluntarily give their informed consent before participating in a study. The researcher obtained informed consent through Question 1 of the survey (see Table 2). It consisted of providing ample information to the potential participant about the study, giving the subject the opportunity to contemplate options, replying to questions the subject may have had, and ensuring that the subject or the legal representative understood the information (Giroir, 2020). Consent must be obtained from the research subjects before participation in research begins. This question was designed so that if informed consent was not provided, the participant would not be allowed to continue with the survey. Of the 282 participants, 100% of them agreed.

Table 2

Survey Question 1 Results

Survey Question 1	# of participants	% of participants
Yes	282	100%
No	0	0%

Note. Total participants = 282.

Survey Question 2

> The study you will be participating in includes a total of eight questions via Qualtrics Research Core and should take no more than 10 minutes to complete. The questions are a combination of standardized multiple-choice and open-ended explanation type questions. You will not be asked your age, gender or any agency information. The study is being conducted on a strictly volunteer basis and you will not be compensated for taking the survey. The information gathered in this study will be published; however, no identity or organizational information will be used—therefore confidentiality is ensured. The survey should take no more than 10 minutes to complete; however, if at any time you feel uncomfortable or would like to stop the survey, you may do so without penalty (see Figure 12).

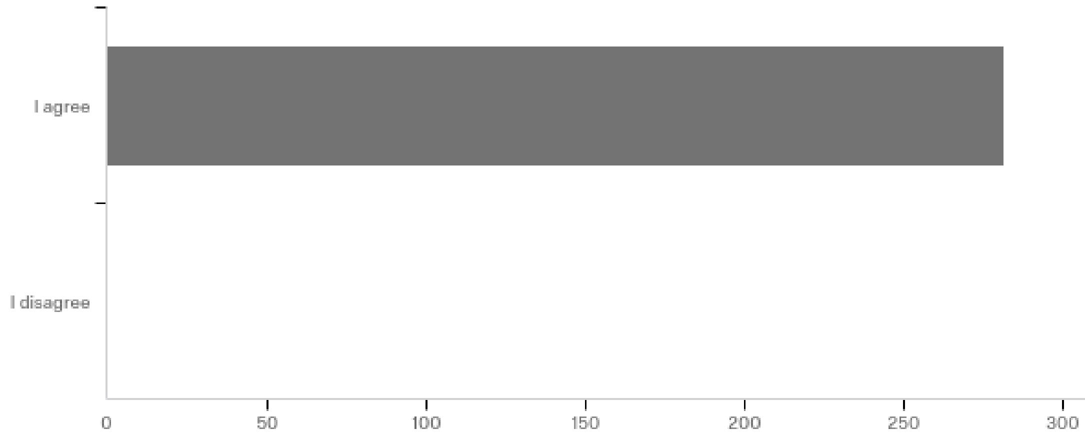


Figure 12. Data chart from Qualtrics for participant confidentiality.

Survey Question 2 was designed to advise the participants of the approximate time commitment in taking the survey and the kinds of questions they would be asked, ensure confidentiality and anonymity, and provide an option to stop the survey if discomfort was felt. Of the 282 participants, 100% of them agreed (see Table 3).

Table 3

Survey Question 2 Results

Survey Question 2	# of participants	% of participants
I agree	282	100%
I disagree	0	0%

Note. Total participants = 282.

Survey Question 3

Identify your employment status:

a) I am currently an employee of a city government in the state of California

b) I am currently an employee of a county government in the state of California

c) I am recently retired from a city or county government in the state of California (see Figure 13).

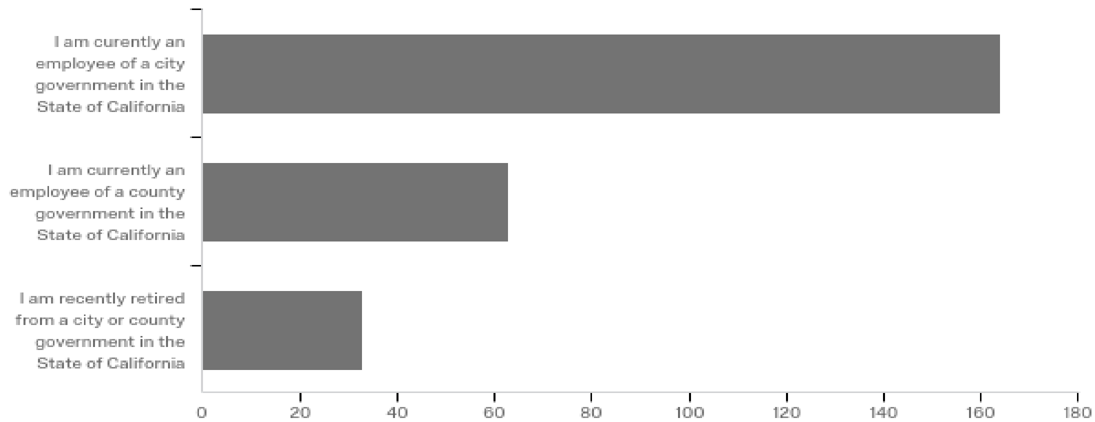


Figure 13. Data chart from Qualtrics of participant employment status.

For this study, the sought population was local government employees in the state of California who had participated as a rater, or interview panelist, for a local government position. By definition, local government (n.d.) is the government of a specific local area and can include a city or county jurisdiction. Typically, the description of the population and the common binding characteristic of its members are the same, such as *government employees*. This is a well-defined group of people who can be considered a population, and all the members of this population were indeed employees of the government. The majority of participants were city employees in California at 62.08%, followed by county employees in California at 26.24%, and recently retired city or county employees in California at 11.7% (see Table 4).

Table 4

Survey Question 3 Results

Survey Question 3	# of participants	% of participants
Currently a city employee in California	175	62.08%
Currently a county employee in California	74	26.24%
Recently retired from city or county government in California	33	11.70%

Note. Total participants = 282.

Survey Question 4

How many times have you served as a rater on an interview panel for a local government organization?

a) 1-3 times

b) 3-5 times

c) 5-10 times

d) 11+ times (see Figure 14).

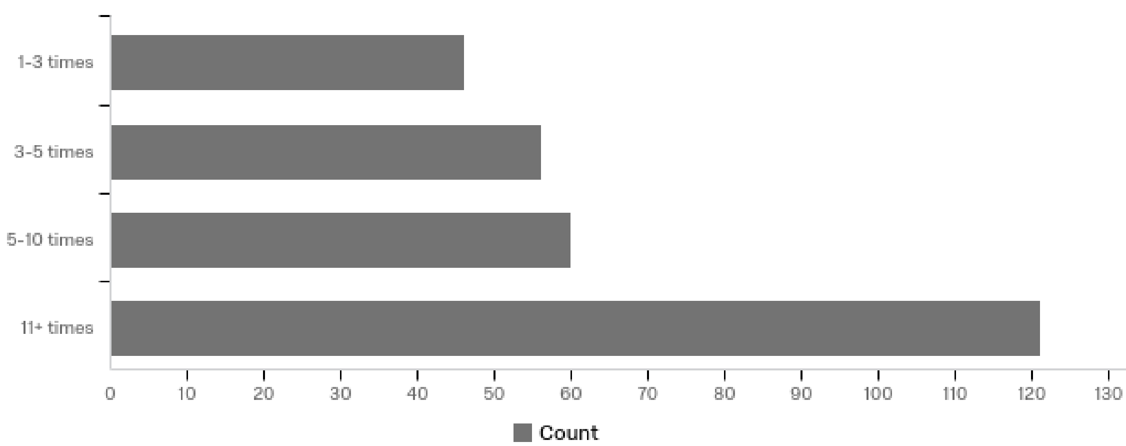


Figure 14. Data chart from Qualtrics for number of interview panels participated.

In Survey Question 4, the researcher wanted to determine how many times each participant had served as a rater on an interview panel to identify their experience level. The majority of participants had been a rater more than 11 times in a local government setting with 45.74%. Next, participants in the 3-5-time category registered with 23.5%, followed by newer raters with 19.86%, and ending with more experienced raters in the 5-10 times category with 10.99% (see Table 5).

Table 5

Survey Question 4 Results

Survey Question 4	# of participants	% of participants
1 – 3 times	56	19.86%
3 – 5 times	66	23.40%
5 – 10 times	31	10.99%
11+ times	129	45.74%

Note. Total participants = 282.

Survey Question 5

> Have you ever received training by the hiring organization to prepare you as a rater on an interview panel? For the purposes of this study, training is identified as instruction on how to ask the interview questions (i.e., voice inflection, eye contact, overall demeanor); how to evaluate answers to identify the best candidates; identify illegal interview questions that should avoid being asked; the importance of proper documentation and note-taking; and awareness of rater biases (see Figure 15).

a) Yes

b) No

c) Partially

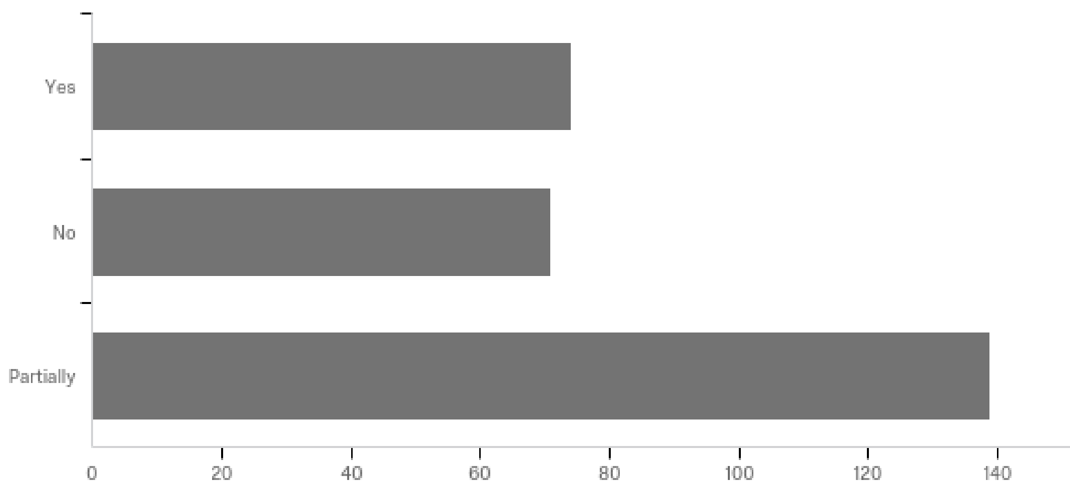


Figure 15. Data chart from Qualtrics determining participants' training received.

