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Don't let video kill the rock-star recruit.

For those of you not engaged by music trivia and who cannot relate to the catchiness of the title of this month's newsletter, it is a reference to the song title of the first video played by MTV when it made its on-air debut on August 1, 1981. "Video Killed The Radio Star" by The Buggles was the first video played by MTV.

In December 2018 I had the opportunity to interview for an interim project manager position at a public university. A grant-funded role, I did not know how long it would last, but I never know how long any of my assignments will be. The university used a video interview service where the candidate would (supposedly) be presented with a question, have time to think of an answer, and then record the answer. A computer and web camera were the tools needed. Okay, this is a little different but I could see the practicality of it. The execution, however, was a disaster and failure from a project management standpoint.

The video interview third-party software provider had technical glitches which they acknowledged, forcing my first and second interview attempts to fail. The company only provides telephone support from 9:00 AM to 5:00 PM Central time Mondays through Fridays, (I am located in the Eastern time zone, as is the educational institution), even though interview candidates were informed they could take the interview at any time day or night.

The video interview had a five-day deadline that ended on a Sunday at midnight from the date that I received the interview request. Otherwise, if help was needed outside of support hours and days, only a help desk ticket could be submitted.

The technical glitches eventually seemed localized to my choice of web browser, as my third attempt using Internet Explorer rather than Chrome alleviated the problems. However, no prior instructions as to which preferred browser to use were provided. In fact, the educational institution's best guidance was for me to go and use someone else's computer or perhaps go to a library and use a computer there. Really? For a video interview of undetermined time and length where I had to ensure a quiet place? Are you kidding me?

As a candidate, I was providing screen snapshots of the error messages I was receiving to the educational institution. I was acting as technical support and project manager. Why didn't the educational institution establish functioning computers at their location and have all candidates come in to record their interviews instead of burdening candidates to be debuggers and run around finding alternate computers to use?

Once I was able to finally access the interview, I found the setup to be contrary to qualifying job candidates, at least for a project management role. Was this a Hollywood screen test or an interview for a project manager role? There were supposedly only seven questions to answer, with one minute to consider each question before recording one's answer. However, the questions were multiple parts, with one question having four parts to it. The number of takes option was disabled, therefore the candidate could not re-record a bad video take upon stumbling during the 3-minute answer timeframe. The video interview should have been limited to one, short, concise question per take, not one multi-part question per take. And the candidates should have been allowed to record up to two takes per question to ensure satisfaction with the video-recorded answer.

Not even the structure and length of the interview was known up front. Information about the interview format and length would have been appropriate to provide to the candidate prior to the interview itself, such as in an introduction email.

And the premise was obviously false: a multi-part question is not the same as a single-concept question, especially when the different parts of a multi-part question are unrelated from each other.

I am not opposed to the use of technology, nor am I against new methods of doing things. What I absolutely do not agree with is when poor project management and a lack of foresight and planning create a disadvantage to achieving success and what should be the stated project goals and objectives. I also spent four hours of my time debugging the first two interview attempts just to try and accomplish the third.

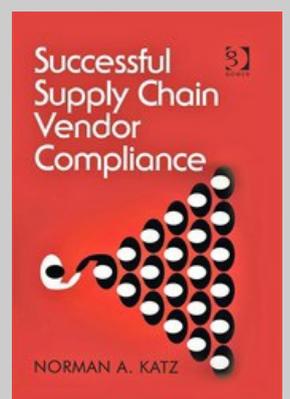
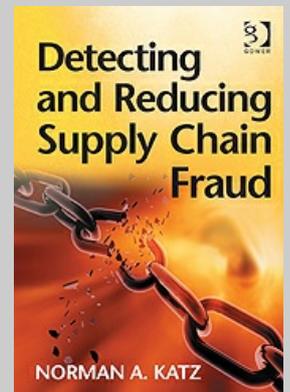


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As a friend of mine who is a life-long human resources executive pointed out, the problem with a video interview is that it can be labeled as discriminatory because the candidate's image is visible. At one time it was thought that a candidate should attach a photograph to their resume, with that practice quickly scuttled for this reason. An automated interactive telephone interview to initially screen applicants, where candidates receive a call into a service, are asked a recorded question, and then record a response – something I have also recently experienced – is a much better option because the company has the resume and only a recorded voice, no candidate image attached to any candidate profile. And this was done right: one brief question at a time, and it felt like a natural conversation to me on the telephone.

Organizations are having endless conversations about wanting the best and brightest “rock-star” candidates, but processes like the video interview that I described above will only alienate and discourage quality candidates from bothering to consider companies that cannot get their hiring processes organized. More egregious are the ridiculous psychological online games that companies attach to hiring processes in a belief that they are predictors of a person's personality profile. Having sampled some of these myself, I don't need to be an expert to tell you that relying on these is about as scientific as online dating. If this is how your company is qualifying candidates, you'll basically get what you deserve.

For companies who are disgruntled about the people they are hiring, resentful with new hires who fail to show up, angry with new employees who leave their jobs after being on board only a short while, dissatisfied with personnel who don't live up to expectations, maybe placing the blame on the person you hired is short-sighted: perhaps it was the poor process that produced the exact results that you received that needs an examination.

Thanks for reading.

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