

# In-Depth Interview Research & Validity Study Overview

## Background & Purpose

In 1994 and again in 1997, Selection Strategies in conjunction with The Strategic Staffing Group (Judith Sears, Principal) directed behavioral research to validate the efficacy of the In-Depth Behavioral Interview (now known as the InSITE™ Interview: In-Depth Sales Interview and Trait Evaluation).

The validity research consisted of conducting 72 in-depth interviews (one-on-one interviews via telephone) with sales and account management (post-sales customer service) employees from four companies. The purpose of these interviews was to gather data regarding the behavioral competencies of employees involved in direct sales & service roles. It was hypothesized that significant differences would be found between successful sales and support employees in some behavioral categories. Essentially, the premise highlighting the difference between archetypal “Hunter” and “Farmer” profiles. Specifically, sales employees were expected to be more aggressive interpersonally than the account management group and to demonstrate greater competitive drive. Alternatively, account management employees were expected to display greater empathy interpersonally and to be more motivated than their sales counterparts by service considerations.

## Research Method

Subjects were on-board employees of Hunter Business Direct, Dialogic Corporation, Power Productions International, and BellSouth Communications. Subjects were not informed of the purpose of the research, other than that it was a general investigation of the attitudes and behaviors of performers in their positions.

Dependent Measures were: 1) a prototype of the In-Depth Interview – 67 questions assessing several behavioral categories, including assertiveness, rapport building, listening skills, goals and competition, initiative, and information-gathering and sorting abilities. The questions were open-ended and subjects could answer with as much or as little detail as they preferred. 2) Supervisory ratings – a 30 question, 5 point Likert scale of supervisory ratings of employees' performance.

## Results

ANOVA and discriminant analysis were used to determine the behavioral differences between sales and account management employees (as measured by the In-Depth Interview). The results of the analysis of variance (ANOVA) found a significant difference between sales and account management on the Achievement Orientation ( $p < .10$ ) and Service Orientation ( $p < .01$ ) behavioral competencies (categorized as “Motivations & Drives”), with the sales group outscoring the account management group on Achievement Orientation, as predicted, and the account management employees outscoring the sales group on Service Orientation, also as predicted.

There were no statistically significant differences between group scores on the remaining behavioral competencies, however, the differences between the groups on two competencies, rapport-building and assertiveness, trended in the direction predicted, with the sales group scoring higher than the account management subjects.

A discriminant analysis was done to determine if the behavioral competencies can predict whether a given study participant is a member of the sales or account management group. The results indicate that scores on the In-Depth Interview (now InSITE™ Interview) correctly predict

membership in the sales group 76.4% of the time, while membership in the account management group is correctly predicted 76.5% of the time.

### **Managerial Implications**

- The overall findings of this research study support the use of behavioral interviews for reliably and accurately identifying individuals who will be successful performers in, respectively, sales and account management positions.
- The results of the research support part of the initial hypothesis that sales employees will be more ambitious and competitive than their more team-and-service-oriented counterparts in customer service.
  - This difference is critical. Achievement Orientation and Service Orientation represent significantly different motives driving behavior. These represent what the individual will find ultimately fulfilling and probably will be much less responsive to training or coaching.
- In short, managers should not assume that employees performing well in a sales function will automatically perform well in a service function or vice versa.
- Managers should interview and select employees for sales and service functions with different expectations as to the types of motivations that successful candidates are likely to exhibit.
  - Sales candidates are more likely to be motivated to perform in environments which offer incentives to perform to explicit, measurable goals and in which performance feedback is frequent.
  - Account Management candidates, however, are likely to be looking for a position which optimizes their desire to feel that they make a contribution to others and which emphasizes team work.
- The finding that the In-Depth Interview (now InSITE™ Interview) predicts group membership correctly 3 out of 4 times is quite significant. This suggests that information gained in the InSITE™ Interview can contribute substantially to successful hiring.