The intent of this survey question was to ascertain whether the participants had been trained for their role as raters. The options were *yes*, *no*, or *partially.* Although yes/no are natural and were clear-cut options for answering, the option for partially was made available because the idea of training can be subjective. For example, a 10-minute briefing by HR may be viewed as training in the eyes of the HR professional who has facilitated the briefing before. However, to the rater who is serving as a panelist for the first time, a 10-minute briefing may seem insufficient. Although the researcher defined training as how to ask the interview questions (i.e., voice inflection, eye contact, overall demeanor), how to evaluate answers to identify the best candidates, how to identify illegal interview questions that should avoid being asked, the importance of proper documentation and note-taking, and awareness of rater biases, participants may have felt that they were trained in some of the areas or most of the areas but not all of the areas (see Table 6).

Table 6

Survey Question 5 Results

Survey Question 5	# of participants	% of participants
Yes	72	25.53%
No	71	25.18%
Partially	139	49.29%

Total participants = 282

Survey Question 6

What type of training did you receive? For the purposes of this study, training is identified as instruction on how to ask the interview questions (i.e., voice inflection, eye contact, overall demeanor); how to evaluate answers to identify the best candidates; identify illegal interview questions that should avoid being asked; the importance of proper documentation and note-taking; and awareness of rater biases.

a) I watched videos or did online training

b) I read a manual, handbook, etc.

c) I had a briefing from human resources

d) I attended a class in person

e) I did not receive training

f) Other. Please explain (see Figure 16).

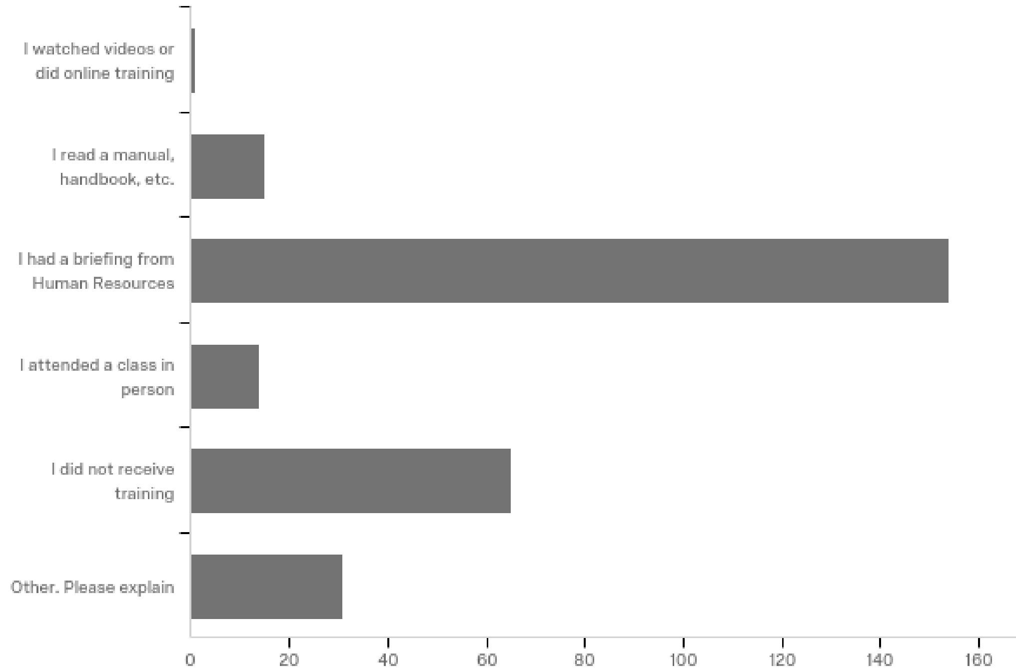


Figure 16. Data chart from Qualtrics determining type of training received.

Survey Question 6 was written to determine how interview panelists felt they were trained. Although options (a)-(e) provided clear options for response, option (f) presented an open-text option for participants to add additional details of how raters felt they were trained (Table 7).

This question also corresponded directly to Research Question 1, which asked, "How are raters trained to serve on interview panels in local government organizations?" The themes that emerged from this question indicate that 56.38% of participants had a briefing by HR as their training, followed by 23.05% of participants who felt they had not had any training. The percentages in between indicate smaller variances of other types of training received. Survey Question 6 clearly demonstrates a clear need for interview panelist training.

Table 7

Survey Question 6 Results

Survey Question 6 themes	# of participants	% of participants
Has taught the training	2	0.71%
Informal discussions with coworkers	6	2.13%
Discussion with more experienced raters	10	3.55 %
Self-taught	1	0.35%
Mentored by superior	2	0.71%
Classes	17	6.03%
Briefing by human resources	159	56.38%
Read a manual or handbook	15	5.32%
Watched videos or did online training	2	0.71%
Combination	3	1.06%
I did not receive training	65	23.05%

Note. Total participants = 282.

Survey Question 7

How frequently were you trained for your role as a rater on an interview panel?

a) Regular annual training

b) Whenever I am asked to be a rater

c) I rarely receive training as it is assumed that I know what to do

d) I have never received official training (see Figure 17).

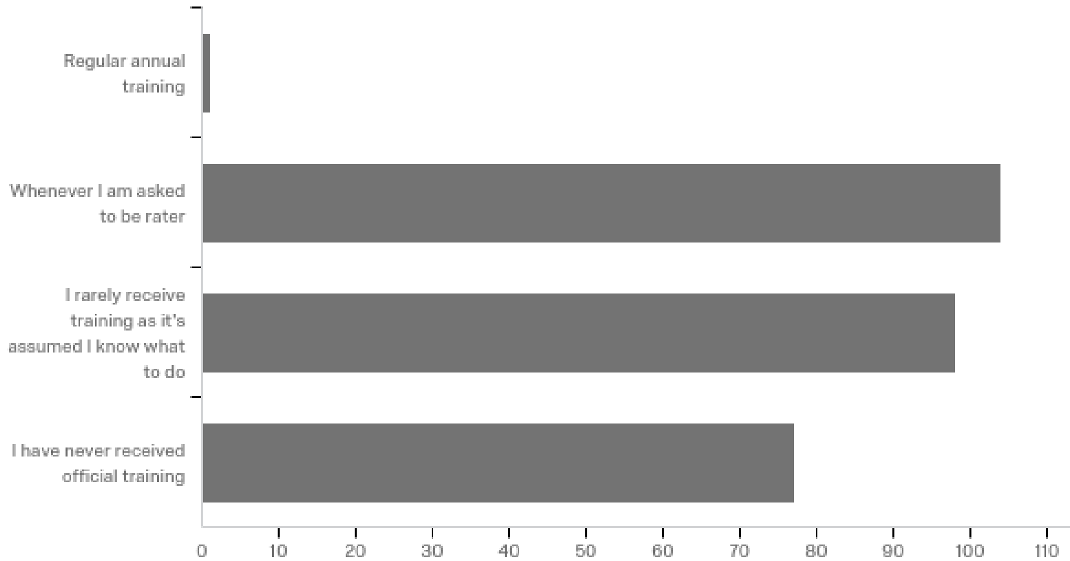


Figure 17. Data chart from Qualtrics determining frequency of training received.

Survey Question 7 focused on the frequency of training, if any, that raters received. The results demonstrate that interview panelists did not receive regular annual training but had split responses between whenever they were asked to be a rater and "rarely as it's assumed" they knew what to do (see Table 8).

Table 8

Survey Question 7 Results

Survey Question 7	# of participants	% of participants
Regular annual training	1	0.35%
Whenever I am asked to be a rater	104	36.88%
I rarely receive training as it's assumed I know what to do	100	35.46%
I have never received official training	77	27.30%

Note. Total participants = 282.

Survey Question 8

Do you feel that you have been adequately trained as a rater to serve on an interview panel?

a) I feel adequately trained

b) I feel partially trained

c) I feel mostly trained

d) Not really, but I have had plenty of experience

e) I do not feel adequately trained (see Figure 18).

