

Face-to-face Panel Interviews

How to create and implement neuro-inclusive Face-to-face Panel Interviews.



About Face-to-face Panel Interviews

Panel interviews involve a candidate meeting with multiple interviewers simultaneously, typically representing different departments or areas of expertise. This format can provide a holistic assessment of the candidate's skills, while also allowing interviewers to evaluate the candidate as a panel.

Benefits

The benefits may include:

- A panel can offer varied perspectives and insights.
- Incorporating multiple perspectives helps to reduce individual interviewer biases.
- A panel encourages a wide range of questions, providing a deeper understanding of the candidate's capabilities.
- Combines input from many departments into one interview, saving time and resources.
- Panel members can divide up tasks required to reduce pressure on a single interviewer.
- Panel interviews allow less experienced interviewers to observe and learn from more experienced colleagues.
- Supports the leadership potential, values alignment, and problem-solving abilities from a variety of perspectives.



Ideal for:

Complex roles such as research scientists, team leaders, and executives.

Applicable for:

STEM, corporate management, and education.

Considerations and solutions

There are considerations to address to ensure the assessment is neuro-inclusive. These include:

Considerations

Intimidation:

Facing multiple interviewers can be overwhelming for some candidates, particularly those who are less socially confident.



Favours socially confident candidates:

Panel interviews may favour candidates with strong interpersonal skills over those who are less outgoing but equally as qualified.



Differences in opinion:

Differences in opinion among panel members may lead to misinterpretations or disputes.



Solutions

Create a welcoming environment and ensure the candidate is introduced to the panel members beforehand.

Use structured, role-specific questions to evaluate competencies objectively rather than focusing on interpersonal charm.

Develop a unified strategy with agreed-upon evaluation criteria and scoring systems to ensure consistency.

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Face-to-face panel interviews provide a structured opportunity for several interviewers to collectively evaluate a candidate's skills and suitability for a role. However, for neurodivergent candidates, the complexities of interacting with several interviewers can present challenges. By implementing neuro-inclusive practices employers can create a fairer and more accessible recruitment experience.

Pre-interview preparation

Neurodivergent individuals may find the prospect of facing multiple interviewers overwhelming. They might struggle with interpreting social cues, understanding unwritten expectations, or processing varied questioning styles. Additionally, a lack of clarity about the structure of the interview and the roles of panel members can heighten anxiety.

Neuro-inclusive strategies

Neurodivergent awareness training

Ensure all panel members understand common neurodivergent characteristics and how they might present in interviews.

Detailed interview information

Provide comprehensive details, including visuals about the interview process well in advance.

This should include:

- The interview schedule, including start and end times
- Access details (location, parking, public transport, signing-in procedures)
- Venue details, including sensory information and breakout spaces
- Names, roles, and photographs of interviewers (as relevant)
- Dress code recommendations
- Necessary documents to bring
- Contact details of a support person from the organisation to answer any questions.

Accommodations and adjustments

Encourage candidates to request specific accommodations, such as what time of the day the interview takes place, or adjustable lighting during interviews.

Allow a support person and items

Clearly communicate that candidates may bring a support person, a job coach or support items to assist with understanding questions, managing stress, and providing feedback.

Interview questions in advance

Provide questions in advance, unless quick thinking is being specifically evaluated.

An autistic adult explained,

“I would really appreciate if I got the interview questions prior to the interview. Sometimes I feel caught out by questions and then I just stumble... it really shakes my confidence.”

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Preparing the interview environment

For neurodivergent candidates, the physical and sensory aspects of an interview environment can be significant barriers. Sensory distractions, unfamiliar settings, or lack of preparation time can create anxiety or sensory overload, making it difficult for candidates to focus.

In addition, the physical and sensory aspects of a panel interview environment—with the presence of multiple interviewers—can be overwhelming for neurodivergent candidates. Creating a sensory-friendly and supportive environment can help mitigate these challenges.

Neuro-inclusive strategies

Workplace visit

Offer candidates an opportunity to tour the workplace prior to the interview. This visit can help candidates familiarise themselves with the setting, reducing anxiety and allowing them to identify accommodations they may need.

Sensory-friendly settings

- Minimise loud, continuous noise

(For example, humming from coffee machines)



Ask the candidate: "How can we make the interview more comfortable for you?"

- Avoid sudden loud noises, like doors slamming
- Ensure consistent, non-flickering lighting
- Avoid strong smells from perfumes, kitchens, or nearby restrooms
- Simplify décor and communicate any potential sensory stimuli in advance
- Provide a range of sensory items that the interviewers and candidate can use
- Provide a range of alternative seating options and encourage them to move furniture around

A sensory friendly setting will support the candidate to feel comfortable and to do their best.

Break spaces

Identify and communicate the availability of quiet areas where candidates can take breaks before or during the interview.

