

HR RESEARCH SERIES 2026 - REPORT R02 OF 10 (EXTENDED)

Structured Interviewing: The Science and Practice

How to design interviews that predict performance, not likability, with Europe 2026 benchmark data.

The scientific evidence on interview validity is unambiguous: structured interviews, those with predetermined questions, consistent administration and scored against defined rubrics, predict job performance dramatically better than unstructured conversations.

2.6×

better predictive validity of
structured vs. unstructured
interviews

30–50%

reduction in demographic
outcome gaps with structured
interviews

67%

of European companies still
rely primarily on unstructured
interviews

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In a talent market where one bad hire costs €51,000 at manager level, the difference between an interview that identifies the best candidate and one that identifies the most likable candidate is a direct financial loss. Structured interviewing is not bureaucratic box-ticking, it is the most cost-effective quality improvement available to any HR team.

The evidence on interview validity

Structured interviews have a predictive validity coefficient of 0.51 vs. 0.38 for unstructured, a 34% improvement in predicting who will perform well. Work sample tests combined with structured interviews achieve a predictive validity of 0.63, the highest of any practical hiring method.

Method	Predictive validity	Adverse impact risk
Unstructured interview	0.38	High
Structured interview	0.51	Low
Work sample test	0.54	Low
Structured + work sample	0.63	Very low
Cognitive ability test	0.51	Medium-high
Reference checks	0.26	Low

Why most companies still don't use structured interviews

- **Perceived rigidity**, hiring managers fear losing 'gut feel' that they overestimate.
- **Time investment**, designing a competency framework takes 2–4 weeks, often skipped.
- **Manager training gap**, the average European hiring manager receives less than 3 hours of interview training.
- **Cultural inertia**, 'we've always interviewed this way' is the most common rationale.
- **Tooling absence**, most ATS platforms don't natively support scorecards or rubrics.

Designing a competency-based interview framework

A competency framework defines 4–6 role-critical competencies, each with behavioural anchors at four performance levels. Every competency is assessed by at least two interviewers using the same questions and the same scoring rubric.

- **Step 1**, define the 4–6 competencies that distinguish high vs. average performers in this role.
- **Step 2**, write 2–3 behavioural questions per competency with explicit scoring anchors (1–4).
- **Step 3**, assign competencies across the panel so each is assessed by at least two interviewers.
- **Step 4**, calibrate scoring with a pilot before rollout, target inter-rater agreement above 0.7.
- **Step 5**, score independently first, then discuss, never discuss before scoring.

Situational vs. competency-based questions

Both question types belong in a structured interview. Behavioural (past-experience) questions probe what a candidate has actually done. Situational (hypothetical) questions probe judgment when past experience is thin, especially useful for early-career hiring.

Bias reduction through structure

Structured interviews reduce gender outcome gaps by 31% and racial / ethnic gaps by 28% compared to unstructured equivalents. The mechanism is simple: when every candidate answers the same questions and is scored against the same anchors, the room for similarity bias, halo effects and stereotype activation collapses dramatically.

Panel interviews without structured scoring actually produce worse outcomes than individual structured interviews. Format alone adds no validity, structure does.

Implementation, rolling out structured interviewing

- **Weeks 1–2**, choose two pilot roles, define competencies, draft questions and rubrics.
- **Weeks 3–4**, calibrate with hiring managers, run mock interviews, refine anchors.
- **Weeks 5–8**, deploy in pilot roles, track inter-rater agreement and offer-acceptance.
- **Weeks 9–12**, expand to remaining roles, embed scorecards in the ATS.
- **Quarterly**, audit a sample of completed interviews for adherence and bias drift.

Forward outlook 2026–2030

Structured interviewing will become the regulatory baseline for high-risk hiring under EU AI Act enforcement. Companies that have already invested in scoring rubrics will find compliance trivial; those that haven't will be retrofitting under audit pressure.

Built for what's next.

tenperzent.com is the AI-native ATS designed for European hiring in 2026 - GDPR by default, EU AI Act compliant, free to start, €79/month to scale.

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