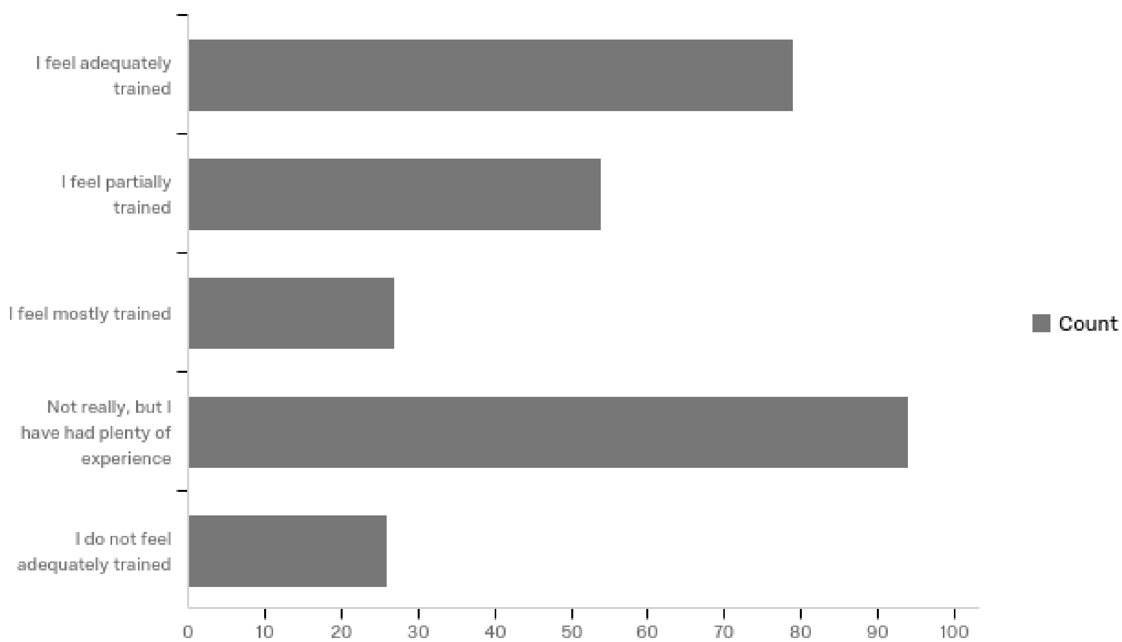


Figure 18. Data chart from Qualtrics for adequacy of training received.

Survey Question 8 sought to determine whether panelists felt they were adequately trained for their roles. The results indicate that the majority of participants did not feel adequately trained but felt they had plenty of experience (see Table 9).

Table 9

Survey Question 8 Results

Survey Question 8	# of participants	% of participants
I feel adequately trained	79	28.01%
I feel partially trained	54	19.15%
I feel mostly trained	27	9.57%
Not really but I have had plenty of experience	96	34.04%
I do not feel adequately trained	26	9.22%

Note. Total participants = 282.

Survey Question 9

What type of training do you feel would be beneficial for raters on interview panels to receive?

a) Training videos

b) Manuals or books

c) In-class training

d) Online training

e) Other. Please explain (see Figure 19 and Table 10).

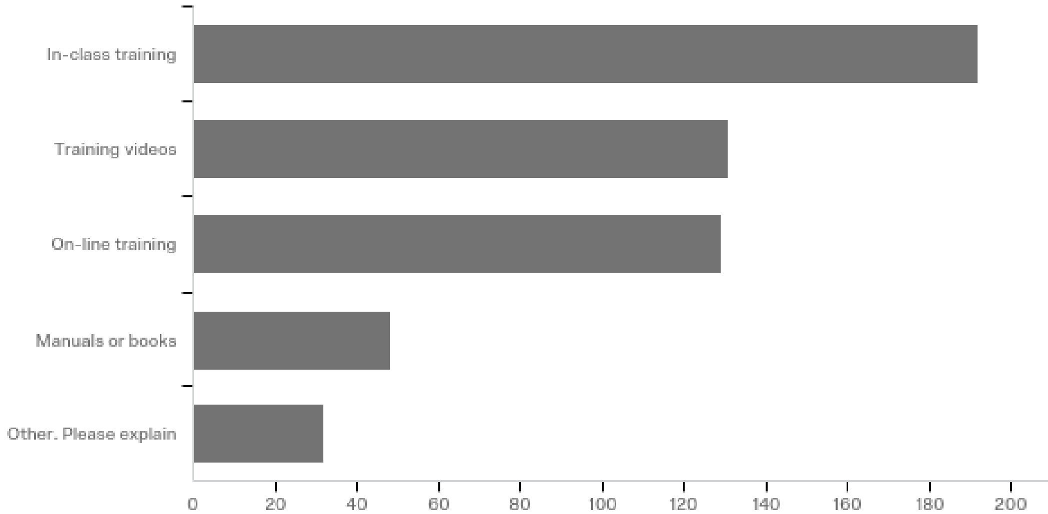


Figure 19. Data chart from Qualtrics for training best practices.

Table 10

Survey Question 9 Results

Survey Question 9	# of participants	% of participants
In-class training	131	46.45%
Training videos	48	17.02%
Online training	192	68.09%
Manuals or books	129	45.74%
Other. Please explain (see below)	32	9.22%

Note. Total participants = 282.

Survey Question 9, option (e) was left for open-text responses from the participants to capture data that would support Research Question 1, “What are the best practices for preparing a rater to sit on an interview panel?” Delineating the responses directly from the participants is shown in Table 11.

Table 11

Survey Question 9, Option E Open-Text Comments

Response	Survey Question 9: Option E
R1	Providing a short training tutorial on do's & don't prior to conducting a formal oral interview process.
R2	Mentorship by the assistant city manager.
R3	Type or method of training depends on how the learner learns. I personally believe in a combination of all types of training to be stimulated by all senses. Also, the concept of the 10/20/70 rule.
R4	Training videos are brutal and have the production value of local access television. Have a trained human resource employee from the governing body is the best way in my opinion.
R5	Training review by HR at time of panel and not just a brief.
R6	Actual training prior to the process would suffice.
R7	Training on the answer to the questions being asked to the candidate so the rater would know what minimum response is expected to show competency of the question being asked which would impact the score.
R8	Specific training regarding bias.
R9	Prior to the interview (not the same day as the interview) a 5-10-minute phone conversation with a follow-up e-mail that provides one complete (short) document.
R10	Practice interview panel.
R11	None—life experience and on-the-job training is most helpful.
R12	More specific rating schematics.
R13	Mock interview panels as a training exercise.
R14	Interactive training; online is okay though I feel classroom/discussion is best!
R15	In addition to in-class training, human resources should provide individual trainings as well.
R16	I think a real training in class with an annual refresher would be good. Organizations can't foresee when employees are going to be on a panel.
R17	I am typically asked to participate on a panel for a department interview that I have at least 10 years of experience. So, I believe the panel is picked based on their area of expertise, but it would be good to have training on potential conflicts with ethics codes.
R18	Experienced raters should be on panels.
R19	Discussion with the panel so they are on the same page.
R20	Dialogue with clearly expressed guidelines and structure of expectations, what is permitted or not.
R21	Anything would be better than nothing.

Table 11—*continued*

Response	Survey Question 9: Option E
R22	Any type of training would be beneficial.
R23	Any training would be helpful, especially if the rater is new to interviewing.
R24	Any training would be good.
R25	Annual online training to go over agency's policies, procedures, and expectations throughout the review process.
R26	All. First time in class, annual online, reference books and videos before you do an interview and FAQ's.
R27	A variety of the resources mentioned above would be suitable. I have found peer mentoring to be beneficial as well.
R28	A complete briefing with discussion and case studies would be best.
R29	A briefing prior to the first interview so the panel is going in the same direction.
R30	A briefing by the hiring authority.

Survey Question 10

Is there anything else about training raters for their roles as interview panelists that you would like to add? (Optional open-text question).

Survey Question 10 was designed as an open-text optional question to allow participants an opportunity to add any additional pertinent information about the training of raters for their roles as interview panelists. The open text was coded based on emerging themes during the data collection and analysis process. Of the 282 overall participants, there were 131 recorded responses for Survey Question 10. The percentages for Survey Question 10 were determined by the weight of participants who answered Survey Question 10 rather than the total number of participants in the study (see Table 12). The responses in this question supported Research Question 2, which sought to understand what raters felt the best practices were in training interview panelist for their role (see Table 13).

Table 12

Survey Question 10, Themes

Survey Question 10, themes	# of participants	% of participants who answered Q 10
Question development / delivery	8	6.11%
Clear understanding of what the employer is looking for	12	9.16%
Nonverbal communication (panelist and rater)	9	6.87%
Training implemented by policy	10	7.63%
Frequency of training	5	3.82%
Scoring and weighing of candidates' innate characteristics	6	4.58%
Panelist attitude / panelist selection	10	7.63%
Biases/prejudices/stereotypes	4	3.05%
Techniques for training various generations	2	1.53%
Equity/fairness of the process (i.e., preselected candidate vs. organic selection process)	6	4.58%
Do's and don'ts of being a panelist	5	3.82%
Utilization of technology for note-taking	1	0.76%
Probing/follow-up question techniques	2	1.53%
Scoring	2	1.53%
Listening skills	2	1.53%
Quality and necessity of training	30	22.90%
Role playing / scenarios / exercises	4	3.05%
Nonessential comment	25	19.08%

Note. Total responses = 131.