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During the interview

The panel interview itself can present barriers such as heightened stress. Ensuring flexibility, clarity, and a welcoming atmosphere can make the process more inclusive for everyone.

Neuro-inclusive strategies

Welcome preparation

Plan to meet the candidate at the door. Begin the interview with introductions, clearly stating each panel member's name, role, and their focus during the interview. Allow for processing time.

Work environment tour

Begin with a brief tour of the workplace. This serves as an icebreaker and helps candidates better understand the role. This can be done by a non-panel member.

Name tags

Ensure each member of the panel wears a name tag to support engagement.

Structured format

Follow a clear, predictable structure, with panel members taking turns to ask questions and avoiding overlapping or rapid-fire questioning.

Interview checklist

Provide interviewers with a checklist to ensure they focus on performance-relevant criteria rather than social or behavioural characteristics. Use a robust scoring system for objective evaluation.

Room acclimatisation

Allow candidates time to settle in and get comfortable before starting the interview.

Interview questions

Focus on specific objectives

Use structured, role-specific questions that align with the job's key competencies.

Direct and clear questions

Avoid abstract or ambiguous queries, opting for straightforward questions.

For example, ask, "What professional skills do you excel at in the workplace?"

Concrete vs. open-ended questions

For example, ask, "In your last job, how did you handle challenging customers?"

Focus on past experiences rather than speculative scenarios

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Direct and clear information

Use straight-forward language

Be mindful of literal interpretations; avoid idiomatic language and jargon.

Avoid double-barrelled questions

When multiple questions with different responses are asked at the same time it can be confusing.

Use specific prompts to guide detailed responses

For example, ask, "What steps did you take to mediate the situation?"

Additional support

Allow candidates to bring and refer to notes or work samples

Offer to rephrase unclear questions or provide examples

Provide immediate feedback to guide responses if necessary

Allow extra time and breaks as needed to ensure candidates can perform at their best.



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After the interview

The post-interview period can be challenging for anyone due to uncertainties about outcomes. For neurodivergent individuals, this phase can be particularly difficult, as expectations about what happens next may not be intuitively understood. Employers can support neurodivergent candidates by being explicit and direct about the next steps. Providing clear information about timelines, outcomes, and expectations can alleviate anxiety, while transparent communication and constructive feedback can foster growth and a positive candidate experience

Neuro-inclusive strategies

Clear timeframes

Clearly communicate when candidates can expect to hear about the outcome and what the next steps will involve.

Transparent feedback

Provide constructive feedback, highlighting both strengths and areas for improvement.

A neurodivergent employee shared,

“I have been told I interview well but there was just someone more suitable.
This is useless feedback, as I do not know where I can improve.”

Panel debrief

Conduct a structured review, using the interview checklist, among panel members to consolidate feedback and ensure alignment in evaluations.

Process evaluation

Regularly collect feedback from candidates on their experience to refine and improve the process.

This structured, supportive approach allows candidates to demonstrate their organisational and leadership abilities in a calm, accommodating environment.

Learn more and access resources

To learn more about Neuro-inclusive Recruiting and how to create and maintain neuro-inclusive workplaces, scan the QR code or visit neuroinclusiverecruiting.org.au.



Example of a neuro-inclusive Face-to-Face Panel Interview

Scenario

A logistics company is hiring a warehouse supervisor. The panel interview focuses on organisational skills, team leadership, and problem-solving in high-pressure environments.

Actions taken

Detailed pre-interview agenda

- Candidates receive a clear overview of the interview process, including the panellists' names, roles, and the specific topics each will address.
- Candidates are able to select when the interview takes place (morning, afternoon), choosing the time of day where they perform at their best.
- The structure of the interview, including timing, expectations, and scheduled breaks, is shared well in advance to reduce anxiety and allow preparation.



Provide information about the panel members roles and have panel members wear name tags to support engagement.

Structured panel dynamics

Each panellist has a defined role:

- One panellist asks situational questions about managing teams and resolving conflicts.
- Another evaluates organisational skills, such as coordinating schedules
- A third observes and takes notes to minimise interruptions.

A lead panellist acts as the primary point of contact, ensuring smooth transitions and answering candidate questions.

Inclusive environment design

- The interview is conducted in a quiet, well-organised space with panellists seated in a semi-circle to create a welcoming and open environment.
- Name tags or visual aids are provided to help candidates identify panellists easily.

Supportive questioning approach

- Candidates are given a list of sample questions ahead of time to help them prepare for different types of inquiries.
- They are encouraged to take their time responding and may refer to notes or reference materials during the interview.
- Follow-up questions are kept concise ensuring candidates are not overwhelmed.

Built-in breaks

- A short break is included midway through the session, allowing candidates time to recharge and process their thoughts.