
Are Multiple Job Interview Rounds Really Necessary?



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How companies can simplify the process without compromising their evaluation of candidates.

While it's critical for companies to thoroughly assess potential hires, the length of the job interview process seems to be increasing. On LinkedIn, you'll find numerous stories of candidates undergoing [anything from nine to 12 rounds of interviews](#) in their quest to secure a role - only for their application to be unsuccessful.

The time it takes for an organisation to make a new hire has reached [an all-time high](#), as reported by human capital advisory firm The Josh Bersin Company and global talent solutions business AMS. Beyond unfavourable macro conditions beyond a firm's direct control, much of the culpability for drawn-out, cumbersome interview processes falls on the companies themselves.

A prolonged process - say, one that stretches over two months from start to finish - doesn't just cause psychological stress for candidates, but also has practical implications for firms. Vacant roles remain unfilled, which can be a

drain on both time and resources. Candidates can become frustrated and withdraw their application, causing the company to lose out on a good hire.

One reason for conducting so many interviews could be that firms are just not adequately prepared when they begin the hiring process. A lack of internal alignment and entangled politics increase the complexity and slow things down. Leaner headcounts – especially in HR departments – due to recent layoffs could also mean that individuals without the proper knowledge of how to interview candidates are being asked to step up without sufficient preparation.

Inefficient stakeholder management could also be at play. Some firms require multiple individuals to meet and sign off on a hiring decision, which may be advantageous for reasons of equity and diversity. But this can prolong things if too many people with similar profiles are involved.

There is also immense cost and performance pressure to hire the right candidate – one that can execute the role, is an organisational fit and will remain in the firm for at least a year (or, ideally, longer). Hiring managers and HR executives could therefore feel the need to put a candidate through the wringer to ensure that they are making the right choice.

Job interviews have fundamentally changed

Before making procedural tweaks, companies must reconsider old perspectives to interviewing candidates. In a programme I recently ran with C-suite executives, I asked them to raise their hand if they thought the job interview process had changed. Almost everyone raised their hand while shaking their head – it seemed apparent to them that the purpose and dynamics had evolved in the past few years.

Indeed, job interviews have **fundamentally shifted** from a one-way assessment to a two-way conversation. Traditional interviews are mostly about fitting candidates' skills and experiences into a box on an organisational chart. Companies hold most of the power, and candidates need to sell themselves to secure the job.

Elements of this still exist in today's job interviews, but these have become more of a dialogue, with the aim of arriving at a **mutually beneficial outcome**. Candidates are also assessing whether an organisation – including its approach to the interview process – is the right cultural fit, offers a

platform for them to make an impact and will allow them to progress in their careers.

To tailor job interviews to suit this new reality, firms should focus on finding a culture and purpose fit for both sides instead of spending countless rounds just assessing hard skills. Interviewers also need to get ready to “pitch” the organisation to the candidate, connect with them through personal anecdotes and ask the right questions to craft a development plan that suits the individual.

Making the interview process more efficient

How can the interview process be made less painful for all involved, while still ensuring a holistic and comprehensive evaluation of the candidate?

Attempting to shorten the process by conducting multiple back-to-back interviews on a single day presents logistical challenges and can have several disadvantages. The intensity and high-stakes nature of this approach may put undue pressure on a candidate to perform and result in organisations making hasty hiring decisions. It may risk catching both sides on a “bad day”.

Instead, organisations can focus on better preparation before interviewing potential hires. Just like they expect candidates to do, employers should be putting their best foot forward when they embark on interviews. Internal alignment from all stakeholders needs to be established early, and should cover the evaluation criteria, delegation of roles and interview format. The candidate should be able to meet with a diverse range of individuals from within the firm to avoid biased evaluations. This can help with attaining clarity and decisiveness, which could shorten the interview process.

Relatedly, companies need to send in the right personnel to evaluate candidates. Not everyone within an organisation is adept at interviewing or trained to conduct interviews well. Firms must therefore devote the proper resources towards building this up as a unique capability.

Agreement on the appropriate number of interview rounds and standardising the process are also key. For instance, Google’s People Analytics team examined interview data and determined that having four interviews was sufficient to make a reliable hiring decision. Implementing this reduced their average time-to-hire by roughly two weeks.

Firms should also think beyond the conventional one-on-one in-person interview format. **Group and panel interviews**, casual chats over lunch and structured office visits where candidates interact with potential future colleagues can offer different perspectives. These may also help companies arrive at a decision quicker.

Remote interviewing techniques – including having candidates record a video to introduce themselves or doing video interviews – can also be used for baseline or technical assessments. This can help alleviate scheduling and cost issues, enabling companies to make faster hires across a range of markets.

However, for most firms, I would caution against hiring people solely based on remote interviews. A remote set-up makes it hard for both sides to gauge the culture and organisational fit. It should thus be supplemented by on-site visits or in-person conversations during later rounds.

Adopting a holistic approach to the process can help make it more efficient and effective. It can ensure that the time spent interviewing is purposeful and empower a company to hire people that will not only perform well, but also move the organisation forward.

*This article is adapted from a **commentary** published in *The Straits Times*.*

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