Table 13

Survey Question 10, Optional Comments

Response	Survey Question 10
R1	Q7 did not have great answers to choose from. We are trained every 5 years.
R2	There should be more diverse questions during the interviews.
R3	Unconscious bias awareness
R4	Not sure if there is but having software that has drop down comments that can be strengthen or weaken. It's hard to write later in the day after your sixth interview.
R5	Many interviewers are given the questions to ask the candidates, but often they are not well written or open ended and interviewers need to ask additional follow-up questions to get a fuller response. Raters need training or experience to do this well.
R6	Panelists should be told to keep to the script of questions for fairness.
R7	Comparing evals with other panelists and explaining why the rating was received really excels the learning process.
R8	As said above, you look for the response of the person when asking the question. Body movements, voice, and the nervous reactions, if any. You can pretty much tell how a person will do as soon as they walk in the door, well dressed, confidence, but not egotistical, and well prepared.
R9	Raters should clearly understand what the agency is looking for in the answers.
R10	Clear expectations of what the hiring authority is seeking in a candidate
R11	It should be mandatory and updated frequently to ensure all laws are being followed.
R12	In my opinion, it all depends on the type of interview conducted and how much latitude interviewers are permitted to have, which can be tricky if you're trying to keep the interviews as objective as possible.
R13	My opinion should be a minimum requirement that could be accomplished through HR prior to interviews.
R14	Training to understand millennials would be helpful. Millennials get a bad rap especially from baby boomers.

Table 13—*continued*

Response	Survey Question 10
R15	Better environment, opportunity to discuss understanding of rating prior to start.
R16	Training is important and should include how panelists listen and interpret information. I've been on panels where a candidate tells us something, two panelists hear one thing and the other panelist heats it different.
R17	What the needs of the hiring person is and what pitfalls to looks for, i.e., buzzwords don't always mean someone knows what they are doing. Saying vs. doing. Lots of people do very well in interviews but can't do the job, and vice versa. There has to be a balance.
R18	How to write interview questions that are geared to identify the knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs) that you are seeking in an applicant.
R19	Establishing the top priorities of the hiring department or organization for this position and what the specific objectives for your panel are.
R20	We have used a form for all raters that gives them the opportunity to rate on body language, presentation, substance, etc., on each question. The form explains how to gauge those matters during the interview.
R21	Optimum rating/interviewing techniques when questioning millennials.
R22	Question 6 should have the ability for more than one selection. I have read handbooks as well as HR briefings. Good luck.
R23	The process that I have experienced was adequate and well organized
R24	As an interview panelist, it is not always important to rate someone on their interview skills, but on their enthusiasm and passion for the opportunity. Being nervous is a human instinct and can easily be looked past.
R25	Helps to have at least one person who is very familiar to the classification being recruited for on the quality assurance plan (QAP).
R26	In today's age, organizations should do everything to minimize lawsuits stemming from the interview process.
R27	I don't think it really matters since they hire who they want anyways.
R28	I didn't even know there was training.

Table 13—*continued*

Response	Survey Question 10
R29	People who are asked to be raters need to take it seriously and not see it as a burden.
R30	Question development is also really important. Most of the time the questions asked don't really tell you anything about the candidate. More conversational would be better and maybe even offsite or over lunch would be good.
R31	An initial training then refreshers would be good.
R32	I've been a rater for one organization that really did it right. A full training a few hours before the actual interviews.
R33	What a great research project! Hopefully you'll share the results so local government can start making some much needed changes.
R34	Rater bias? That's interesting. I never looked at it that way, but I'm pretty sure I've been biased. This has me thinking.
R35	The need for training really depends. Why waste peoples time to train if there is already a preselected candidate? If organizations were truly being fair and looking for the best candidate then yes, I think training is needed. I've just seen too many times the "best" candidate be passed over because there is someone specific the department wants.
R36	It would be nice to know what we are looking for in a candidate and what's more important—technical or soft skills. I've seen employees hired that are great technically, but their work ethic or attitude is awful. I'd rather see someone hired who has a great work ethic and can be taught rather than the other way around.
R37	As a very seasoned interviewer, I learned along the way what to do and how to do it. I don't know if what I did was right or wrong now seeing this study, but in hindsight, I think some brief training would be good. Moreover, I think organizations need to focus on picking qualified people to be a rater. All too often are people picked because there is no one else to choose from. Sad.
R38	I think training would be helpful. I've been on so many panels for various cities and it always feels so cookie cutter; like it's just a process that's supposed to happen rather than really looking for a good candidate. Most of the time the panelists are too busy chatting in between interviews and don't really talk about the candidates.

Table 13—*continued*

Response	Survey Question 10
R39	Always have an odd number . . . 3/5. Always have differing backgrounds
R40	I think this is important research because I've been a panelist a few times and never really understood what I was looking for. I think it would help for the hiring department to let panelists know what they are looking for; but also, for HR to actually provide training.
R41	A lot of panels are about fit for the organization. While I think it is imperative that rater understand the legal ramifications, I also think that training the raters 30-minutes before and focusing on the organization's visions and values are of equal importance.
R42	Yes. Many times, the HR person doing the training is not adequately trained in the purpose of the job. They tend to be rigid and not "people persons".
R43	My first time as an interview panelist I felt completely lost. HR seemed to think I knew what to do. I didn't, but I was too embarrassed to say I didn't. The other panelists must've felt my discomfort because they explained a few things to me. In the end, I basically asked questions and wrote a few notes.
R44	One should be trained before being asked to interview candidates. This training should be a part of the core training.
R45	Examples of what to avoid I have found very helpful. Smart people learn from their mistakes. Wise people learn from the mistakes of others.
R46	The rater needs to have knowledge of the position. Sometimes I have found myself on an interview panel and the HR department has no idea of what the position responsibilities really are.
R47	It's critical to recognize that rank or status within any given organization does not necessarily equate to competence or qualification as a rather. When selecting evaluators for panels, I think you need to evaluate several factors beyond professional status, availability and willingness to participate.
R48	Training is dependent on the raters' experience. However, there should a minimum refresher course for everyone who is a rater at least every 2 years.
R49	Training usually amounts to about 5 minutes of do's and don'ts.

Table 13—*continued*

Response	Survey Question 10
R50	I think a mandatory training class of some type should be required for someone to participate on an interview panel as a rater and be knowledge on what the hiring dept. is looking for in the candidate and on the position.
R51	It varies across agencies. Some cities do a very good job preparing raters, while others do a brief orientation.
R52	Training needs to be more engaging and briefer. Too much information in a dry manner is not beneficial.
R53	Raters should be aware if another rater has or may have adversely affected a prospective candidate's ability to adequately respond.
R54	Short video training and a briefing prior to rating would be good
R55	I've sat on panels for more cities than I can count. Every city handles them differently, so some training or guidance is generally needed so that I know how that City likes to conduct the interview process. I think the best way to do this is in person and it would feel very impersonal if they gave me a video to watch or a manual to read. I probably wouldn't do it.
R56	I was a rater for a city that had a formal training prior to being a panelist and it was eye opening. I learned things that I had never even thought of and probably would have mistakenly said during an interview. I hope all organizations are training their folks!
R57	I think that training raters is very important to the overall success of the organization. I say this because raters have the ability to pass someone to the next round of interviews or make a recommendation to hire them. If the raters aren't trained, then how do they know what they should and should not be doing. Especially when it comes to biases or stereotypes? I think it would also be interesting to see HOW raters are selected. Are they people who look out for what's best for the organization or warm bodies?
R58	Mainly just question development and what specifically not to ask.
R59	I would like training specifically on what types of interview questions will provide insight to the skills that I am looking for in the successful candidate.

Table 13—*continued*

Response	Survey Question 10
R60	I believe most raters have been selected based on their expertise and knowledge of the position, so a long training session may not be necessary. Some training would definitely be beneficial, maybe a 30-minute video or live training session I believe would be sufficient. Especially to maintain consistency between sessions days, and between different panelists if this happens to occur.
R61	Current or prior experience in the role and reputation in the industry is sufficient to assist in the process. To be a rater is time consuming as is. It will be difficult to ask high level executives to take classes or training.
R62	Provide panelists with a do's and don'ts side by side of what to say and not say
R63	Training needs to be current and focus on soft skills as opposed to hard skills. This will help diversify the workforce in term of industry and government can innovate, be efficient and effective.
R64	Definitely needs to be taken more seriously and detail consequences for biases and improper assumptions.
R65	Make the interviewee comfortable and encourage them
R66	One difficulty with briefings and training is that panelists often coming in late, use available time to chat/catch up with other panelists and higher level panelists often don't want to listen to a briefing thinking they have done this before and are experienced. I would like a copy of your results if possible. Thanks.
R67	Training on how to handle out-of-the-norm interviews., i.e., candidates who cry or walk out, candidates who provide inappropriate info (HIIPA), etc.
R68	The traditional HR brief prior to the process provides only a brief amount of information. Creating clear, concise and actionable training could be beneficial.
R69	There should be a distinction about training for various levels of recruitment. An entry level position is different than a management or executive level employee.
R70	This type of training is sorely needed as bringing an individual into an organization is one of the most important decisions a leader can make.

Table 13—*continued*

Response	Survey Question 10
R71	I believe based on going through the process ourselves, and having time on “the job” . . . They believe we know what we’re looking for. I believe a portion of asking a person questions during an interview is only a part of it. We are looking at the personality, presentation, way they talk to the panel and if we could work with them for years to come.
R72	Providing training on reading people and ways to ask questions to get more meaningful answers
R73	Consistency and uniformity are important. Since there are so many different agencies in our County, our satellite teams tend to create variations or modifications to the recruitment process, which causes confusion to candidates that apply for multiple agencies. This sends mixed messages to our end users/stakeholders.
R74	Being able to recognize nerves instead of not really knowing what you may be asked about. People can talk around the answer and get credit vs. someone who gets very nervous but knows what they are talking about and it just doesn’t come out right. Don’t think you can train on that.
R75	Sit in on interviews as an observer
R76	I think it would be beneficial to all candidates that every scoring panelist is trained as much as possible on how to conduct, interview, and rate a candidate so that the best employee is selected.
R77	Don’t waste the raters or interviewers time to simple go through this arduous process to select a predetermined candidate.
R78	Organizations need to identify their purpose and work culture first before knowing how and what to train.
R79	Have mock interviews with the interview panelists and have them score the person being interview and provide feedback
R80	There should be role playing and creating scenarios to calibrate grading/scoring.
R81	Raters need to know who a good fit for a position would be and not how good they look on a resume.
R82	I feel they should also go over the scoring system to try to make it less subjective.

Table 13—*continued*

Response	Survey Question 10
R83	I think the following are important considerations as well: Be cognizant of the room layout/environment. Temperature, comfort and cleanliness count. Have water for candidates. Let each candidate know that during the interview, the panel hopes this interview is the candidate's best interview ever.
R84	Sometimes there isn't time to prepare an interviewer because they are filling in at the last minute. Having a large pool of people trained ahead of time would be ideal.
R85	My experience tells me that the process is not designed for equity but for efficiency alone. There is rarely enough time for thoughtful evaluation of a candidate's interview, rather first thoughts, gut reaction only. Additionally. Oftentimes, there are far too many candidates to interview in a day—the pace creates an unfair disadvantage for candidates who are not charismatic at the end of the day.
R86	Understanding the difference between the first and second interview (technical vs. fit)
R87	Rater training should include how to be objective and how to use critical thinking in rating candidates, not just subjective (appearance, instincts etc.)
R88	Sometimes we are asked to sit in on interviews, that we do not know the position being filled. More training in the different positions is ideal.
R89	Practical scenarios with role players
R90	I believe cities should outreach to those people in job classifications that are tasked with being on panels at least annually to see if they need training, would like updated training, or are o.k. to skip training. There is so little information communicated to raters (and I have rated in three difference cities). Just even a 30-minute refresher once a year would be helpful
R91	The rater should understand what the organization is looking for in a new employ.
R92	That at least two raters have journey-level experience in a like position in which they are rating candidates
R93	It varies from city to city based on the tools and metrics that they choose to use. Although similar, there is no consistent process in my experience unless they give you no direction and you do things your way every time.

Table 13—*continued*

Response	Survey Question 10
R94	Experience matters. So, having a panel that is unbiased with a comparable level of experience in their fields may help cities assess interviewees' true skill levels.
R95	It would be beneficial if we were allowed to go off script to be able to have a conversation with the candidate. Having a conversation can tell me more about a candidate's emotional intelligence then asking boilerplate questions approved by HR.
R96	In my experience training was significantly lacking and could be greatly improved.
R97	I feel we need to have people who are trained and have credentials to say they are qualified to pick the best candidate for our organization.
R98	Training should be interactive and allow for questions.
R99	I've noticed not all agencies provide adequate training. I was fortunate to receive good training from my previous agencies and supervisors. I recommend "New Supervisor" training for all agencies and specific in-person and written instructions before being on a panel. Not doing so can cause bias selections and legal issues for the department (due to inappropriate questions).
R100	Includes perimeters, what you can and cannot do
R101	Simulated/practice interviews and evaluation for the raters prior to the process would be beneficial.
R102	If multiple panels, they all need to interview in the same way.
R103	Nothing
R104	Individual agencies should hold a 4-hour preparation for their particular process
R105	It is important for the rater to have an adequate understanding of the position prior to participating on the panel. On numerous occasions I have served on panels for positions that I did not understand, nor did I understand the type of candidate to look for. Oftentimes, we were asked to participate on a panel due to a lack of staffing within the agency.
R106	Yes. Raters would greatly benefit from in class training, so we understand our role better.

Summary

Chapter 4 described the findings from a survey of local government employees in the state of California who voluntarily participated in a qualitative grounded theory study on the training of interview panelists in local government. Chapter 4 presented a detailed analysis of data collected through an anonymous social network system utilizing line-by-line open coding and statistics from Qualtrics. Through some open-ended questions, additional data were gathered outlining what participants viewed as the best practices for training interview panelists and how they themselves were trained as raters (see Figure 20). The study showed that most interview panelist participants have not been thoroughly trained by the hiring organization and felt as though some type of quality training is necessary for such a large role. Although a good majority had been briefed by HR about their role as panelists, almost as many had not received training at all. Furthermore, the findings also suggest that most panelists, despite their level of experience, felt that they were expected to know how to perform in their role.

Chapter 4 further illustrated that the type of training most preferred was in-class sessions, refresher courses, and online tutorials (see Figure 21). The emphasis based on the open-text questions was more focused on the quality of the training provided by HR than on the method. Another interesting point was the inclusion of equity and fairness during the process—implying that some interviews are staged to appear fair when a specific candidate had already knowingly been preselected. In summary, local government can work to improve the training of interview panelists for their critical roles as raters. Presented in Chapter 5 are the results of the research questions, the emerging themes from the study, recommendations for future research, and concluding summary

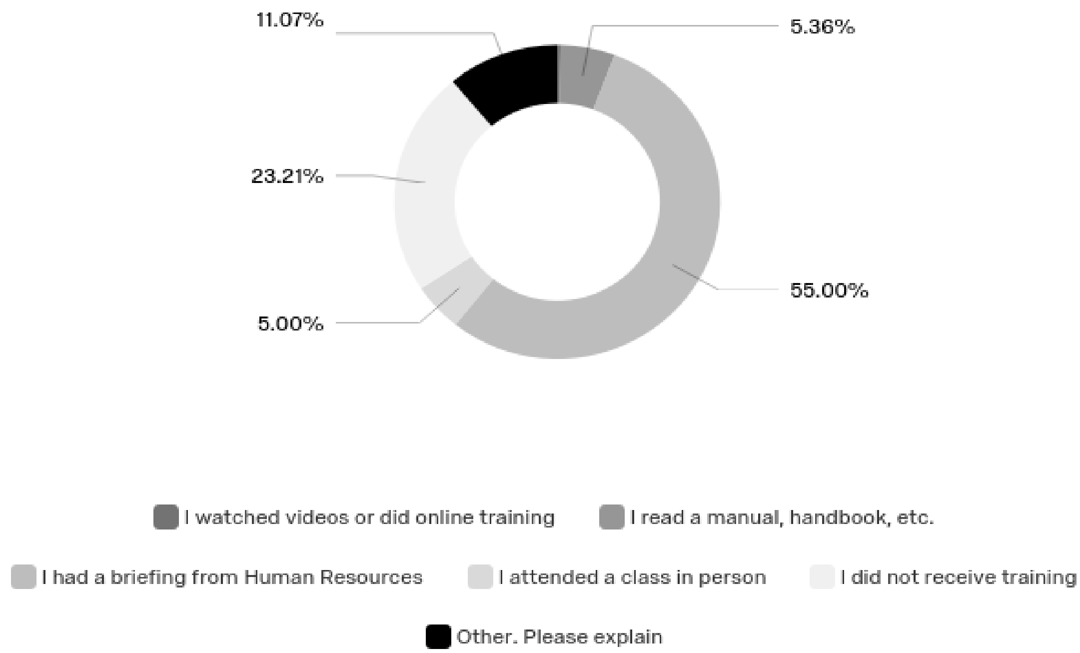


Figure 20. Data chart from Qualtrics for current training practices.

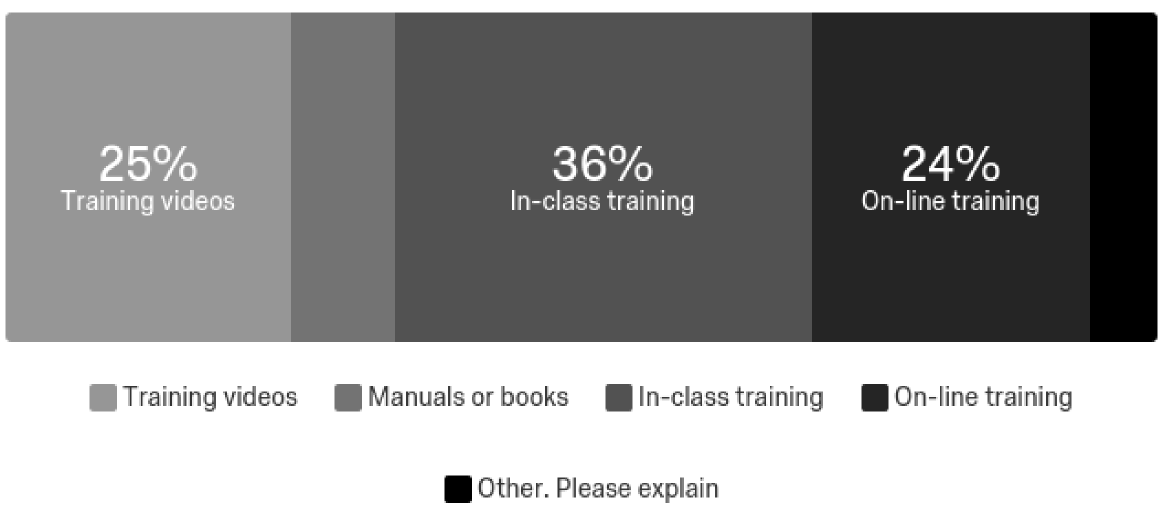


Figure 21. Data chart from Qualtrics for best practices.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The face-to-face panel interview has been one of the most commonly used employment selection methods in the public sector to hire new employees in the most equitable and fair way possible. The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore how local government organizations train or prepare raters for their role of serving on a job interview panel and to discover the best practices of this process. To obtain data, the researcher developed an online anonymous survey for local government professionals in the state of California to take through social media networks. The results outlined in Chapter 4 demonstrated that most interview panelist participants felt that they had not been properly trained by the hiring organization. Although a good majority had been briefed by human resources (HR) about their role as panelist, almost as many had not received training at all and felt as though some type of in-depth training was necessary for such a large role. Chapter 5 includes the conclusions reached, the themes identified, recommendations for additional research, and a summary of the study.

Study Conclusions

A total of 282 local government professionals in the state of California participated in the 10-question online survey. Participants were asked questions in order to determine what their training experiences had been in preparation for their role as a rater on an interview panel and what they felt the best ways to train raters were based on their experiences. Participants were also asked some open-ended questions that allowed them to share any additional information they felt was pertinent to the training of interview panelists within local government. The current section includes a detailed discussion of the study results, identified themes, and recommendations for the public sector. Framed in grounded theory, the end product of this study provides progressive identification and integration of the themes that emerged from the data, specific coding procedures, comparative analysis, and memo writing. The results from this study can be utilized as a tool, primarily in the local government realm of public sector, to see the importance, necessity, and benefits of training raters for their roles as interview panelists. Two research questions, which are shown along with the results, provided the foundation for this research.

Research Question 1

How are raters trained to serve on interview panels in local government organizations?

Most of the participants in the survey consisted of city employees currently working in the state of California who identified as being experienced, having sat on an interview panel more than 11 times. Of the 10 survey questions asked, four tied directly into Research Question 1. When asked whether they had ever received training to prepare them for their role as a rater, approximately 50% of the 282 participants were partially trained, 25% had received training, and 25% had not been trained. Most participants identified that the training they did have was more of a briefing from HR rather than an actual training session. Approximately 36% of local government employees had very infrequent training with 36% of raters stating that they received only a briefing by HR as training, and 35% of raters claiming that they rarely received training because it was assumed that they knew what to do. In totality, only 28% of the interview panelists felt adequately trained, 34% not adequately trained, and 19% felt partially trained.

Raters accept a huge undertaking when selected to fulfill this role. They are responsible for the evaluation of candidates to determine the best person for the position, which requires a great deal of "know-how," such as practicing proper communication techniques (both verbal and nonverbal), note-taking, decreasing the risk of biases, and adhering to legal requirements. Ultimately, the results suggest that most raters described their training as a briefing by HR, and most did not feel prepared for their role as an interview panelist.

Research Question 2

What are the best practices for preparing a rater to sit on an interview panel?

In the survey, one multiple choice question, with the option of an explanatory answer, demonstrated the results in response to Research Question 2. One flaw of the study emerged in Survey Question 9 when participants were asked what type of training they felt would be beneficial for raters to receive and were allowed to pick multiple options in addition to being able to respond to the optional explanatory question. However, the results identified that most raters felt *any* type of quality training would be beneficial. The breakdown of the results showed that 68% of raters would like online training, 46% would like to see in-class training, 45% preferred manuals or books, and 17% opted for training videos. The optional explanatory questions allowed for participants to identify any other methods that were not previous options. Although not substantial, some training themes emerged. Several felt mock interviews, which would allow potential raters to participate in simulated interview panels, would be beneficial. Others deemed selecting experienced raters to sit as panelists would be ideal.

Consequently, defining an experienced rater proved to be subjective and difficult to identify.

Emerging Themes

A total of 10 themes emerged from the responses collected in the online survey. The themes served as guidance and direction for translating meaningful answers to the research questions. Following are the themes that emerged:

- Theme 1: The development of interview questions is a critical component to the employment interview process.
- Theme 2: Interview panelists feel it is critical to know and understand what the employer is looking for in the ideal candidate.
- Theme 3: The nonverbal communication with the both the panelist and the rater is a critical component as it can stimulate both a positive or a negative experience.
- Theme 4: Policy-driven training for raters allows for accountability during the interview panel process.
- Theme 5: Raters feel that being trained frequently is important for consistency and dissemination of any new laws, rules or practices.
- Theme 6: Scoring and weighing the candidate’s innate characteristics can be just as important to interview panelists as the answers provided by a candidate.
- Theme 7: How interview panelists are selected for their role and what their attitude is toward the process and the day of the interview are essential.
- Theme 8: Attempting to control for biases, prejudices, and stereotypes is paramount to help prevent subjectivity and possibly litigation liability.

- Theme 9: Interview panelists feel that equity and fairness during the interview process is critical and safeguarding from situations (i.e., having a preselected candidate interview vs. an organic selection process).
- Theme 10: Raters felt that there is a definite need to receive training for their roles and that the focus should be the quality of the training.

Theme 1

The development of interview questions is a critical component to the employment interview process.

An employment interview is a meeting where someone is asked questions in order to find out whether they are suitable for a job. The interview questions are typically developed to determine a candidate's experience, education, qualifications, and/or overall fit for the job or organization. Questions can often be developed to represent a specific criterion, for example:

- *Situational questions:* The purpose is to see how a candidate would react to specific scenarios in the organization which can provide a sneak peek into a candidate's instincts, confidence, and decision-making abilities.
- *Competency questions:* The purpose is to align past behaviors with specific competencies that are required for the position.
- *Behavioral questions:* The purpose is to objectively measure past behaviors as a potential predictor of future results.

However, participants in this study found doubt in what questions were being asked in the local government employment interview, claiming that some questions do not really tell the rater good information about the candidate. What are the interview questions asking and what are measurements are in place to determine a good response from a bad one? Although there are no real right or wrong answers to job interview questions, it is important to understand what is really being asked. For panelists, it is best for them to have a clear understanding of what is being asked and why—plus what an ideal response looks like. This insight provides rationalization for a methodical process in question development.

Theme 2

Interview panelists feel it is critical to know and understand what the employer is looking for in the ideal candidate.

In addition to methodical question development, understanding what the hiring department or manager is looking for in an ideal candidate is tremendously important. The foundation of seeking the ideal candidate starts with the job flyer which identifies the minimum qualifications or specified skill sets. These are typically requirements that either a candidate does or does not have, such as 3 years of minimum experience (in desired field); bachelor's degree (in desired field); or ability to type 50 wpm or higher. However, apart from the technical skills or qualifications that are particular to a specific job, most employers seek certain skills that are universal for all types of jobs. These soft skills come in a variety such as

- *Communications skills:* This is the ability to speak, write, and listen in an effective way. This can mean being a good listener and good communicator who has the capacity to effectively convey the information in writing and also verbally with internal and external customers and in person, online, on the phone, and/or in writing.

- *Interpersonal or people skills:* These are the skills used for interacting and engaging with people. The ability for the candidate to relate to their coworkers, motivate others to participate along with problem-solving, and mitigating conflict with the colleagues is necessary.
- *Positive attitude:* Employers usually look for candidates who have a positive, can-do attitude, who are dedicated and willing to make extra contributions for getting the job done.

Although *soft skills* can be difficult to quantify, many panelists felt that it is critical for the hiring department or hiring manager to identify what soft skills they are looking for. Pinpointing these types of skills and passing this information along can help interview panelists identify the most overall qualified/ideal candidate for employment.

Theme 3

The nonverbal communication with the both the panelist and the rater is a critical component as it can stimulate both a positive or a negative experience.

While in an employment interview, many believe that a job offer will come based on how well the interview questions were answered; however, a big part of the success is actually attributed to nonverbal communication. Nonverbal communications are interactions that do not use words, such as intonation, speaking speed, pauses and sighs, facial expressions, general body language, attire, and grooming. These nonverbal interactions can assist in shaping how well or badly the interview can go. During an interview, the raters observe nonverbal communication continuously throughout the interview, and oftentimes if a candidate's nonverbal communication skills are not up to par, it may not matter how well the questions were answered.

Alternatively, the nonverbal communication an interviewer demonstrates can also elicit a good or bad experience. For an interview panelist who traditionally does not do most of the talking, the nonverbal communication can be interpreted in a variety of ways by the candidate. Body language such as facial expressions and body movements (i.e., nodding, staring blankly, frowning, sighing, yawning, or checking a mobile device, etc.) can communicate a large negative message to the candidate. This type of behavior can distract and derail an interviewee to where they are unable to communicate satisfactorily. Additionally, while note-taking during the interview, interviewers should make eye contact periodically with the candidate to show their interest and to provide opportunities to observe the candidate's nonverbal behavior.

To put this into context, imagine a candidate who walks into an interview who does not smile, does not shake hands with the panel, and answers the questions seemingly emotionlessly. This may automatically provide the panel with a less than favorable impression and can allow the panel to shape their opinion before an interview question is even asked—an opinion that can be demonstrated through the panel's nonverbal communication. The reality of a situation like this is that the candidate may simply be very nervous, the candidate may be from another country or culture where handshakes and eye contact are seen unfavorably, or perhaps the candidate really is not pleasant and not a good fit for the organization. In any case, this study demonstrated a demand for local government organizations to provide training or awareness classes for interview panelists on nonverbal communication, what it is, how to read/interpret it, and the importance of this type of communication.

Theme 4

Policy-driven training for raters allows for workforce development and organizational accountability during the interview panel process.

This study has identified the lack of interview panelist training in local government organizations but has offered insight as to how this can be implemented. Policy-driven training for raters can offer a variety of benefits for not only the agency but also for the panelists and the overall workforce. Figure 22 identifies those benefits for policy-driven training.

Figure 22. Concept map for policy-driven panelist training.

- *Supports legal compliance:* Litigation liability is one of the focal points for HR departments in terms of hiring practices because the threats of unfair hiring practices of potential plaintiffs who may sue an organization for alleged discrimination extends beyond current and former employees and includes rejected job applicants. Before organizations can adequately try to minimize the risks associated with the hiring process, primarily with interviewing, it is important to understand the existing major antidiscrimination laws that could be implicated during the hiring process and have them identified in a policy.

- *Standardization and clear expectations*: A well-written policy provides employees with a clear understanding of their responsibilities and what is expected and can serve as a procedural compass.
- *Workforce development:* Workforce development is commonly recognized as a strategic tool for an organization's efficiency and continuing growth. If local government agencies neglect certain elements of the organization, then the workforce development process can become clumsy and frustrating for both the employees and the organization.
- *Organizations mission and goals:* More than likely, a local government organization has a mission statement, core values, or vision that identifies who the agency is and what their overall goal is. Including this in a policy that outlines training goals for interview panelists can reinforce the raters' role and how they serve a greater purpose.
- *Identifies interviewer eligibility:* Though it has not been researched in this study *how* interview panelists are selected, it is a recommendation for future research. However, if an organization has any minimum qualifications (MQs) for a rater, a training policy would be an ideal place to identify what those MQs are.

- *Point of reference:* Having a policy identifying the abovementioned items can provide a point of reference for panelists on their responsibility and also provide accountability for organizations whose responsibility it is to implement and uphold a training program.

Theme 5

Raters feel that being trained frequently is important for consistency and for the dissemination of any new laws, rules, or practices.

When reviewing the survey results when raters were asked how frequently they were trained for their roles as interview panelists, most identified with not ever being trained because it was assumed they knew what to do and received a briefing from HR when they were asked to be a rater (see Table 14).

Table 14

How Frequently Raters Are Trained for Their Role

Survey Question 7	# of participants	% of participants
Regular annual training	1	00.35%
Whenever I am asked to be a rater	104	36.88%
I rarely receive training as it's assumed I know what to do	100	35.46%
I have never received official training	77	27.30%

Note. Total participants = 282.

With the majority of local government interview panelist participants in California feeling like they were not adequately trained on a regular basis, the frequency of training should also be considered. This can assist with many elements such as

- *New laws or legislature impacting hiring practices:* For example, Genetic Information Nondiscrimination Act of 2008 (GINA), under Title II states that it is illegal to discriminate against employees or applicants because of genetic information. This law also prohibits the use of genetic information in making employment decision.
- *Updates or changes:* If there are changes to rules, practices, or procedures, frequent training will allow panelists to ask questions, receive instruction, and have a good understanding of what has changed and why.
- *Modernized or simplified interviewing techniques:* As the role of technology has evolved and processes are becoming more modernized, it is imperative for raters to receive training well in advance for familiarity purposes and so that the interviews are not slowed down because of learning curves. This can also be true for any interview techniques that may have changed or even simply to brush up on skills.

Theme 6

Scoring and weighing the candidate's innate characteristics can be just as important to interview panelists as the answers provided by a candidate.

Many local government organizations rely on traditional hiring practices, which often do not account for the screening of soft or innate skillsets. Most hiring practices focus on hard skills needed for the job such as education/degrees, years of experience, and past titles; however, in the modern workforce, soft skills are becoming more valuable. These skills are considered to be the personal attributes one has that allows positive interactions with other people and the ability to do the job effectively, which can include the following:

- *Communication:* Both orally and in writing, the ability to communicate effectively can be the difference between a great employee, a good employee, and a bad employee.
- *Problem-solving skills:* The ability to not only identify problems, but provide solutions is a skill set that is invaluable to hiring organizations.
- *Collaborative attitude:* Possessing the capacity to work collaboratively with others requires emotional intelligence, listening skills, and a team-oriented mindset, which can be difficult to find in employees based on an interview.
- *Flexibility:* Most working environments outline roles and responsibilities in a job description; however, the reality is that employees are often tasked with work that goes outside of those duties. Some workers can have a hard time being flexible and have to adjust to doing things they "were not hired to do."
- *Positivity:* Having a positive attitude starts within a person and is a skill that cannot be taught easily.

Although soft skills are extremely valuable, they can be difficult to assess during the interview process. However, Theme 6 in this study has shown that interview panelists in local government felt that the scoring and weighing of the candidate's innate characteristics can be just as important to interview panelists as the answers provided by a candidate. To accomplish this, organizations can consider implementing situational and behavioral questions into the candidate screening process or another scoring sheet that identifies these soft skills. For example, Southwest Airlines scores candidates based on how many times they smile during an interview. This is in large part attributed to their overall mission, which is rooted in warmth and friendliness. They simply cannot have a person who does not smile on their workforce.

Theme 7

How interview panelists are selected for their role and what their attitude is toward the process and the day of the interview are essential.

The process of interview panelist selection in local government organizations is a topic that offers minimal to no research; however, it is one of the single most critical components to the panel interview. Participants in this study had valuable input related to this theme and offered the following insights:

- R29: People who are asked to be raters need to take it seriously and not see it as a burden.
- R37: As a very seasoned interviewer, I learned along the way what to do and how to do it. I don't know if what I did was right or wrong now seeing this study, but in hindsight, I think some brief training would be good. Moreover, I think organizations need to focus on picking qualified people to be a rater. All too often are people picked because there is no one else to choose from. Sad.
- R47: It's critical to recognize that rank or status within any given organization does not necessarily equate to competence or qualification as a rater. When selecting evaluators for panels, I think you need to evaluate several factors beyond professional status, availability, and willingness to participate.
- R97: I feel we need to have people who are trained and have credentials to say they are qualified to pick the best candidate for our organization.

The people who sit on a panel as raters have a legitimate power to rank, recommend, and/or select the successful candidate for a job so having the right people with the right attitude in these roles is important.

Theme 8

Training for biases, prejudices, discrimination, and stereotypes is paramount to help prevent subjectivity and possibly litigation liability.

The possibility of litigation liability is very real in the hiring practices of local government organizations. Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 made it unlawful for an employer to refuse to hire any individual, or otherwise to discriminate against any individual with respect to employment because of an individual's race, color, religion, sex, or national origin (U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission [EEOC], 2018). When HR professionals design selection processes, they should ideally strive to create fair and impartial procedures that give all candidates an equal opportunity to get the job. However, this study has displayed a need for organizations to better protect themselves with training for panelists related to biases, prejudices, discrimination, and stereotypes. Figure 23 categorizes these influences, identifies their distinct differences, and demonstrates their application to the interview process.

Although these types of influences can be difficult to prevent, training panelists in current laws that prohibit unfair hiring practices; awareness of what stereotypes, biases, prejudices, and discrimination are; how they vary; and how to control them is paramount.

Theme 9

Interview panelists feel that equity and fairness during the interview process is critical and safeguarding from situations (i.e., having a preselected candidate interview vs. an organic selection process).

Ideally, hiring processes are designed to select the best candidate for a job, but to allow for the process to be equitable and/or fair. However, this is not always the case

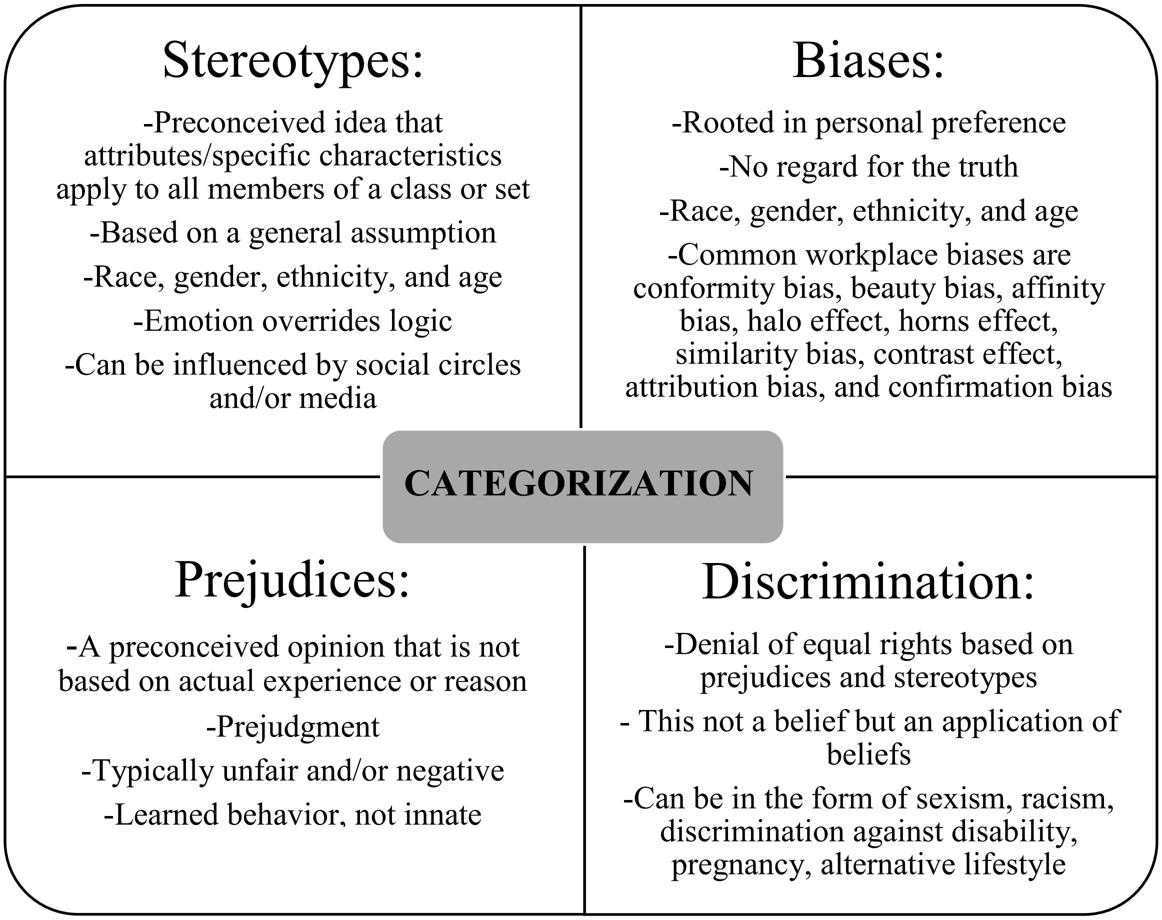


Figure 23. Categorization of stereotypes, biases, prejudices, and discrimination.

despite the best efforts of the organizations. Theme 9 identified that interview panelists felt equity and fairness during the interview process is critical and safeguarding from situations such as having a preselected candidate interview versus an organic selection process is important. The following are some common practices that demonstrate inequity or unfairness:

- *Cronyism:* The practice of cronyism occurs when a person of authority gives a job or other favors to friends regardless of qualifications and for their own reasons. This is a political move that is clearly an unfair hiring practice but difficult to prove.

- *Favoritism:* Slightly different, favoritism is when one favors another for one's own reasons such as a personal friendship, beauty bias, or interviewer-applicant similarity.
- *Nepotism:* This influence is demonstrating favoritism, typically in appointing a job, because of kinship. Some organizations have strict policies to help prevent nepotism; however, there are plenty of loopholes where this can occur.
- *Prejudgment:* Prejudgment in the interview is when a panelist has made some determination about a candidate prior to the interview process even beginning. This can occur in a variety of ways including being provided unsolicited information, social media prescreening, or word of mouth.

Again, despite the difficulty in controlling for these influences, interview panelists in local government viewed training as a critical component in attempting to safeguard from these types of practices. This very well may also be a matter of panelist selection and selecting those who demonstrate the ability to compartmentalize biases.

Theme 10

Raters felt that there is a definite need to receive training for their roles and that the focus should be the quality of the training.

The common thread in Theme 10 is that most interview panelists in this study felt that not only was there a need for training raters for their role but also that it needed to be of quality. Results showed that HR departments mostly provide an overview as opposed to in-depth training (see Table 15). Providing quality training can help reduce biases, prejudices, and discrimination and ultimately reduce the potential of litigation liability, allowing for a more equitable process and increasing the likelihood of securing a great candidate for the organization.

Table 15

Participants Feel the Need for Training

Response #	Response
R13	My opinion should be a minimum requirement that could be accomplished through HR prior to interviews.
R49	Training usually amounts to about five minutes of do's and don'ts.
R64	Definitely needs to be taken more seriously and detail consequences for biases and improper assumptions.
R70	This type of training is sorely needed as bringing an individual into an organization is one of the most important decisions a leader can make.
R99	I've noticed not all agencies provide adequate training. I was fortunate to receive good training from my previous agencies and supervisors. I recommend "New Supervisor" training for all agencies and specific in-person and written instructions before being on a panel. Not doing so can cause bias selections and legal issues for the department (due to inappropriate questions).

Limitations of the Study

The purpose for identifying the limitations of a study was to identify flaws or shortcomings that could be the result of unavailability of resources, small sample size, flawed methodology, or another reason. In this study, there were three main limitations to take notice of.

First, the State Controller's government compensation in California is only updated every few years, in this case 2017, and provides data that are not up to date when identifying how many local government employees there are. Second, the number of participants representing the population could have been increased if the survey had been cast for a longer period of time or if an additional dissemination method was used in addition to the social media system. According to the calculator, Raosoft, the sample size that needed to be met to make the study viable was 267 with a 50% response distribution and a preferred 5% margin of error. This study accomplished this with 282 participants, a 50% response distribution, and a 6% margin of error. The last limitation was the development of Survey Question 9, which asked participants, "What are the best practices for preparing a rater to sit on an interview panel?" The problem with this question was that the participants were allowed to choose multiple answers, which slightly skewed the data.

Recommendations for Future Research

Through the process of researching, executing, and reviewing the results of this study, the researcher formed multiple recommendations for future research. The process of how interview panelists were selected would make for a contributory research project because there is minimal to no research in this area. However, through this study, it was shown that *who* sits on the panel is critical because they have a legitimate power in deciding which candidates succeed or not; plus, the attitudes and personality of how the organization is represented cannot be overstated. Having someone who is annoyed, grumpy, or flippant can highly influence how candidates perform in an interview.

Another recommendation for a future study would be to look at the interaction between various generations during the interview process and the impact of those interactions. There is no question that millennials and Generation Xers were born in different eras with very different methods of communication, but examining how that plays a role in the interview panel and what kind of training could be done to provide a seamless process would be insightful. Millennials being raised with high levels of technology and Generation Xers still maintaining a balance of oral communication and technology begs the question: What would happen if someone who is 50+ and untrained and does not approve of technology as a primary method of communication is rating someone who is 25 or younger?

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to explore how local government organizations train or prepare raters for their role of serving on a job interview panel and to discover the best practices of this process. A comprehensive review of the literature confirmed that the interview panel process is a commonly used practice in organizations and is the preferred method when screening candidates for employment. The research also showed that there are state and federal organizations that have been developed over the years to protect people from unfair hiring practices, such as the EEOC, the Civil Service Commission, the Department of Labor, and the Department of Justice. However, it has also been identified that, as human beings, people are subject to complacency, biases, prejudices, stereotypes, and discrimination despite the laws that have been put in place to protect the hiring process. Some of these influences have resulted in court cases directly related to unfair hiring practices in various cities and counties in California.

Through a qualitative study rooted in grounded theory, the researcher's targeted audience was employees of local government organizations in California who were over the age of 18 and who had served as a rater on an interview panel within a city or county jurisdiction. The sample size yielded 282 participants gained through an online survey via the social media networks LinkedIn, Facebook, and Instagram. The data collection was captured within Qualtrics, the online survey company used, and password protected by the single researcher. Data analysis was performed by both Qualtrics and the researcher on a continual and routine basis until the sample size was obtained. The data were cleaned and coded so that themes could emerge. A total of 10 themes emerged, which ultimately identified some gaps in the interview panelist training processes within local government organizations.

Overall, most raters felt that hiring organizations or HR departments could improve how panelists are prepared for their role. Most participants identified with having a vast amount of experience being on panels but no real training to support their capabilities. There seemed to be an assumption that when people were asked to be a panelist, they were well-versed in their role and knew what to do and how to do it. What this study showed was that the role of an interviewer goes much deeper than simply asking questions and taking a few notes—it is the beginning of the investment in human capital in an organization. The workforce is only as good as its people, and if panelists are not trained to seek the best, brightest, and those who add value to the organization, then what true value does the process hold? Through the exploration of the recommendations for future research in addition to the contents found in this study, perhaps local governments can operationalize a plan to improve this process.

Implications for Public Administration

The results of this study indicated that 56.38% of interview panelists received only a briefing by HR as their training, and 23.05% had no training at all, which equates to approximately 80% of raters who were not adequately trained for this critical role. This creates a challenge in the interview process for multiple reasons: (a) psychological constructs, such as biases, prejudices, stereotypes, and discrimination, can put an organization at risk for litigation liability rooted in unfair hiring practices; (b) the execution of the questions, friendliness, and demeanor of the panelist can shape how the interview can flow—positively or negatively; (c) there are state, federal, and local provisions regulating equity and fairness in the employment interview that panelists need to be aware of. In order to preserve the equity and fairness of hiring practices, organizations should strive to streamline policies, practices, and decisions.

Participants in the online survey very clearly identified their desire for training, but also the preferred methods of *how* they would like to receive training. In ascending order, raters preferred online training, followed by in-class training with a small number preferring manuals or books and training videos. Considering the valuable time of the local government employee, the fiscal impacts, and the best practices for time management, implementing an online training through the vast E-learning and technology platforms currently available is a viable option for training. Through information technology departments, there are ways to create accountability measures to ensure the employee is understanding the information delivered, for example, requiring practice tests at the ends of each module with a 90% or higher passing rate. If organizations are able to provide in-class training, there are a multitude of resources and mechanisms to do so. As an example, one of the most beneficial and effective practices the researcher participated in as a professional was in a local government organization in Southern California. This organization outsourced a private firm to develop the interview questions without the hiring department's input or knowledge. The firm provided 90 minutes of training for the panelists prior to the first interview. The training provided clear instructions on how to rate each candidate and clear expectations of what the hiring organization was looking for. Even as a seasoned interviewer, this process provided unity among the panelists, as well as role clarity, clear visions, and expectations so panelists knew what to look for in the ideal candidate and the “do’s and don’ts” of panelists’ roles. What this training did was create legitimacy in the hiring process that minimized the psychological constructs and potential for litigious claims.

With the approximation of local government employees in the state of California being 688,000—inclusive of city and county employees (California State Controller, n.d.-a, n.d.-b)—and research indicating that the interview panel process is the primary method in the employment selection process, the conclusion can be made that interviews are frequently occurring in the state of California. Combined with the study results that approximately 80% of panelists did not feel trained, it is apparent that local government organizations in California do not adequately prepare raters for their role, which demands the question: how *DO* panelists rate, score, and recommend hiring if they are not adequately trained? This research determined challenges exist and offered a variety of solutions that can help change the way the interview panel is viewed and operationalized in local government organizations—especially because the investment in human capital is paramount to the workplace.

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